Drivers of decent work results and ILO effectiveness:
A meta-analysis of ILO RBSA interventions 2013-2017

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International Labour Organization
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Table of Contents

List of acronyms ........................................................................................................................................... 3
1  Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 4
   1.1  Overview of the RBSA funding modality and changes over time ...................................................... 4
   1.2  Approach and method ......................................................................................................................... 6
   1.3  Limitations of the study .................................................................................................................... 7
2  Summary of results by effectiveness criteria ............................................................................................. 7
   2.1  Areas of successful performance ....................................................................................................... 9
   2.2  Areas of variable performance ......................................................................................................... 11
   2.3  Areas of poor performance ............................................................................................................... 15
3  Drivers of success ...................................................................................................................................... 16
4  Recommendations emerging from the effectiveness review .................................................................... 18
   4.1  Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of RBSA .............................................................. 18
   4.2  Recommendations to improve the use of RBSA evaluations .......................................................... 18
5  Possible topics for further investigation .................................................................................................. 18
Annexes ....................................................................................................................................................... 20
   Annex 1: List of evaluation reports reviewed .......................................................................................... 20
   Annex 2: An Overview of evaluations considered by the review ......................................................... 21
   Annex 3: List of documents consulted .................................................................................................... 22

Table 1. Meta-analysis framework.................................................................................................................. 6
Table 2. Four-point scoring system ............................................................................................................... 7

Figure 1. Distribution of scores by performance criteria ............................................................................. 9
Figure 2. Factors of success for the most effective RBSA-funded interventions (2013-17) ......................... 17
## List of acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3RP</td>
<td>Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AER</td>
<td>Annual Evaluation Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPO</td>
<td>Country Programme Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTA</td>
<td>Chief Technical Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>Development Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWCP</td>
<td>Decent Work Country Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>DWT</td>
<td>Decent Work Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVAL</td>
<td>ILO Evaluation Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB</td>
<td>ILO Governing Body</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILS</td>
<td>International Labour Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBF</td>
<td>Outcome-Based Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBW</td>
<td>Outcome-Based Workplan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIR</td>
<td>Programme Implementation Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P&amp;B</td>
<td>Programme and Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>Regular Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBSA</td>
<td>Regular Budget Supplementary Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPF</td>
<td>Strategic Policy Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>Technical Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ToR</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ToC</td>
<td>Theory of Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNEG</td>
<td>United Nations Evaluation Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>United States Dollar</td>
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<tr>
<td>XBTC</td>
<td>Extra-budgetary Technical Cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Introduction

Towards the end of 2018, the ILO Evaluation Office (EVAL) initiated an independent review of the effectiveness of Regular Budget Supplementary Account (RBSA)-supported interventions in attaining Decent Work (DW) Results, based on evaluation reports from 2013-2017. The review took a meta-evaluation approach, using EVAL’s existing development effectiveness measurement tool.

This i-eval think-piece presents the key findings emerging from the review and focuses on learnings and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of RBSA-funded interventions. After an overview of the RBSA funding modality, the method used for the effectiveness assessment and its key limitations are briefly presented. This is followed by a summary discussion of results by performance, based on the criteria used in EVAL’s effectiveness measurement tool: strategic relevance and alignment; effectiveness, sustainability and impact; and implementation performance and efficiency of management arrangements. The final section presents key factors of successful performance, and recommendations that emerged from the effectiveness review. It also highlights areas that need further investigation for a more effective use of the RBSA funding modality.

1.1 Overview of the RBSA funding modality and changes over time

The RBSA is a funding modality introduced to channel voluntary un-earmarked financial resources, in order to support the Decent Work Agenda as expressed in ILO’s Programme and Budgets. This differs from other extra-budgetary funding centred on defined outcomes of the ILO’s strategic framework or on specific interventions. It is a key resource to deliver decent work results and is reserved for support to programmes in countries eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA). Its flexibility allows the ILO to complement or allocate resources for activities that fall within its results framework on themes and countries where they are most needed.

RBSA follows and is subject to the same governance and oversight as the Regular Budget (RB), and follows the OECD-DAC guidelines, with reduced overhead charges and streamlined administrative procedures. RBSA-funded activities are subject to standard evaluation policies and guidelines of the ILO. RBSA allocations, expenditure and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)-related guidance has been provided through various internal governance documents.

RBSA allocations are linked to Country Programme Outcomes (CPOs) under Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP). The CPO linkage allows for its alignment to ILO Programme and Budget (P&B) Outcomes. It is assumed that this funding modality will be flexible, and rapid, and funds are allocated to a limited number of prioritized DWCPs. Office procedures for RBSA, as outlined in IGDS number 475 (version 1) calls for using RBSA for ‘catalytic action’ that leverage other resources across the Programme and Budget for the biennium.

RBSA funds thus enable the ILO, inter alia, to:

- Rapidly launch innovative initiatives to address emerging needs – in low-income and lower middle-income countries in particular
- Upscale, or expand the scope of existing initiatives
- Mainstream cross-cutting issues in labour policies and programmes
- Leverage greater funding from other sources
- Increase the sustainability of ILO assistance through partnerships with UN agencies

1 ILO Programme and Budget (P&B) outcomes are higher level organisational outcomes endorsed by the Governing Body of the ILO
2 Core Voluntary Funding (RBSA) for the ILO development cooperation, PARDEV, ILO, March 2018
Over the last four biennia (2012-2019), the ILO received close to USD 133 million in RBSA allocations, with key donors being Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. RBSA’s share in the overall Voluntary contributions ranged from 4% to 8% over the biennia 2012-13, 2014-15 and 2016-17.  

The ILO Evaluation Office has reviewed the effectiveness of RBSA funded activities for many years now. The findings have been published as part of the Annual Evaluation Report (AER) of EVAL for the years 2010-11; 2011-12 and 2012-13 and an Overview of Evaluation of RBSA in the ILO overview was developed in 2016. Together, these reviews included 20 project and thematic evaluations with sizeable RBSA funds. The findings suggested that RBSA-supported initiatives:

- Were highly relevant and effectively contributed to linked CPOs;  
- Helped in promoting ILO’s core mandates in a country;  
- Added value to ongoing initiatives by supporting capacity building, legislative reforms and development of knowledge products;  
- Had shortcomings related to efficiency, owing to delayed approvals (including that from other sources supporting the linked CPO/project), weak design and weak monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems.

Based on these findings, the AER 2013-14 recommended early identification and prioritisation of potential areas where RBSA funds could help achieving results by country offices; and timely evaluation of CPOs receiving major RBSA contributions or Outcome-Based Funding (OBF) towards the end of DWCP period or combined with the DWCP reviews for better use of evaluation. These recommendations were endorsed by the Governing Body. The subsequent AERs did not have a dedicated section on RBSA but they did report on follow-up on recommendations.

An internal review of RBSA managed by PARDEV and PROGRAM using a team of consultants was also undertaken in 2014. The review concluded that while RBSA contributed to bringing greater coherence between CPOs and higher-level strategic objectives, the complexity of allocation process and smaller allocations and timeframes of RBSA supported projects made it difficult to address priorities and report impact. Responding to the recommendations by EVAL as well by the Internal Review 2014, the ILO revised the allocation and appraisal procedures for RBSA and Outcome based funds. In 2016, the RBSA threshold per project was increased (USD 200’000 up to USD 500’000) and the appraisal and decision processes became time-bound (a maximum of 15 days after submission of proposals). In 2018, the financial threshold was further increased (USD 200’000 up to USD 1 million).

The following sections in this Think Piece distil the key elements of the Effectiveness Review of RBSA-funded interventions covering the period 2013-17, with a particular focus on areas of successful, variable and weak performance, as well as what actually drives good performance.

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3 Sources: ILO Programme Implementation 2012-13; ILO Programme Implementation 2014-15; Core Voluntary Funding (RBSA) for ILO development cooperation, Fact Sheet, Nov 2019

4 Overview of Evaluation of RBSA in the ILO, EVAL Nov 2016, provides a summary of these assessments and the subsequent recommendations presented in relevant Annual Evaluation Reports endorsed by the Governing Body (GB).

5 Review of ILO’s Regular Budget Supplementary Account, John Horekens and Ralf Maurer; August 2014.

6 As the scope of this report covered projects and CPOs evaluated during the period 2013-17, these were not affected by changes in programming practices introduced in 2017.

7 RBSA Review Recommendations (September 2014) and ILO responses (December 2014 interim response and October 2016 update)


1.2 Approach and method

The Independent Review examined the trends in effectiveness of RBSA-supported interventions towards the delivery of Decent Work results, based on a substantial set of 21 evaluation reports of projects or CPOs with significant RBSA-support from across all regions for the timeframe 2013-17. Annex 1 provides the list of evaluation reports included in the review exercise. The distribution of the evaluation reports by type, region, year and thematic areas is presented as Annex 2. The ‘Effectiveness Review’ followed EVAL’s standard methodology that was first developed in 2011 and evolved over time in terms of Performance Area and Criteria, while still allowing for comparability across the review periods. The methodology followed in this study has been in use since 2017, when it was last modified. The review framework has 26 criteria under three broad performance areas (Refer Table 1 below). The performance areas are:

- Strategic relevance and alignment;
- Effectiveness, sustainability and impact;
- Implementation performance and efficiency of management and resource use.

The assessment within these areas was determined by availability of performance information as available in evaluation reports selected for this review. Technical cooperation performance of projects was thus assessed through an ex-post performance rating related to a list of 26 criteria, as presented in the table below.

Table 1. Meta-analysis framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance area</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Strategic relevance and alignment</td>
<td>1.1 Link between project purpose and/or objectives with P&amp;B outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Causal link between project objectives and DWCP outcome(s)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.3 Constituent support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.4 Validity of design/approach</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.5 Pro-poor focus</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.6 Gender-responsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Effectiveness, sustainability and impact</td>
<td>2.1 Quality and completeness of outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 Achievement of immediate objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 Knowledge development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.4 Capacity building</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.5 Normative work / standards promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.6 Policy influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.7 Strategic importance of results achieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.8 Strategic relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.9 Tripartite processes being embedded in approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.10 Sustainability of policies, knowledge &amp; capacities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.11 Acknowledgement and Use of ILO expertise and involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.12 Resource leveraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Implementation performance and efficiency of</td>
<td>3.1 Goal orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Project management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Monitoring and reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.6 Visibility and accessibility to knowledge and information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 The “significance” of RBSA-support was defined in several ways by EVAL. Reports included either obtained at least 50% of their funding from RBSA-allocations, or RBSA allocations amounted to over USD 500’000. The majority of reports evaluated projects or CPOs that were fully funded by RBSA (11), six had at least 50% of funds from RBSA, and four had less than 50%, but the amount allocated was over USD 500’000.

11 When quoting examples from certain evaluation reports, they are referred to by a number in accordance with Annex 1.

12 The DW results and effectiveness of ILO operations: A meta-analysis of development cooperation evaluations, 2013-2016, ILO 2017 is referred to as the “DW 2017 Review” for ease of reading.
A four-point scoring system (see Table 2) was applied to the findings, using a performance criteria matrix provided by EVAL. Criteria with insufficient evidence were given a score of ‘0’, and were excluded in the quantitative analysis of performance. The full scoring matrix can be viewed in annex V of the DW 2017 Review.

### Table 2. Four-point scoring system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unsuccessful</th>
<th>Partly successful</th>
<th>Successful</th>
<th>Highly successful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly deficient performance</td>
<td>Basic level of performance but stated need for improvement</td>
<td>Adequate level of performance and results</td>
<td>Very good level of performance and results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quantitative scores were attributed to each criterion, and qualitative information was obtained from evaluation reports to present evidence and justification for each performance criterion score and to allow for more in-depth analysis based on key themes. For methodological robustness and quality assurance purposes, reports were assessed independently by a team of two reviewers.

### 1.3 Limitations of the study

Scoring of thematic or regional evaluations proved to be somewhat problematic when results differed from one country to the next. While the qualitative aspect of the results allowed for variations to be highlighted, it was more difficult to select a quantitative measure of performance, leading to possible misrepresentation of the realities on the ground.

It was difficult for evaluators to pinpoint the specific contributions of RBSA to the projects and CPOs being evaluated, mainly due to weaknesses in monitoring and reporting systems, which led to insufficient identification and documentation of substantive evidence of progress towards results. This is especially important in cases where funds were used to add value to ongoing interventions or in projects and CPOs with different funding sources, among others.

Most reports did not provide sufficient information to allow for generalized conclusions regarding the added value of the RBSA funding modality in terms of delivering results at different levels, or an assessment of the situation if RBSA funds were not available for the CPOs funded through this modality. This is an important limitation of the reports, as an evidence-based assessment of contribution or attribution was not possible.

These last two points are also echoed by Horekens and Maurer (2014), as they note that RBSA evaluations do not focus on the specific contributions of RBSA resources to CPOs or P&B outcomes as a specific source of funding, and that as such, it would be difficult to measure the added value of RBSA-funded initiatives, or to assess the extent to which the funds have furthered programme results.

## 2 Summary of results by effectiveness criteria

Results from the meta-analysis were positive for the most-part, as seen in the distribution of scores by performance criteria (see Figure 1), with RBSA-funded projects and CPOs being particularly strong in the areas of standards promotion, policy influence, capacity building, and knowledge development. Projects and CPOs were well aligned with strategic priorities, and a majority responded to stakeholder needs and involved constituents at different stages of the project cycle. The analysis also revealed that there were also some important weaknesses, such as...
the lack of pro-poor focus, challenges in goal orientation, and significant shortcomings in the reporting and monitoring mechanisms.

This review found that the highest levels of effectiveness in achieving Decent Work Results were obtained through the combination of RBSA and other Development Cooperation (DC) funds, with the RBSA funding allowing the ILO to adapt to the local context and quickly respond to constituent needs, and other funds providing more stability in terms of volume and duration, especially since RBSA funds are often limited in these two respects. However, in situations where there were no complementary technical cooperation funds, the limited amount of RBSA funds allocated to different projects and CPOs was also an important limit to effectiveness and sustainability.

The allocations of RBSA funds were usually found to be relevant by constituents and ILO officials, especially due to their flexibility, which meant that that were context-appropriate and responded to local needs. This was reflected in the different uses of funds: they complemented other resources to finance specific activities, addressed gaps, and/or consolidated and extended achievements from previous years, thus adding value to ongoing interventions, or allowed for the piloting of new approaches. However, there was very limited evidence of the use of RBSA funds for resource leveraging.

In some cases, RBSA funds were allocated in areas found to be more challenging and complex than the ILO’s usual development cooperation portfolio, or to extend projects with a high strategic value. This allowed the ILO to take a leading role within the UN system, for instance, in the response to the refugee crisis in Syria, thus engaging in higher-risk interventions. There was also substantial progress toward the promotion and implementation of International Labour Standards and the strengthening of the ILO’s normative mandate, as well as progress towards policy influence. Other cross-cutting areas, including genderresponsiveness, had mixed results.
While there was uneven availability of performance information in the evaluation reports, most criteria were covered in at least 80 per cent of reports, with only three being under this threshold: the promotion of standards was covered in two-thirds of cases; cost efficiency in 71% of reports, and goal orientation in 76% of reports.

### 2.1 Areas of successful performance

The great majority of projects demonstrated a clear link between their objectives and purpose and P&B outcomes, as well as DWCP outcomes or CPOs. In three cases, projects were explicitly associated with Areas of Critical Importance (ACI), in line with the decision to concentrate RBSA funding on ACIs in 2014-15. Only one project, “ILO’s Response to the Syrian Influx in Turkey,” did not have explicit reference to a DWCP or CPO, but was still found to be highly relevant to the ILO’s strategy, as RBSA funds were used to strengthen the ILO’s role in the context of the Syrian crisis as a collaboration partner in the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP). Regional projects in Africa, Latin America and Europe demonstrated relevance in linking to a range of DWCPs, as well as regional strategies. In some cases, it was highlighted that RBSA allocations had been made in response to requests...
for additional funding to support specific Outcomes, thus helping the ILO to respond to needs expressed by constituents.

Two-thirds of projects or CPOs reviewed were found to be of good quality and were successful in achieving their outputs, with results being used by some stakeholder groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The flexibility of RBSA funding was underlined as a factor of success in several projects, even when faced with resource challenges:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“In spite of the delay in making the fund available to programme implementers, the flexibility of RBSA funding has enabled the ILO to respond quickly and effectively to urgent and emerging needs and priorities in all the 5 CPOs evaluated... The ILO interventions through the release of RBSA funds and technical support by the ILO Programme Officer, the Director ILO Ethiopia, and backstopping support from Geneva have all contributed to enhancement of the capacity of Trade Union leaders at national level to take into consideration the concerns of disabled persons in collective bargaining and in the formulation and implementation of relevant policies.” (An independent evaluation of African CPOs funded from RBSA in the thematic area of Social Dialogue, Evaluation 4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of results, a large majority of projects were successful in influencing policy, through the improvement of the capacity of stakeholders to influence policy at different levels. Numerous reports provided specific examples of how RBSA funds supported constituents in engaging in policy discussions, policy advocacy and formulating policy, often through tripartite dialogue, and how the development of products, such as studies, research, and diagnoses on specific topics served as inputs for the design of policy proposals and norms in certain countries.

RBSA support proved useful and effective in developing knowledge resources and capacities in many instances. Capacity development at the individual and institutional levels was one of the most highly scored and fully covered elements in the study. Capacity-building was often linked to achieving sustainability and seen as an excellent long-term investment, especially when activities responded to demands from constituents. This took different forms, including trainings for tripartite constituents, participation in national platforms and working groups, and study trips, among others. A majority of projects also succeeded in generating or bringing together relevant, good quality knowledge on technical and substantive topics to support decision-making.

The integration of International Labour Standards and normative work into RBSA-funded projects and CPOs was highly rated overall, and the link between ratification of ILO conventions and sustainability was noted in several reports. Different types of support were provided to constituents, including technical support to draft legislation; provision of advice and expertise to improve national legal instruments (Labour Codes, Laws on Employers’ organizations and on Trade unions, etc.) and promote know-how of International Labour Standards; and publications drafted and translated into different languages to make them accessible for the social partners. This led to the promotion of, and ratification of different ILO Conventions (e.g. C.102: Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952: C.151: Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978; C. 183: Maternity Protection Convention, 2000; and C.189 Domestic Workers Convention, 2011) in different countries, and progress achieved through RBSA-funded work also contributed to the adoption of Recommendation no. 204: Concerning the transition from the informal to the formal economy, 2015.

Building and leveraging of relationships with different organizations was an area of good performance for many projects. Relationships were built with government ministries, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, research institutions, as well as the private sector. Examples of strategic relationship-building included projects where the ILO forged relationships with institutions to complement its field of competencies and projects which brought together different business communities. Partnerships also facilitated capacity-building of constituents and cost-sharing of activities. Collaboration with UN agencies and universities was seen as a positive step in strengthening results. Important partnerships at different levels were also forged as a response to the Syrian refugee influx.
The strategic importance of results achieved was an area of strong performance for most projects and CPOs, and allowed constituents to progress towards, or achieve national development outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An example of a project performing well in this regard was provided through an evaluation of strengthening tripartite social dialogue: assessment of RBSA-funded outcomes 2014-15 (Evaluation 9), which highlights that “the results of RBSA-funded CPOs [in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Georgia] have been highly relevant and substantial. ILO interventions took place in different political contexts and at unequal stages of transition from centrally planned to market economies. Notwithstanding that, the outcomes achieved, as measured by the Milestones generally met, show the rightness of strategic planning and managerial arrangements in implementing activities which were well correlated with the expected immediate objectives of the projects and stated needs of the tripartite constituents.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The recognition of ILO’s expertise was generally successful, with the highest “Highly Successful” score of the study. The ILO was recognized for its technical and managerial expertise and leadership in the area of decent work in a majority of projects, and its comparative advantage in comparison to other international organisations was underlined by many evaluators. The ILO’s capacity to ensure multi-stakeholder involvement, coordination and cooperation at local, national and regional levels was underlined as another of its core strengths. The presence of the ILO encouraged different organisations to participate in policy discussions and technical assistance in several cases. ILO support to the project and internal coordination were positive overall, with synergies achieved when collaborations and cooperation took place between different departments and projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most RBSA-funded projects and CPOs were found to be cost-efficient, with RBSA-funds sometimes being used to boost projects, although the information and level of detail provided varied in the reports, and evaluators used various approaches to ascertain cost efficiency. Many reports noted that the flexibility of RBSA allocations was a crucial element in boosting or catalyzing results, thus leading to efficiencies. Others noted that co-financing also led to efficiencies, especially in instances where RBSA funds decreased.</td>
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</table>

2.2 Areas of variable performance

The effectiveness review revealed that results were often nuanced, with mixed levels of performance in the case of many criteria examined, namely constituent involvement; validity of design; achievement of immediate objectives; strategic importance of results achieved; tripartite processes; resource leveraging; visibility and accessibility to knowledge and information; and project management.

While two-thirds\textsuperscript{13} of projects involved constituents in project design and implementation and reflected national decent work needs, this was not always systematic, thus influencing the effectiveness of results. In some cases, significant stakeholder consultations had taken place at the DWCP formulation stage, and involvement in project implementation seemed to be more frequent, but there was sometimes a disparity in participation between stakeholder groups.

\textsuperscript{13} Some of the lower scores may not mean that there was no stakeholder involvement, but rather that the evaluators were unable to gather sufficient information regarding constituent contributions to project design and implementation.
The validity of project design or approach also had mixed success, often due to a lack of clarity regarding stakeholder endorsement of project objectives and technical approach, or due to over-ambitious approaches in sometimes complicated contexts. Highly-rated cases highlighted that milestones, activities, outputs and outcomes were well defined, and linked to strategic outcomes. Another strength was due to consultations with stakeholders, with constituent feedback used to improve project design, and synergies developed in multi-country projects.

RBSA support was appreciated in certain projects in response to the Syrian crisis as it helped in responding to the emergent demands more flexibly. In these instances, the RBSA’s more flexible modality allowed the ILO to develop problem-based interventions and helped to ‘position itself within the UN mechanism of response to the Syria crisis in a framework of unpredictable uncertainty’, as highlighted by evaluations of livelihood, job resilience and decent work related projects for Syrian refugees and host communities (Evaluations 8 and 23). In such cases, stakeholder participation took place during the project document design. The project design for one of these projects also built on ILO experience implementing the ‘Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees (PRODERE) project, an UN Inter-agency initiative in six in Latin American countries between 1989 and 1995. Such projects would not have been possible without RBSA funding.

Several reports attributed weaknesses in design to the way RBSA funding had been administered, because the criteria for RBSA changed over the years, and because the application forms did not require logical frameworks, gave less attention to outcome and impact levels, and omitted assumptions (risks) in the design processes.

Only half of projects reviewed were found to have met their immediate objectives. Many projects had made progress towards their objectives, but had mixed results. It is important to note that this assessment included many thematic and regional evaluations, in which the reports covered different countries, with some projects performing well in some countries, and less so in others. The way in which many RBSA interventions have been evaluated so far – either through a focus on multiple CPOs grouped together and/or through a thematic approach – makes it challenging to provide a complete picture of achievements and may obscure particular successes regarding the extent to which progress has been made.

“Marked differences have been found in the degree of implementation and progress in achieving results. Although in countries such as Argentina and several Caribbean countries the degree of implementation has been high, in a number of other cases, including Haiti, Panama, Paraguay and several Caribbean countries, the degree of implementation has been extremely low.” (An independent regional evaluation of the models of ILO’s technical assistance implementation financed with RBSA funds: Evaluation 20)

A similar conclusion was reached in a thematic evaluation of RBSA-funded informal economy projects in the Europe region (Evaluation 13) which highlighted disparities found in different countries regarding RBSA-funded informal economy projects: “The expected objectives were partially achieved; some initial steps have been made to enhance institutional capacities in target countries through events, conferences, networking. … Studies produced under the project have been received in different ways in the two countries; this largely depends upon the diverse level of commitment and progress of policies in this area, and secondly upon the complex institutional context in [Bosnia and Herzegovina], which imposes challenges in achieving uniform results and impedes the development of, and consensus on, comprehensive and holistic solutions.”

Gender considerations were completely absent from nearly quarter of the reports, while just over half of the projects reviewed that did address gender were rated as performing well in this regard, revealing an area where further progress is needed. Most reports did not have gender-specific objectives or gender-sensitive indicators, gender analyses were seldom conducted, and their data was not gender-disaggregated. In some cases, progress was clearly made towards strategies to address gender inequality issues, but no information was provided on actual gender analysis or the use of gender-sensitive indicators.

Integration of tripartite processes in the project approach was only successful in just over half of projects and CPOs reviewed, yet performance was rated as “highly successful” in a quarter of the reports, thus reflecting wide...
disparities in the performance of RBSA-supported interventions, and highlighting an area where improvements are still needed.

Evaluations of projects with strong performance underlined the systematic inclusion of tripartite partners in the design and implementation of interventions; capacity-building of constituents in tripartite dialogue, the organization of tripartite conferences, and the promotion and creation of national tripartite committees and Tripartite General Agreements, among others. They also emphasized the importance of RBSA funding to support tripartism. Low performance was explained by negligible attention to tripartism in the project approach or strategy, or limited involvement or engagement of one or two constituent groups, with no rationale for this arrangement.

“...was noted in an evaluation of RBSA supported CPOs on social dialogue in the Africa region (Evaluation 4). It also explained how RBSA funds in Ethiopia were used by programme management to “work closely with Government through the tripartite constituents to develop and implement capacity building activities.”

“...This was an example of tripartism in action when – in otherwise difficult conditions – all the parties involved were genuinely interested in the success of this new form of social dialogue within an ILO Area of Critical Importance. While Technical Cooperation [termed as Development Cooperation since 2016] projects are usually limited in time and highly dependent on Donor preferences, work on ACI topics could become less volatile, more sustainable and strategic if financed through RBSA.” (An evaluation of RBSA funded outcomes relating to social dialogue in the Europe region: Evaluation 9)

There were also challenges associated with promoting tripartism, as noted in an independent regional evaluation of the models of ILO’s technical assistance implementation financed with RBSA funds (Evaluation 20): “...Donors seem to have a high degree of influence on the degree of participation in the design of cooperation and the ILO lacks a consistent discourse on the practice of how constituents should participate in the definition of technical cooperation.” An associated recommendation was that the allocation of RBSA funds be oriented mainly to actions that have tripartite support to contribute to DWCP results. It was found that a tripartite perspective was more prevalent in projects funded through RBSA and XBTC rather than public funds, but there was no evidence of increased constituent engagement when RBSA funds were used to address their specific needs. However, the evaluation noted an interesting finding regarding these funds: “ILO officials give RBSA funds great value in carrying out tripartite activities in contexts where conflict among constituents makes them unworkable through XBTC projects.”

Sustainability and resource leveraging were two other areas with an overall positive performance, but variable results. Only half of the projects evaluated demonstrated tangible possibilities of maintaining, advancing, or scaling up interventions, with some thought to an exit strategy. In the higher scoring projects, important factors of success included effective capacity-building and ownership of stakeholders through trainings and participation in national or regional platforms and working groups, knowledge development and dissemination, awareness campaigns, adoption of policy, building of partnerships, resource leveraging, and the willingness of governments and social partners to translate policy into concrete actions; the delegation of responsibility for implementation, and a strong focus on sustainability throughout planning processes and implementation. In many cases, threats to sustainability included problems in ownership, limited capacity of stakeholders, unrealistic resource planning or allocation, low cooperation or tensions between constituents, lack of enabling environment, and no exit strategy. Questions related to financial sustainability were also raised in a number of reports. Several noted that despite positive results and a commitment from a majority of constituents, uncertainties related to the financial capacity of stakeholders to sustain outputs could limit the possibility of maintaining existing interventions.
The nature of RBSA funds was sometimes mentioned as a limitation in this regard in comparison with other sources of funding. Certain projects, on the other hand, demonstrated how RBSA funds were used as seed money to trigger the leveraging of external resources to maintain or scale up interventions. In some cases, projects were designed and managed by requiring co-financing components, which ensured the financial sustainability of interventions and buy-in of companies and other stakeholders.

Resource leveraging was found to have mixed success, with only half of projects having a positive score, challenging the ILO’s assumption that RBSA funds would help in leveraging resources. Nevertheless, 12 per cent of projects were found to have leveraged significant resources from donors, governments, or other stakeholders, to boost project results. In many instances, it was mentioned that RBSA funds were used to support other interventions.

Successful performance was found in projects that used cost-sharing and collaboration with partners, or required co-financing from different actors. Others used RBSA funds as seed money to mobilize resources from donors and government sources, thus causing the intended “trigger” or “catalytic” effects for which they were intended.

Sound project management processes, known and used by most staff, were found to be in place in just over half of projects and CPOs. Weak performance was associated with limited availability of some technical experts in contrast to the number of countries and programmes in their portfolio; structural absence of local project staff in countries without permanent sub-regional or national offices; lack of regional strategy and limited involvement of the Decent Work teams; complex bureaucratic and institutional procedures; unclear organizational set-up, roles and responsibilities in the project document, or lack of guidelines to establish management structures. In some cases, the lack of understanding of the RBSA mechanism resulted in poor CPO planning and budgeting on the part of certain outcome coordinators.

14 The number of projects that actually leveraged resources may be higher than reported, as certain evaluations noted that it was likely that resources had been leveraged, but that lack of details made it difficult to confirm. Furthermore, in many cases, and as is shown above, leveraged resources were not always quantified by the evaluators. As such, it is difficult to come to specific conclusions regarding this area, due to the paucity of information available in reports.
The presence of a strategy to document and disseminate knowledge was variable, and there were disparities in performance for projects that were reviewed at the regional or thematic level.

2.3 Areas of poor performance

Most projects reviewed lacked a pro-poor perspective, with only one-third of projects reviewed getting a positive score – it was one of the weakest areas identified in the study. Although this was not explicit in the reports, it is likely that over half of projects had some poverty effect due to the nature of interventions, as well as the country contexts in which they operated.

Another area needing improvement was adequacy of resources: more than half of reports noted that RBSA funds and the human resources available were insufficient to deliver the project outputs and objectives. Many projects were found to be over-ambitious, in terms of available financial and human resources and time available for implementation (mostly two years or less) vis a vis the scope and expected deliverables. Delays in the release of RBSA funds also had a negative effect on intended results. The current management structure of the ILO in countries that do not have the presence of a permanent Decent Work Team was also found to be an important limitation, in terms of having on-going, timely access to technical staff. Nevertheless, the efforts of staff in the Country and Regional Offices to offset these challenges were often praised, especially in situations where human resources were insufficient.

Timeliness of requests for proposals, approval and release of RBSA funds was an element affecting effectiveness noted by several evaluators. Approval of RBSA allocations sometimes occurred late in the biennium, leading to delays in the implementation of CPOs. Funds that were not released in a timely manner led to activities being postponed, to the detriment of project results. In some cases, ILO inputs were in line with the schedule, but dependence on external funding partners meant that some initiatives were delayed or not funded. In others, projects were delayed due to difficulties in mobilizing key staff, including Chief Technical Advisors (CTAs), due to internal bureaucratic procedure and communication gaps. To address this, some projects were granted no-cost extensions to accomplish planned achievements. In one instance, project activities continued without a formal service contract, putting the ILO at risk.

“While acknowledging that RBSA funds are meant to complement resources from other sources, most respondents felt that the allocated RBSA funds were grossly inadequate for effective delivery on the planned outputs and outcome. In fact, one respondent put it that RBSA funds are like “a drop of water into the ocean”. Nonetheless, virtually all respondents indicated that despite this, RBSA resources were extremely important as they enabled the ILO to support strategic interventions where spin-off benefits were often disproportionately larger than the amount of resources used. The resources were also said to be quite important and critical in countries where there were no TC projects. In this regard, one key respondent said that “albeit small, RBSA resources are like gold to us as they help us to finance high returns intervention e.g. strategic policy issue” (A thematic evaluation of RBSA support to selected CPOs concerning promotion of employment during the 2012 - 2013 Evaluation 6)

The adaptability of RBSA compared to other sources of funding was also presented as a factor of success: “Being ILO’s own funding mechanism, the RBSA was more flexible compared to the PRM project in terms of budgeting. Re-allocation of resources among the budget items could be materialized upon the approval of the ILO HQ.” (An evaluation of livelihood and decent work for Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey: Evaluation 8)

In addition to the criteria discussed above, the most important weaknesses in the study were related to goal orientation - where only one quarter of projects had performance targets in line with their strategy, with a logical fit between indicators and outcomes; and monitoring and reporting – with no examples of projects rating as “Successful” or “Highly Successful” and over 40 per cent of projects without established M&E frameworks, and absent, or inadequate reporting, revealing areas where further efforts should be concentrated. The absence of monitoring frameworks, limited reporting, absence of, or confusion regarding indicators, milestones, targets,
activities, and results; and unrealistic, overambitious targets, in terms of time-frames, resources, and capacity, were frequently noted in reports.

Comments from evaluators repeatedly highlighted that the Decent Work Results dashboard, Programme Implementation Reports (PIR) and Outcome-Based workplan (OBW) sessions did not provide adequate information to measure progress and assess results associated with RBSA contributions in many cases. Based on the findings from different evaluations, it seems that even when the formal mechanisms for project steering and monitoring were in place, the reports tended to focus on actions/outputs rather than outcomes/impacts. Furthermore, a few reports noted that stakeholders were informed of progress/achievements during meetings, but they underlined that there was limited evidence in terms of indicators at the level of results, or at the level of overall project assessment, thus posing a challenge for M&E.

The majority of reports stated that the lack of formal framework for monitoring and reporting on progress and achievements made the evaluation process very challenging. This was often linked directly to the reporting modalities associated with RBSA-funding, and some evaluators noted this was an important limitation of having a flexible funding mechanism. The lack of baseline information and monitoring/reporting mechanisms made it difficult for them to find valid evidence and assess and validate results or to assess the added-value of RBSA, which would be useful for the Office to obtain. Understanding the difference between the different funding sources and how progress/results achieved are tracked, and focusing on the evaluability of RBSA-funded interventions upstream is essential for evaluators to fully capture the effectiveness of RBSA contributions.

“There is no official requirement to prepare progress reports on RBSA funded projects since the results are reported within the framework of biannual implementation reporting of the ILO.” (An evaluation of a project related to collective bargaining and amicable dispute settlement in the Europe region: Evaluation 7)

“The absence of clear guidelines in the monitoring and reporting of RBSA funded activities, separate from the larger TC or DWCP project, could hamper evaluation judgment on the ILO criteria. The ILO should make it mandatory for programme management utilizing RBSA funding to produce at least one monitoring report during the biennium in reference, as a means of ensuring efficiency of resource management.” (An evaluation of RBSA supported CPOs on social dialogue in the Africa region: Evaluation 4)

“Non-availability of structured monitoring documents (i.e. logical frameworks, sufficiently elaborated with (i) indicators, (ii) sources of verifications, (iii) risks / assumptions at all levels, general objective, specific objectives and results) allows for relative flexibility to the project implementation from a methodological perspective, but that at the same time is prone to creating bottlenecks for the monitoring and evaluation task.” (An evaluation of livelihood and decent work for Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey: Evaluation 8)

3 Drivers of success

The most successful projects of the sample were examined to see if there were any distinctive contributing factors in achieving development outcomes effectively. This group of projects consists of the top overall median scores, further refined to have achieved “Highly successful” and/or “Successful” scores on each of the following performance criteria 2.2 (achievement of immediate objectives), 2.3 (knowledge development), 2.4 (capacity building), 2.5 (Normative work/standards promotion), and 2.6 (policy influence). This resulted in seven projects being selected.15

15 Evaluation reports 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 16, 23
The examination was able to identify eight factors that consistently contributed to the success of the selected projects, although a few projects had one or two areas of weakness, and coverage of performance criteria was sometimes uneven. These are briefly described below and summarized in Figure 2.

- Successful projects all demonstrated clear links between their objectives and P&B outcomes, as well as to DWCP and CPOs in all-but-one cases, thus responding to national decent work priorities.
- Reports highlighted that success was associated with projects that were demand-driven, and where RBSA funds were used to respond to specific needs from constituents in a flexible way.
- Following from this, constituent involvement in project design and implementation was a key factor of success, and effectiveness increased when tripartite partners were involved in all stages of the project cycle.
- A large majority of the most successful projects achieved their main outputs, which were of good quality, with evidence of use by stakeholders.
- Results achieved had strategic importance, with constituents being able to make progress towards, or achieve towards national development outcomes.
- The ILO’s technical expertise and leadership, its comparative advantage in the area of decent work, and its facilitator approach through the promotion of social dialogue, was underlined in all reports as an important contribution to project effectiveness.
- Building and leveraging strategic relationships with different organizations and institutions, led to synergies and complementarities to assist constituents in achieving results, and to ensure sustainability of interventions.
- The flexibility of RBSA allocations was a crucial element in boosting or catalyzing results, thus leading to cost efficiencies. Some reports noted that co-financing and cost-sharing with partners also led to efficiencies, especially in instances where RBSA funds decreased.

Figure 2. Factors of success for the most effective RBSA-funded interventions (2013-17)
4 Recommendations emerging from the effectiveness review

Based on the evidence presented in the evaluation reports under review, various recommendations were made to improve the effectiveness of the RBSA modality, as well as on the use of RBSA evaluations. These are presented below. It is important to note that the time-frame for this analysis was retrospective, and as such, the changes introduced in RBSA programming practices as of 2017 are not considered and may affect the relevance of some of these recommendations.

4.1 Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of RBSA

Recommendation 1: A balance is required between maintaining the flexibility of the RBSA modality in terms of implementing projects and the importance of having a structured framework for monitoring and reporting. It is important to address the evaluability of RBSA-funded interventions at the inception stage, and devise monitoring and reporting requirements to address this accordingly.

Recommendation 2: Involve ILO constituents from the onset, so that RBSA-funded projects and CPOs can better respond to stakeholder needs, and benefit from a long-term perspective, including the co-development of an exit-strategy to promote sustainability and ownership.

Recommendation 3: Make it a precondition to obtain RBSA-funds that project design is gender-responsive, addresses poverty concerns if appropriate and takes a tripartite approach to ensure that these key issues are properly addressed in future projects.

Recommendation 4: Require the use of logical frameworks, Theory of Change, and other structured documents to address the shortcomings associated with the lack of goal orientation and monitoring and reporting of RBSA-funded interventions. A stronger focus on results at the design stage can still allow for some latitude for innovative approaches.

4.2 Recommendations to improve the use of RBSA evaluations

Recommendation 5: Include specific questions regarding the RBSA-funding modality in the list of evaluation questions in evaluation Terms of Reference, to facilitate assessment of its effectiveness.

Recommendation 6: Brief evaluators who will assess RBSA-funded interventions about the differences between these and Development Cooperation projects, so that they have a better understanding of how to capture RBSA-specific information at the inception stage.

Recommendation 7: RBSA-funded interventions that are evaluated thematically or regionally, or based on a cluster of CPOs can be useful to provide transversal lessons. However, it is important that the evaluation questions be designed to provide a nuanced assessment of achievements. In terms of assessing effectiveness, sub-criteria could be used in order to highlight disparities in progress from one country to the next.

5 Possible topics for further investigation

It would be useful for the Office to further review different areas, in order to promote a more effective use of the RBSA funding modality:

- While the flexible approach to project design and implementation enables the ILO to respond quickly to emerging or urgent needs of its constituents, it also creates challenges at later stages of the project cycle and
limits the extent to which effectiveness can be assessed. This issue has been highlighted in previous evaluations and related meta-studies, and should be addressed in order to optimize the use of RBSA.

- Additional work is required to determine how to best measure progress and assess results associated with RBSA-funded interventions, if the Office wishes to better understand the added value of RBSA and attribute results to this funding modality. While success stories are important, it needs to be understood that these often fall in the realm of self-reporting. A more systematic accountability mechanism involving validation of results would allow the ILO to obtain a better strategic understanding of RBSA contributions.

- It will be useful in the future to review the effectiveness of RBSA-funded interventions that began following the revised allocation and appraisal procedures, to ascertain whether and how these changes have led to progress towards some of the recommendations listed in the previous section.

- One area of weakness noted by evaluators was the inadequacy of human and financial resources to deliver project outputs, as project design, workplans and budgets were over-ambitious. Challenges were also noted in the timeliness of requests for proposals, approval and release of RBSA funds. Some of this might have improved since the revised procedures but it would still be worthwhile to review how best to balance resources and ambitions. Furthermore, more information is needed regarding the extent of resource leveraging associated with RBSA funds.

- The role of RBSA in responding to post conflict or emergency situations should be studied in detail. While RBSA enables the ILO to be more agile in responding to emergent needs, further information would allow a better understanding of the advantages and risks associated with this funding modality, as well as improved awareness associated with risks of delays and failures in fragile situations.
### Report No* | Title of Evaluation
---|---
2 | Evaluation thématique indépendante du support du Compte Supplémentaire du Budget Ordinaire (CSBO/RBSA) aux CPO des pays sélectionnés relatifs à la protection sociale durant le biennium 2010-2011
3 | Final independent thematic evaluation : Diálogo social para la generación de empleos productivos y trabajo decente en la agroindustria de la caña de azúcar, turismo y PYME
5 | Independent Evaluation of African Country Programme Outcomes (CPOs) funded from 2012-2013 RBSA in the Thematic Area of Social Protection
6 | Independent Thematic Evaluation of RBSA Support to Selected Country Programme Outcomes (CPOs) Concerning Promotion of Employment during the 2012 - 2013 Biennium
7 | Final Evaluation of The Improved Labour Dispute Settlement Project – Enhancing collective bargaining and amicable settlement of labour dispute mechanisms in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Moldova Project
8 | Final internal evaluation - Improving Livelihoods and Decent Work Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities (US PRM) and ILO’s Response to Syrian Influx in Turkey (RBSA)
10 | Final Independent Evaluation - Improving Labour Market Data Sources in Myanmar through Support to the National Labour Force and School-to-Work Transition Survey
12 | Independent final evaluation of support for Employers’ Organisations in Myanmar
13 | Final Thematic Evaluation of RBSA-funded informal economy Projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the Republic of Moldova and Sub-regional Component
14 | Evaluación Temática Regional sobre Pisos de Protección Social
15 | Efectividad de la asistencia técnica de OIT en la promoción de entornos propicios para las empresas sostenibles
16 | Evaluación cluster sobre iniciativas OIT en favor de la transición hacia la formalidad
17 | Evaluación interna RBSA y RBTC vinculados a la implementación de la metodología SIMAPRO México
20 | Evaluación regional independiente sobre los modelos de implementación de asistencia técnica de la OIT financiada con fondos RBSA
21 | Evaluación Regional Temática Independiente sobre Migración Laboral
23 | Independent Final Evaluation (Draft report) - Enhancing Job Resilience and Protecting Decent Work Conditions in Rural Communities Affected by the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Northern Lebanon
24 | Internal Final Evaluation - Enhancing SME productivity and competitiveness in Jordan and Lebanon (WISE) through responsible workplace practices (January 2015 – May 2017)
25 | Final Internal Evaluation of The enabling environment for sustainable enterprises in Armenia project
26 | Final Evaluation of SCORE Short Pilot Implementation in Turkey

*Missing numbers denote that some evaluation reports shortlisted for the review were finally excluded as they did qualify the inclusion criteria set by EVAL and the Reviewers.*
Annex 2: An Overview of evaluations considered by the review

Figures below present an overview of the RBSA-funded interventions evaluated in the reports used in the review, by region, year of evaluation, type of evaluation, associated Policy Outcome (SPF 2010-15), as well as type of funding.
Annex 3: List of documents consulted


ILO (2018), Program allocation changes. IGDS Number 187 (Version 2)

ILO (2016). Regular Budget Supplementary Account. IGDS Number 474 (Version 1)

ILO (2016). Regular Budget Supplementary Account. IGDS Number 475 (Version 1)


ILO (2018). Core Voluntary Funding (RBSA) for ILO development cooperation. Geneva (RBSA Fact Sheet PARDEV)


Core Voluntary Funding (RBSA) for ILO development cooperation, Fact Sheet, Nov 2019


RBSA Review Recommendations (September 2014) and ILO responses (December 2014 interim response and October 2016 update)

Updates on Allocations of RBSA in 2016. Meeting on ILO’s Voluntary Core Funding (1 November 2016)