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High-level evaluations of strategies and Decent Work Country Programmes

Purpose of the document

This document presents a summary of the findings and recommendations of three independent high-level evaluations conducted during 2023. Part I pertains to the ILO's strategies and actions to promote fundamental principles and rights at work for 2018–23. Part II concerns the ILO's strategies and actions to promote decent work in the rural economy (with a focus on rural employment) for 2016–23. Part III consists of the ILO's post-conflict and recovery work in the Arab States region, with emphasis on Iraq and Yemen, for 2019–23. The Governing Body is invited to endorse the recommendations and request the Director-General to ensure that they are implemented (see the draft decision in paragraph 88).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Main relevant outcome: Enabling outcome B: Effective and efficient governance of the Organization.

Policy implications: The final section of each evaluation summary contains a set of recommendations, the implementation of which will have policy implications.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: Within existing budget allocations.

Follow-up action required: Follow-up to the recommendations will be reviewed by the Evaluation Office (EVAL) and the Evaluation Advisory Committee, and reported to the Governing Body through the annual evaluation report.

Author unit: EVAL.

Related documents: GB.349/PFA/4.

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► Introduction

1. This document is a concise summary of three independent high-level evaluations conducted by the ILO's Evaluation Office (EVAL) in 2023.¹ Its main purpose is to inform strategic decision-making and contribute to future policies and programmes. The evaluations follow internationally accepted criteria, tailored to suit the ILO's specific mandate. The data collection process was rigorous and utilized various methods, including desk reviews, synthesis reviews of related project evaluations, interviews, online surveys, and thematic and country case studies. The overall assessment in each evaluation uses a six-point rating scale, ranging from "highly unsatisfactory" to "highly satisfactory". These ratings serve as a benchmark for readers to compare their understanding of the narrative in the sections on relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and emerging impact. The evaluations encountered challenges, particularly in gaining access to stakeholders in some countries, due to less cooperative attitudes and excessive bureaucratic procedures. In a post-coronavirus disease (COVID 19) context, where we have returned to field visits and direct observation, renewed efforts now seem required to restore full acceptance of a sometimes-intrusive evaluation process.

► Part I. Independent high-level evaluation of the ILO's strategies and actions to promote fundamental principles and rights at work, 2018–23

Purpose and scope

2. This high-level evaluation examines the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and emerging impact of the ILO's strategies and actions on fundamental principles and rights at work between 2018 and early 2023. The evaluation assessed how the ILO integrated the objectives related to the fundamental principles and rights at work into its strategic and programme frameworks, the extent to which it achieved planned results, how the results were achieved, as well as the contextual factors that affected outcomes. The findings of the evaluation are intended to inform the next recurrent discussion on fundamental principles and rights at work, which will take place during the 112th Session of the International Labour Conference in June 2024. The high-level evaluation was based on a synthesis review of 33 relevant project evaluation reports, 188 in-depth interviews, and a survey of national constituents and ILO staff. The team selected six countries for in-depth data collection interviews, many of which were conducted in-country through face-to-face interviews, and carried out three in-depth thematic studies.²

¹ Independent high-level evaluation of ILO's strategies and actions to promote fundamental principles and rights at work, 2018–23; Independent high-level evaluation of ILO's strategies and actions to promote decent work in the rural economy (with a focus on rural employment), 2016–23; Independent high-level evaluation of the ILO's post-conflict and recovery work in the Arab States region, with emphasis on Iraq and Yemen, 2019–23.

² These countries were Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Guatemala, Kenya, Peru and Viet Nam. The evaluation examines three additional countries – Bangladesh, Qatar and Uzbekistan – through a more limited document review. The high-level evaluation also looks at three thematic areas: ILO promotion of and contributions to core Convention ratifications in 2018–23; ILO action on the Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) recommendations for follow-up by the Office in 2018–23; and fundamental principles and rights at work integration into Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) in 2018–23.

Key findings by evaluation criteria

A. Relevance

Key finding 1: The ILO's country level strategies and actions involved constituents in defining priorities for ILO support, which is reflected in their generally high levels of satisfaction with ILO fundamental principles and rights at work programmes. However, fundamental principles and rights at work programmes were often driven by external reputational, trade and investment concerns; while these programme drivers often aligned national and donor interests, and facilitated relatively strong political buy-in from national leaders, other equally or more significant fundamental principles and rights at work gaps (in sectors not subject to international trade considerations) were not addressed.

Key finding 2: Contrary to the priorities expressed by the ILC 2017 Framework for action for the effective and universal respect, promotion and realization of fundamental principles and rights at work 2017–23, the ILO did not significantly update its strategies or scale up its freedom of association and collective bargaining promotional and development cooperation activities during the evaluation period, even though these are important enabling rights.

Key finding 3: The ILO produced a large volume of fundamental principles and rights at work research, guidance notes and tools during the evaluation period, which helped ground policy and decision-making at various levels in evidence and international good practice.

Key finding 4: The ILO contributed to helping its constituents and others understand and, in some cases, find negotiated solutions to deal with the negative impact of COVID-19 on fundamental labour rights. Many key informants, however, highlighted that respect for fundamental principles and rights at work declined during the pandemic, notwithstanding the large number of ILO guidance materials.

3. The ILO seized opportunities for high-impact programming to address challenges to fundamental principles and rights at work, often working on high-profile matters where partners' interests aligned, leading to strong political will and greater resources for its interventions. Nevertheless, reinforcing its efforts to promote freedom of association and collective bargaining as a critical enabling right was an important ILC priority that the ILO largely failed to address. In contrast, the Office's volume of relevant research and knowledge-sharing activities on fundamental principles and rights at work were priority areas in which the ILO excelled. Similarly, the ILO's assistance to meet tripartite constituents' needs emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic showed adaptiveness and helped constituents understand and address pandemic consequences in terms of fundamental labour rights.

B. Coherence

Key finding 5: ILO strategic frameworks consistently articulate the importance of the fundamental principles and rights at work. Although these objectives partially carry through to the programme and budget, gaps in the results framework and related indicators made some objectives less visible, such as forced labour, freedom of association, and others which are hard to measure. At the country level, the ILO's efforts to reinforce how constituents understand and incorporate fundamental principles and rights at work within Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) were largely successful, with significant improvements since the last high-level evaluation and fundamental principles and rights at work evaluation.

Key finding 6: Institutional mandates and technical expertise on fundamental principles and rights at work are spread widely across the ILO, with many sections or units having overlapping and complementary mandates. Inconsistent with its role leading promotional efforts in relation to all fundamental principles and rights at work, the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch (FUNDAMENTALS) remained focused mainly on child labour and forced labour. Internal and external constraints contributed to the Branch's limited progress diversifying its portfolio of activities.

Key finding 7: Even though FUNDAMENTALS' integrated strategy on fundamental principles and rights at work (2017–23) articulated a comprehensive theory of change, milestones and expected results, it was not widely utilized as a road map for action, monitored or evaluated. The actual impact of the strategy on levels of integration within its own portfolio and across other technical branches was limited. While ILO programmes frequently addressed child labour and forced labour together, the strategy led only to a few projects that integrated all aspects of fundamental principles and rights at work.

Key finding 8: The International Labour Standards Department (NORMES) and other technical branches frequently use short-term technical assistance to follow up on supervisory body observations. Albeit less consistently, ILO staff considered observations from the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) in designing larger and more holistic development cooperation programmes. Nevertheless, with relatively few but noteworthy exceptions, normative supervision is seldom the main driver of long-term and relatively more comprehensive development cooperation activities.

4. By not fully engaging other parts of the Office in its design, or fully operationalizing and monitoring its 2017–23 integrated strategy on fundamental principles and rights at work, FUNDAMENTALS missed an opportunity to lead the Office in a strategically important effort to promote and capitalize on the synergies between the different fundamental principles and rights in the ILO's development cooperation programmes. Implementing and monitoring the strategy might have pushed the Office to find more systematic solutions to human resources constraints and departmental silos, and more frequently led to joined-up, "One ILO" initiatives. Nevertheless, its experimentation with integrated approaches, even if on a small scale, produced useful lessons learned that may guide integration efforts going forward.
5. Despite the few and frequently mentioned examples of effective follow-up action on supervisory body comments, such as in relation to Myanmar, Qatar and Uzbekistan, the intersection between the ILO's supervisory body and development cooperation activities remained relatively narrow; cases were few where significant deficits in fundamental principles and rights at work noted by the supervisory bodies led to large-scale, holistic development cooperation responses. Although Office responses to significant issues raised by the supervisory bodies might have produced reforms that indeed affected people's lives, the frequency with which they occurred, compared with the many cases identified by supervisory bodies of need for reform, is regrettable.
6. In all of the above, development cooperation programmes' significant dependence on donor priorities added to the already enormously difficult work of lining up different parts of a big, complex and geographically spread-out organization towards very challenging, high-level, cross-cutting objectives such as the promotion of fundamental principles and rights at work.

C. Effectiveness

Key finding 9: The ILO pursued universal ratification of fundamental Conventions using various means, provided tailored assistance and seized windows of opportunity, meeting or exceeding most targets.

Key finding 10: Few ILO projects addressed structural gaps in fundamental freedom of association and collective bargaining rights, even within the Office's social dialogue, workplace cooperation and industrial relations workstreams. Where they did, examples of positive outcomes include tripartite freedom of association and collective bargaining action plans and social dialogue forums, legal reforms, streamlined trade union registration processes and reinforced capacity in the judiciary.

Key finding 11: Among noteworthy results on gender equality and non-discrimination, the Office successfully extended the Equal Pay International Coalition and the Global Business Disability Network. Nevertheless, except in the area of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and other persons in vulnerable situations, the Office struggled to achieve its P&B objectives, which it attributed to the emerging nature of some workstreams (such as the care economy) and because gender and inclusion reforms were relatively low-priority policy areas during the COVID-19 crisis period.

Key finding 12: The ILO contributed to many positive results towards the elimination of child labour and forced labour, an area where it continues to have relatively high volumes of activity. The Office strengthened policy frameworks and action plans, and expanded Alliance 8.7. In line with 2017 Framework for Action recommendations, it supported updating hazardous lists and supported communication and advocacy activities at various levels. Despite the previous activities, the Office missed many of its programme and budget targets in the 2020–21 biennium.

7. The evaluation highlighted various actions that produced positive results towards fundamental principles and rights at work objectives. Progress towards the universal ratification of core labour standards during the evaluation period was impressive, thanks to effective and persistent promotional efforts and well-timed assistance when windows of opportunity for ratification opened. The ILO set ambitious programme and budget objectives to further gender equality and non-discrimination, which were possibly too ambitious for the time frame and nature of the requisite reforms, especially those promoting the care economy and pay equity reforms. Similarly, the measures of progress the ILO established to assess results towards the elimination of child labour and forced labour were too limited and omitted ILO contributions to advancing improving awareness; strengthening care and referral mechanisms; and linking the fight against child labour with social protection, social finance and other actions that address economic and social root causes.

D. Efficiency

Key finding 13: ILO programmes on decent work in global supply chains and migration governance mainstreamed fundamental principles and rights at work with fair recruitment and multinational enterprises declaration-related programmes being noteworthy examples. Child labour and social inclusion programmes also mainstreamed social protection, social finance, livelihood development and/or labour inspection strengthening in project intervention strategies. Otherwise, broad-based, holistic approaches, in which different departments agreed on ways to share resources strategically towards fundamental principles and rights at work promotion, were not common.

Key finding 14: Although the ILO reported examples of important fundamental principles and rights at work achieved with limited resources, overall insufficient funding, inadequate time and limited scale had a negative effect on Office efficiency. The Office generally established priorities based on its comparative advantage and where deficits in fundamental principles and rights at work were most prevalent, but resource allocation was ultimately constrained by donor priorities, except in the case of the Office's relatively small Regular Budget Supplementary Account funding. The Organization faced human resources limitations that left gaps in its capacity in critical areas.

8. The Office effectively mainstreamed fundamental principles and rights at work in a limited number of strategic workstreams. These examples – combating forced labour among migrant workers for fairer conditions, or tackling “root causes” of child labour, forced labour and economic exclusion with social protection and improved access to financial services – demonstrated the potential economies of scale and higher-level results of working strategically as “One ILO”. Mainstreaming and integration were noteworthy ways in which the ILO increased its impact, despite continuing resource constraints and its limited power to influence donor priorities.

E. Sustainability

Key finding 15: The ILO enabled national constituents’ participation in knowledge-sharing forums and training programmes designed to increase their understanding and expertise in fundamental principles and rights at work in support of sustainability. Office technical assistance practices were frequently well-aligned with different institutional mandates and strengthened constituents’ fundamental principles and rights at work promotional strategies and practices. Workers’ organizations’ capacity-building included efforts relevant to freedom of association and collective bargaining to strengthen union organizing and collective bargaining in the informal and emerging economic sectors. For employers and their organizations, capacity-building focused on fundamental principles and rights at work in the context of compliance and due diligence, and resulted in the expansion of business forums on fundamental principles and rights at work, for example, the Child Labour Platform and the Global Business Network on Forced Labour. In many countries, ILO efforts improved labour inspectorate efficiency, and reinforced its fundamental principles and rights at work awareness-raising and enforcement roles.

Key finding 16: In its fundamental principles and rights at work -related projects, independent evaluators reported that the ILO often did not do enough to institutionalize intervention strategies, whether because of delayed achievement of planned activities, allocating insufficient time and resources, or by not developing an effective exit strategy. Moreover, the ILO faced many deeply embedded structural challenges connected to constraints faced by labour market institutions and the operating environment that diminished the effectiveness of its capacity-building efforts and the overall sustainability of results.

9. In the many countries where the ILO works, Office capacity-building programmes contributed effectively to empowering individuals and developing constituent institutions. In the context of its broader fundamental principles and rights at work awareness-raising and legal and policy reforms, these efforts helped sustain constituents’ and other key stakeholders’ fundamental principles and rights at work promotional activities in many countries. Given institutional challenges affecting national labour market institutions (such as insufficient resources, unequal power dynamics and inadequate incentives) and difficult enabling environments in many countries (such as shrinking civic space and enduring societal norms that permit discrimination and exclusion), constituent capacity-building requires long-term investments from the ILO. Moreover, there is ample scope for additional improvements in how well the ILO institutionalizes its support activities and designs, and delivers holistic capacity-building programmes that over time promote changes in people, institutions and society.

F. Emerging impact

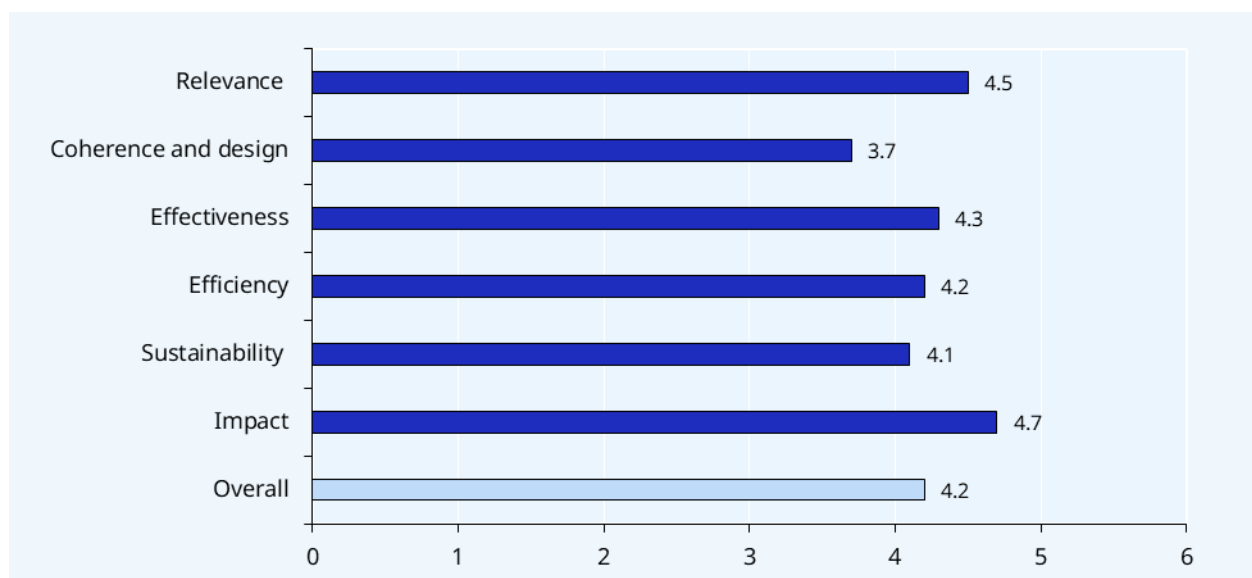
Key finding 17: Core labour standards are reflected in a growing number of international development, trade and investment frameworks, and legislation. fundamental principles and rights at work are embedded in global policy documents, with labour rights increasingly being recognized as human rights by the United Nations (UN) and other multilateral institutions. The ILO has also been relatively successful at the country level in influencing the development of, and facilitating constituent involvement in, UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

Key finding 18: The Office did not implement adequate monitoring and evaluation systems to determine the extent to which its interventions contributed to improved application of fundamental principles and rights at work at the country and project levels. In terms of plausible impact, national constituents and project evaluations often cited improved knowledge and awareness, and strengthened policy and legal frameworks, as important ILO intervention outcomes with the potential to improve the application of the fundamental labour standards in the long run. Moreover, the ILO’s supervisory bodies documented many specific examples of progress made by Member States during the evaluation period that were linked to ILO interventions.

10. The 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, already one of the most-cited ILO Declarations, continued to deepen its footprint in international development, trade, investment and human rights strategic frameworks during the evaluation period. This is a positive reflection of its relevance and potential to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development, as well as the successful promotion of the ILO.

Overall assessment

► **Figure 1. Overall assessment of the ILO’s strategies and actions to promote fundamental principles and rights at work, 2018–23**



6 = Highly satisfactory, 5 = Satisfactory, 4 = Somewhat satisfactory, 3 = Somewhat unsatisfactory, 2 = Unsatisfactory, 1 = Highly unsatisfactory.

Conclusions and lessons learned

11. The ILO tackled fundamental labour rights challenges effectively through impactful programming, when national and external interests aligned, leading to strong political will and increased resources. However, it neglected to prioritize freedom of association and collective bargaining as a critical enabling right, which remained inadequately addressed.
12. The ILO excelled in conducting research and knowledge-sharing on fundamental principles and rights at work and adapted well during the COVID-19 pandemic, assisting tripartite constituents in addressing labour rights issues. Nevertheless, it missed opportunities to fully integrate its 2017–23 integrated strategy on fundamental principles and rights at work across different parts of the Office.
13. The intersection between the ILO's supervisory body and development cooperation activities remained narrow, with limited holistic responses to identified fundamental principles and rights at work deficits. Dependence on donor priorities added complexity in aligning efforts towards the objective of addressing this deficit.
14. While the ILO made progress in promoting universal ratification of core labour standards, there were lessons to be learned in setting coherent country-level priorities and providing long-term assistance.
15. Ambitious programme and budget objectives for the elimination of child labour and forced labour lacked suitable progress measures and require more comprehensive indicators.
16. The ILO effectively mainstreamed fundamental principles and rights at work in strategic workstreams, showcasing the potential for greater impact. Capacity-building programmes empowered individuals and constituent institutions, but long-term investments were necessary to address institutional challenges. The 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work remained relevant in international frameworks. Overall, the ILO achieved significant progress in promoting labour rights, but required improvement in strategic prioritization and systematic integration.

Recommendations

17. **Recommendation 1:** The ILO should expedite its ongoing efforts to strengthen its strategy and actions in promoting freedom of association and collective bargaining, which were initiated late in the evaluation period. Similarly, it should continue efforts to reinforce work on gender equality and non-discrimination, as well as forced labour, where these continue to be sensitive topics. For this, the ILO may build on emerging good practices and lessons learned and capitalize on the following:
 - programmatic entry points, on which there is broad consensus and relatively strong political will, should be used to engage on more politically and socially sensitive principles and rights.
 - political and economic leverage exists in the context of responsible trade and investment frameworks.
 - office research, communication and advocacy capabilities make compelling arguments for greater respect and application of fundamental principles and rights at work, especially those receiving less attention overall or for work in settings that attract fewer resources from development partners.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
Governance, Rights and Dialogue Cluster (ADG/GRD): Governance and Tripartism Department (GOVERNANCE) and International Labour Standards Department (NORMES); with Better Work; Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Branch (GEDI); Inclusive Labour Markets, Labour Relations and Working Conditions Branch (INWORK); Labour Migration Branch (MIGRANT); Statistics (ILO-STAT), regional directors (Decent Work Technical Support Teams (DWTs), regional offices, country offices); in consultation with the Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) and Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV).	High	Immediate and long-term	Variable

18. Recommendation 2: The ILO should formalize what is de facto the case: responsibility for fundamental principles and rights at work related resource mobilization and technical services is distributed across various technical units. Within this context, to strengthen internal coherence, the ILO should:

- clarify the role of FUNDAMENTALS as a “centre of excellence” by refining and better communicating its mandate and strengths to other parts of the ILO, national constituents and donors (for example, the principal technical lead on child labour and forced labour projects, leading integrated fundamental principles and rights at work research, promoting innovative project design and communication drawing on its own and other technical units and field personnel expertise for delivery);
- ensure that any future integrated fundamental principles and rights at work strategy involves different branches and field personnel in the (re)design phase, and is accompanied by additional measures to make the strategy operational, and ensure that it is monitored and evaluated;
- continue research, advocacy and communication strategies that highlight the interconnections between fundamental principles and rights at work, adapted to different country-level contexts;
- more consistently promote integrated and “One ILO” approaches at the country level, in collaboration with national constituents;
- promote work by interdisciplinary teams to develop cross-institutional work products, potentially by assessing such efforts in performance evaluations.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ADG/GRD: FUNDAMENTALS, NORMES	High	Immediate to medium-term	Variable

19. Recommendation 3: The ILO should continue strongly to promote ratifications and greater synergies between the operations of the supervisory bodies and development cooperation programmes. To this end, it should:

- continue to provide tailor-made assistance to overcome obstacles to ratification, and capitalize on windows of opportunity towards universal ratification of the core standards;
- reinforce existing efforts to inform ILO programme staff, and project development and evaluation consultants, on the role and function of the supervisory bodies, possibly through mandatory training;
- strengthen guidance and quality control for the development of project documents, especially on how unrelated projects mainstream fundamental principles and rights at work, the objective being to ensure coherence with the principles and, when possible, inclusion of promotional strategies for each of the fundamental principles and rights at work;
- continue and reinforce existing efforts to build social partner capacity at the country level to use the supervisory system mechanisms designed to promote government accountability.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADG/GRD: NORMES, FUNDAMENTALS • External and Corporate Relations Cluster (ADG/ECR): PARTNERSHIPS • Corporate Services Cluster (ADG/CS): Human Resources Development (HRD) • EVAL 	High	Medium to long-term	Medium

20. Recommendation 4: In embracing occupational safety and health (OSH) as the newly elevated fundamental principles and rights at work, the ILO should apply some lessons learned, as documented in this evaluation report, and strengthen promotion of ratification and the supervisory mechanism of the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), as well as expand areas of its work on OSH and fundamental principles and rights at work, by:

- drawing on momentum created by the designation of safe and healthy work environments as a fundamental principle and right at work to develop products and campaigns to promote ratification of Conventions Nos 155 and 187, and support Member State promotion, respect and realization of the OSH fundamental principles and rights at work, as was done with the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, and remind Member States of their obligations to provide annual review reports where Conventions Nos 155 and 187 are not ratified.
- capitalizing on donor and constituent interest to work in areas where other fundamental principles and rights at work intersect with OSH such as the elimination of child labour and the promotion of safe and healthy working environments for all workers, including young workers; responsible business conduct and OSH; workers’ organizations and OSH culture promotion; and OSH in collective bargaining agreements.
- strengthening the capacity of the supervisory mechanism and its secretariat to monitor application of Conventions Nos 155 and 187, and deal with the increased reporting processing workload stemming from new ratifications.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ADG/GRD: Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health Branch (LABADMIN/OSH), FUNDAMENTALS and NORMES 	High	Medium-term	Variable

21. **Recommendation 5:** The ILO should continue to invest in and capitalize on strategic partnerships with other UN organizations, regional economic organizations and international financial institutions to integrate fundamental principles and rights at work into international development frameworks on sustainable development, responsible business, human rights and inclusive and equitable economic growth. The ILO should:

- continue to promote fundamental principles and rights at work integration and social partner participation in United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks;
- continue to participate in joint UN initiatives as a means of leveraging resources and positioning the ILO to mainstream fundamental principles and rights at work in broader initiatives;
- strengthen alliances with institutions promoting human rights and advocating for greater civic space.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ADG/GRD: FUNDAMENTALS ADG/ECR: PARTNERSHIPS and DWTs 	High	Medium-term	Variable

Office response

22. The Office welcomes the high-level evaluation, takes note of the 18 findings and is committed to taking the necessary measures to implement the five recommendations on the ILO’s strategies and action on fundamental principles and rights at work. The Office will use the recurrent discussion item conclusions (112th Session (2024) of the International Labour Conference, June 2024) and the follow-up plan of action, to be submitted to the Governing Body in November 2024, as an Office-wide road map for action on all fundamental principles and rights at work, which will be aligned with and complement relevant specific plans of action, such as the plan of action concerning the ILO global strategy on occupational safety and health, or ILO strategies, including that on collective bargaining. The Office will also ensure higher visibility and higher work density on less frequently covered fundamental principles and rights at work, including forced labour and freedom of association and collective bargaining.

23. On **Recommendation 1**, the Office will consolidate a “One ILO” framework for action to strengthen its strategy and actions on freedom of association and collective bargaining, around three strategic priorities: effective governance, strong and inclusive institutions and policies, and evidence-based advocacy. The Office will continue to strengthen its work on gender equality, non-discrimination and forced labour, by including these concepts in work related to the other categories of fundamental principles and rights at work and vice versa, and by fostering greater collaboration across the Office. The Office will also promote stronger reflection of the fundamental principles and rights at work across all new decent work country programmes.

24. On **Recommendation 2**, the Office will clarify the role of FUNDAMENTALS as lead unit in promoting all five fundamental principles and rights at work, conducting integrated research, projects and advocacy, and providing technical expertise in the field of child labour and forced labour. FUNDAMENTALS will co-lead on freedom of association and collective bargaining as enabling rights and collaborate on non-discrimination (with GEDI) and occupational safety and health (LABADMIN/OSH). The Office, led by FUNDAMENTALS, will set up an Office-wide fundamental principles and rights at work interdisciplinary team of focal points (headquarters, field and International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITC-ILO)) to promote integrated and “One ILO” approaches towards fundamental principles and rights at work at the country and global levels. The team will revise, monitor and support the implementation of the fundamental principles and rights at work strategy, and the follow-up to the conclusions of the Recurrent Item Discussion, including through the four action programmes.
25. On **Recommendation 3**, the Office will design and implement global and country ratification campaigns, in line with the programme and budget, in particular regarding the least ratified international labour standards. The Office will also make greater efforts to link technical cooperation to the ILO supervisory bodies and develop tools (mapping of interventions and evidence-based selection methodology) to attract additional extrabudgetary Development Cooperation funding and scale up existing interventions on all fundamental principles and rights at work. The Office will also ensure that project staff members gain greater understanding of the role and functions of the ILO supervisory bodies. Through the interdisciplinary team, the Office will further mainstream knowledge of ILO supervisory mechanisms across the Organization (field and headquarters).
26. On **Recommendation 4**, the Office will develop a Global Campaign that will focus on the ratification of Conventions Nos 155 and 187, and on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98) as enabling rights. Efforts will be deployed to increase donors’ contributions for OSH and other fundamental principles and rights at work and strengthen constituents’ capacity to deliver on them (including to report on non-ratified fundamental principles and rights at work Conventions).
27. On **Recommendation 5**, the ILO will increase its engagement with other UN agencies, regional economic organizations and international financial institutions and regional economic organizations, notably through Alliance 8.7, Equal Pay International Coalition, Fair Recruitment Initiative and other partnerships. It will also continue engaging in UN joint initiatives, including through United Nations Country Teams and development cooperation programmes, research (such as Global Estimates) and advocacy activities, including through the inclusion of fundamental principles and rights at work in Common Country Analysis (CCAs) and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

► Part II. Independent high-level evaluation of the ILO's strategies and actions to promote decent work in the rural economy (with a focus on rural employment), 2016–23

Purpose and scope

28. The high-level evaluation reviewed the Office's efforts towards promoting decent work in the rural economy in 2016–23, focusing predominantly on outcome 5 of the ILO's Programme and Budgets for 2016–17 and 2018–19, and output 3.2 of the Programme and Budgets for 2020–21 and 2022–23. The evaluation paid particular attention to the promotion of rural employment, while also assessing the role of social dialogue, social protection and ILS in these efforts. The high-level evaluation was conducted based on data derived from various methods: (a) synthesis review of 32 evaluation reports; (b) review of ILO documentation; (c) interviews with ILO staff, constituents and donors, and UN and other partners; (d) nine case studies (five in-depth country case studies, two light case studies, and two thematic studies); and (e) surveys among ILO staff, constituents and partners.³

Key findings by evaluation criteria

A. Relevance

Key finding 1: ILO programming on decent work in the rural economy is relevant to constituents' needs and country priorities. However, the degree of involvement in formulating the ILO's programming was found to vary among constituents, with governments heavily influencing the agenda.

Key finding 2: Whereas ILO programming on promoting decent work in the rural economy reflected the learning drawn from experience, responses to new and emerging trends were not systematically captured, limiting the quality of responsiveness to constituent demands. Lessons learned were generally not adequately documented, posing challenges to country-level programming.

29. Programming aligned well with country priorities and was relevant to the needs of all constituents. Decent work country programmes featured priorities for the rural economy, depending on national and development contexts. Programming was relevant to the ILO's 2019 Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
30. Owing to limited representation of rural workers and micro and small enterprises, their priorities were incorporated in ILO programming indirectly through alignment with government policies.

³ These included: in-depth case studies in Colombia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar and Morocco; "light" case studies in Jordan and Uzbekistan; and thematic case studies on the ILO's Contributions to Integrating decent work in the rural economy into national employment policies and their outcomes, and the ILO's Partnerships for Promoting decent work in the rural economy. A total of 239 informants (70 per cent men, 30 per cent women) were interviewed. Survey response rates were 17 per cent for staff, 39 per cent for constituents and 40 per cent for partners.

31. Initiatives narrowly focused on agriculture and infrastructure, whereas support for tourism picked up after 2020. Responses to new and emerging trends have not been systematically integrated into ILO programming. Countries with rapidly developing rural economies expressed the need for more advanced support. The absence of systematic documentation of lessons learned posed challenges in formulating effective programming at the country level.

B. Coherence

Key finding 3: The 2011 [ILO strategy on decent work in the rural economy](#) has neither been fully implemented nor monitored or evaluated since its formulation. Implementation arrangements outlined in the strategy are not instituted.

Key finding 4: Limiting decent work in the rural economy to a stand-alone outcome/output obscures the ILO's collective gains in the rural economy, as 76 per cent of its work in the rural economy was undertaken under outputs not related to decent work in the rural economy. Lack of an Organization-wide theory of change on promoting decent work in the rural economy, combined with the lack of effective collaboration mechanisms across ILO departments, prevented systemic integration.

Key finding 5: Despite the comparative advantage of the ILO's mandate, actions on promoting decent work in the rural economy focused primarily on employment promotion and social dialogue, while social protection was marginalized. Although interventions appeared well grounded in international labour standards, they were rarely promoted. Ratification of decent work in the rural economy - related technical Conventions is limited in many countries, leaving workers in the rural economy not covered by these instruments.

32. The ILO's strategy on decent work in the rural economy, formulated in 2011, although broad in scope, remained a static document and has not been reviewed, despite considerable changes and emerging trends globally.
33. Promotion of decent work in the rural economy is a transversal topic, addressed by ten outcomes of the 2016–19 Programme and Budgets and eight outcomes of the 2020–23 Programme and Budgets. Thirty-three per cent of decent work in the rural economy-related country programme outcomes were linked to outcome 4 – Sustainable Enterprises, and 32 per cent to outcome 3 – Employment. The remaining country programme outcomes were spread across the rest of the outcomes in 2020–23. Not implementing the institutional mechanisms prescribed by the 2011 strategy and the lack of an effective Organization-wide collaboration mechanism prevented explicit systemic integration.
34. Decent work in the rural economy programmes focused primarily on employment promotion and social dialogue. While programming contributed to supporting the ratification of key Conventions, the promotion of international labour standards and social protection was marginally reflected in planning and implementation. Just transition was absent, despite its importance for rural employment, as highlighted in the 2019 Centenary Declaration.

C. Effectiveness

Key finding 6: Multipronged integrated support yielded the most significant results, especially when targeting the creation of an enabling environment, leveraging market forces and fostering constituent ownership. However, most of the ILO's initiatives on promoting decent work in the rural economy were implemented at pilot scales in silos, without instituting means for further replication and upscaling.

Key finding 7: Gender equality was effectively mainstreamed, but interventions did not always succeed in promoting it. Young people were supported by capacity-building and linkages to job markets. While marginalized groups such as refugees, migrants and indigenous communities benefited from programming, disability inclusion was mostly overlooked.

35. Capacity-building, knowledge generation, social dialogue, technical support for policy development and enterprise-level bipartite cooperation were predominant means of action, with governments and workers/workers' organizations as primary beneficiaries. Support for employers' organizations was relatively modest. Actions reoriented in response to COVID-19 entailed a shift to no-contact delivery, knowledge and research, OSH support, and job recovery through employment-intensive investment programmes.
36. While project-level targets were often met, success against programme and budget targets oscillated between overachievement and underachievement due to unrealistic planning. Significant results were obtained when multipronged and integrated support was provided. However, the high-level evaluation found an overwhelming proportion of decent work in the rural economy -related initiatives were implemented in isolation under various programming outcomes, and on a localized and pilot scale, without the means for replication and upscaling. For instance, of the 27 country programme outcomes incorporating knowledge generation, 22 per cent involved preparation of documents without linkages to other means of action. Limited dissemination also prevented adoption by constituents.
37. By design, market-oriented projects risked excluding marginalized community members. Gender equality was consistently integrated into programming, but effectiveness was poor in terms of its promotion. Young people were supported through capacity-building and linkages to job markets.

D. Efficiency

Key finding 8: The staffing structure at headquarters appeared adequate, while in regional and country offices it was sparse. The Sectoral Policies Department (SECTOR) lacks an explicit mandate and means for promoting decent work in the rural economy systemically.

Key finding 9: The availability of financial resources for decent work in the rural economy has gradually increased, due to constituent demand and donor interest, with 90 per cent of the financing donor-based. However, the absence of a cohesive resource mobilization strategy resulted in fragmented programme delivery and little control over medium-to-long-term planning. The total expenditure on promoting decent work in the rural economy in 2016–22 amounted to US\$87 million, with an average annual delivery rate of 62 per cent.

Key finding 10: The ILO has engaged in partnerships with other UN agencies through non-binding agreements. Country-level collaboration resulted in 53 joint interventions, for a total of approximately US\$41 million during 2016–23.

38. SECTOR, entrusted to lead the coordination of the ILO's action on decent work in the rural economy, lacks the explicit mandate and capacity to promote decent work in the rural economy systemically, as it is primarily responsible for developing global policy, guidance tools and knowledge products, and organizing sectoral tripartite meetings. While staffing at headquarters is somewhat in line with the requirements of decent work in the rural economy promotion, staffing structures at the regional and country levels are inefficiently lean. The absence of dedicated rural economy specialists in four of the five regional offices is a weakness. Staff turnover at the regional and country levels has been high, with no succession planning and long recruitment processes causing implementation delays and coordination challenges.
39. No structured approach exists for cross-country/cross-regional collaboration, leading to a fragmented organizational approach to promote decent work in the rural economy. When consulted, 38 per cent of surveyed staff rated the coordination between headquarters and regional and country level as satisfactory.
40. The average annual expenditure on promoting decent work in the rural economy increased from US\$8 million (for 2016 to 2019) to US\$18.3 million (for 2020 to 2022). Sixty-nine per cent of this increase was due to migration of country programme outcomes from other outcomes to output 3.2. However, the average annual delivery rate during the evaluation period stayed at 62 per cent (48 per cent in 2022).
41. The programme and budget framework, as a primary programme planning and progress monitoring tool for decent work in the rural economy, presents shortcomings, as it does not cover the breadth of activities undertaken in this area. Other results frameworks, such as decent work country programmes and projects, failed to capture monitoring and reporting targets or deliverables and results dissemination, thereby hindering the scaling-up and replication of initiatives.
42. Global partnerships – building upon the ILO's comparative advantages, and centred on knowledge and advocacy with strategic development partners and UN agencies – were established, such as the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture, Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, and the Decent Work for Equitable Food Systems Coalition. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) were prominent partners.

E. Sustainability

Key finding 11: The ILO's actions had a positive impact on the capacities of governments and workers' organizations at the local level. Advocacy support was provided to employers' organizations to promote decent work in the rural economy. However, sustainability and long-term changes remained limited, notably for job creation.

Key finding 12: While training and capacity-building, policy influence, social dialogue, market systems development and partnerships with constituents promoted sustainability, the lack of clear strategies for upscaling, limited financial resources and technical capacity persisted as major threats.

43. To ensure sustainability, the ILO used multiple strategies and means of action, including training and capacity-building, policy influence, social dialogue, market systems development and partnerships with constituents. However, with a few exceptions, sustainability remains a major concern, with influencing factors being the lack of clear exit strategies for continuation and upscaling, insufficient post-project follow-up and support, and political will. Limited financial resources and technical capacities were also noted as major impediments.

F. Emerging impact

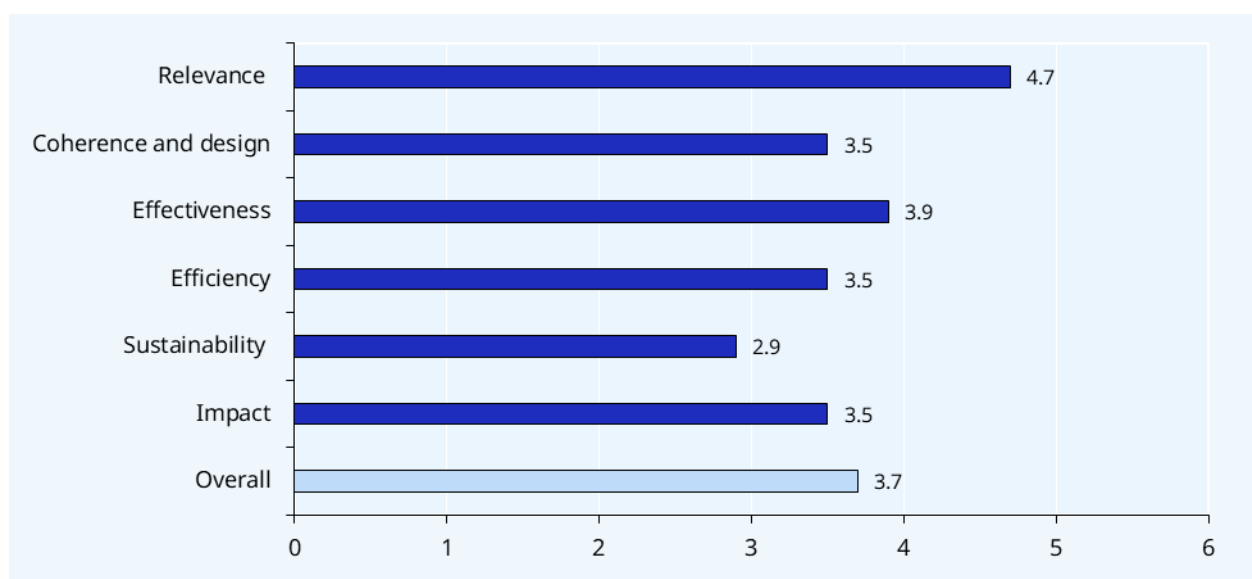
Key finding 13: The ILO’s actions on policy improvements yielded results of varying levels, from achieving structural and transformative impacts, improvements in regulatory frameworks and adoption of strategic guidelines, to the development and approval of strategies/policies only.

Key finding 14: Small project size, limited resources, unclear theory of change and absence of synergies were identified as internal constraints to impact. Persistent limited constituent capacities and buy-in, lack of infrastructure, political instability, and COVID-19 featured as external impact constraints.

44. On a smaller scale, the ILO had a positive impact on constituent capacities, often in the form of: (a) support to governments on decent work in the rural economy planning and programme development (for example, Madagascar, Peru and South Africa); (b) establishment and/or strengthening of workers’ organizations (Uzbekistan), including guidance and advocacy in collective bargaining and on the fundamental principles and rights at work; and (c) advocacy to employers’ organizations to promote decent work principles and OSH, and improve employer–worker relations (Indonesia), among other initiatives.

Overall assessment

► **Figure 2. Overall assessment of the ILO’s strategies and actions to promote decent work in the rural economy (with a focus on rural employment), 2016–23**



6 = Highly satisfactory, 5 = Satisfactory, 4 = Somewhat satisfactory, 3 = Somewhat unsatisfactory, 2 = Unsatisfactory, 1 = Highly unsatisfactory

Conclusions and lessons learned

45. While funding for decent work in the rural economy-related initiatives steadily increased from 2016 to 2022, the average annual delivery rate demonstrates that the ILO is not well equipped to fully utilize these resources. ILO programming is not adequately leveraging areas of comparative advantage in the promotion of decent work in the rural economy, including promotion of international labour standards and social protection, nor sufficiently integrating just transition or disability, to further its decent work in the rural economy agenda.

- 46. The assignment of cross-cutting topics, such as the rural economy, to a particular outcome or output does not adequately present the Organization-wide contribution made towards achievements in such areas of work. Sustained programming using multifaceted and well-integrated approaches can result in the most positive impact towards promoting decent work in the rural economy.
- 47. In the context of limited resources and capacities, partnerships with other international agencies can facilitate the filling of crucial gaps. Furthermore, the involvement of government agencies beyond ministries of labour can also improve effectiveness of projects by facilitating buy-in and establishing intergovernmental linkages and coordination.
- 48. Sustainability is a major concern across the board, mostly owing to ineffective or absent exit strategies.

Recommendations

- 49. **Recommendation 1:** The ILO should review and update the 2011 strategy document in view of the emerging global trends and existing ILO strategies. The strategy should be further expanded by means of a well-articulated theory of change to promote systemic integration of decent work in the rural economy across the ILO and to ensure sufficient emphasis on all four pillars of decent work and the cross-cutting areas so as to accommodate evolving realities of the world of work.

The strategy should be complemented by a comprehensive results framework, time bound plan of action, a monitoring and reporting framework, an intra-organizational coordination framework that provides clear roles and responsibilities, and a fundraising strategy to overcome the issues of fragmented programming.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ADG/Jobs and Social Protection (JSP); EMPLOYMENT (through a participatory approach involving all relevant departments and units from all clusters)	High	Short-term	Low

- 50. **Recommendation 2:** The ILO should strengthen coordination and stewardship of decent work in the rural economy programming. A review is needed to identify a leading entity (for example, department, unit or mechanism) within the ILO with the mandate and technical capacity suitably aligned with promoting decent work in the rural economy, and to provide strong stewardship to decent work in the rural economy programming as a cross-cutting topic.

An Organization-wide strategy should be developed and implemented by this entity following the “3D” principle of Direction, Dialogue and Dissemination. For example, a well-functioning coordination mechanism is needed to provide cohesive direction across the ILO for decent work in the rural economy programming. It should also facilitate dialogue between headquarters and regional and country offices, and disseminate monitoring results.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ADG/JSP: EMPLOYMENT (through a participatory approach involving ENTERPRISES, SOCPRO, SECTOR, FUNDAMENTALS, DIALOGUE, LABADMIN/OSH, GEDI, INWORK, NORMES, ACTEMP, ACTRAV, regional directors (DWTs, regional offices, country offices))	High	Short-term	Low

- 51. Recommendation 3:** The ILO should focus on programming of decent work in the rural economy -related actions for sustained impact. Project designs should rely on integrated approaches and focused efforts to be implemented over extended periods to address systemic decent work in the rural economy -related issues, while also integrating international labour standards and social protection, and explicitly mainstreaming gender equality, youth and persons with disabilities.

For meaningful impact and scaling-up, it is important for the ILO to identify key subsectors where work has yielded significantly positive results, such as work with palm oil and coffee plantation workers, followed by the development of ILO-specific approaches and tools to support rural workers.

Focusing on emerging trends can help the ILO find a niche in areas such as the use of digitization as a means of action and climate change adaptation strategies for rural workers, which can also help expand its scope to other growing rural industries with decent work deficits, such as renewable energy and light engineering.

To overcome the pervasive challenge of unsustainability, it is critical that sustainability strategies be incorporated in project design for durable impact, ranging from simple measures, such as local capacity-building, to more complicated measures, such as linkages with markets.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ADG/JSP: EMPLOYMENT (through a participatory approach involving ENTERPRISES, SOCPRO, SECTOR, FUNDAMENTALS, DIALOGUE, LABADMIN/OSH, GEDI, INWORK, NORMES, ACTEMP, ACTRAV, regional directors (DWTs, regional offices, country offices))	High	Short- to medium-term	Low

- 52. Recommendation 4:** The ILO should revamp monitoring and reporting processes of its actions on promoting decent work in the rural economy. In addition to the programme and budget results framework, progress on the updated decent work in the rural economy strategy must be monitored and reviewed regularly, in accordance with its own complementary results framework to inform programming work.

Consolidated, reliable and up-to-date decent work in the rural economy monitoring data must also be available in a readily analysable format to generate lessons learned and identify emerging trends to inform programming decisions.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADG/JSP: EMPLOYMENT • ADG/GRD: SECTOR • ADG/CS: PROGRAM • EVAL 	High	Short-term	Low

53. Recommendation 5: The ILO should adopt transformative means of action.

For optimal use of limited resources at the country level, the ILO should strengthen support for policy development as a transformative means of action for promoting decent work in the rural economy, and advocate for the implementation of policies and strategies through capacity-building, social dialogue, advocacy and market systems development. Strategies to include rural workers in programme planning must be proactively adopted, such as focus on cooperative development.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ADG/JSP: EMPLOYMENT (through a participatory approach involving ENTERPRISES, SOCPRO, SECTOR, FUNDAMENTALS, DIALOGUE, LABADMIN/OSH, GEDI, INWORK, NORMES, PARTNERSHIPS, ACTEMP, ACTRAV, regional directors (DWTs, regional offices, country offices))	High	Ongoing	Low

54. Recommendation 6: The ILO should continue to extend and strengthen the scope of partnerships to promote decent work in the rural economy.

Developing and maintaining partnerships requires extensive advocacy and outreach efforts across the UN system and other strategic partners of choice, such as regional economic organizations and international financial institutions, to familiarize them with the ILO’s decent work in the rural economy mandate and achievement of results. The ILO should develop a partnership strategy addressing global, regional and country-level partnerships for decent work in the rural economy programming. The strategy should be supported by a time bound implementation.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADG/JSP: EMPLOYMENT • ADG/GRD: SECTOR • ADG/ECR: PARTNERSHIPS 	High	Medium-term	Low

Office response

55. On **Recommendation 1**, the Office will review and update the 2011 strategy. This update will be anchored in the ILO's normative and tripartite mandate, and be guided by high-level policy documents adopted by the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference. It will focus on leveraging the potential of rural areas to promote social justice, decent work and food security. It will consider the transformations in the world of work and their impact in rural areas, including: (a) ensuring a just transition towards environmentally sustainable rural economies; (b) harnessing the potential of technological progress; (c) achieving gender equality; and (d) the need to react to the impact of demographic shifts. The update will be underpinned by a theory of change based on constituents' needs and priorities, and country realities. The Office will strengthen the results framework and coordination across the administrative structure, considering the outputs and indicators of the programme and budget and the role of the outcome coordination teams and the priority action programmes. It will also develop a coordinated approach to resource mobilization.
56. On **Recommendation 2**, the ILO will expand efforts to support and build constituents' capacity. A strengthened output coordination team will leverage the expertise to implement the revised strategy and serve as a catalyst for upscaling interventions and expanding outreach. The Office will enhance technical capacity in field offices, including by tapping into the expertise of employment specialists, to improve the scaling-up and sustainability of interventions. An effective coordination team encompassing field and headquarters colleagues will improve inter-cluster coordination, including with ITC-ILO, ACTRAV and ACTEMP.
57. On **Recommendation 3**, the ILO will build on lessons learned from integrated country level interventions, with a focus on scaling-up and ensuring their sustainability. Emerging trends and transformative changes in the world of work – driven by technological innovations, demographic shifts, climate change and globalization – will underpin decent work in the rural economy interventions. In addition to scaling up interventions to promote gender equality, the ILO will strengthen its efforts to integrate persons with disabilities into its programming, so as to further a more inclusive decent work in the rural economy agenda.
58. The ILO will act upon **Recommendation 4** in the context of ongoing efforts to strengthen the Organization's monitoring and reporting systems. The output coordination team, in consultation with field specialists, will be responsible for monitoring implementation, at the country level and globally, reporting on progress and suggesting adjustments when needed.
59. On **Recommendation 5**, the Office will prioritize support for policy development, with a focus on integrating decent work in the rural economy principles and objectives into national development policies and frameworks. Policy areas of intervention will be determined by constituents' priorities and needs. Strategies to include rural workers in ILO programmes will be promoted, and the Office will build on lessons learned from current interventions.
60. On **Recommendation 6**, the Office will strengthen partnerships to advance policy coherence for decent work in the rural economy and in sustainable food systems. The ILO will leverage the new partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and CARE on decent work for equitable food systems, as well as with the FAO and other partners involved in the implementation of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, to achieve greater impact. The Office will continue to participate in advocacy and knowledge networks, such as the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development.

► Part III. Independent high-level evaluation of the ILO's post-conflict and recovery work in the Arab States region, with emphasis on Iraq and Yemen, 2019–23

Purpose and scope

61. The purpose of this evaluation is to inform strategic decision-making at an ILO governance level and contribute to future policies and programmes in crisis and post-conflict recovery settings, particularly in the Arab States. The evaluation examines the four key pillars of decent work – promoting jobs and enterprise, guaranteeing rights at work, extending social protection, and promoting social dialogue – while also situating the ILO within ongoing shifts towards a humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. The evaluation also considers practical and organizational challenges faced by the ILO in humanitarian crisis contexts.

Overall findings

62. The evaluation examined the ILO's work in broad terms in the Arab States and conducted a detailed analysis of the recovery efforts in Iraq and Yemen throughout the period 2019–23. It explores the accomplishments, difficulties and potential avenues for promoting the Decent Work Agenda in contexts marked by fragile socio-political conditions and prolonged crises. In post-conflict Arab States, the ILO's model of intervention is relevant to contexts moving from large-scale humanitarian emergencies into periods of sustainable development. While the evaluation found numerous examples of effective programming, those achievements came up against unwieldy operational procedures, resource constraints and institutional bottlenecks. Those factors have further implications for ensuring impact and sustainability.

Summary of key findings and conclusions by evaluation criteria

A. Relevance

Key finding 1: The ILO's model of intervention in the Arab States is relevant to post conflict recovery contexts. The Decent Work Agenda was appreciated by tripartite constituents as being pertinent for periods of transition between larger-scale crises and longer-term sustainable development.

Key finding 2: At the downstream level, the ILO's employment-driven response to conflict-induced displacement and economic collapse is relevant to humanitarian needs. The combination of livelihood opportunities and skills training, for refugees/internally displaced persons and host communities alike, is relevant to short-term needs and to tackling underlying conflict drivers in the Arab States.

Key finding 3: The ILO's programmes in the Arab States are relevant to key international and local development frameworks, including: (a) the Decent Work Agenda; (b) Sustainable Development Goals; (c) ILO programme and budgets; (d) the ILO Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205); and (e) country-specific policy frameworks and plans. Most projects make this alignment explicit in associated documents.

63. While there are significant differences in programming across country contexts, the ILO's model of intervention is broadly relevant to conflict drivers in the Arab States. For example, in Iraq, which has moved into a period of stability, the ILO aligned its programmes closely with government priorities and policy development. In Yemen, the programmes were aligned to downstream employment generation, given predominant humanitarian needs. Recent re-engagement in the Syrian Arab Republic, through occupational safety and health and child labour programmes, demonstrates the ILO's ability to align its normative mandate with context-specific "entry points" in challenging political contexts.

B. Coherence and design

Key finding 4: Post-conflict recovery work in the Arab States coheres with the ILO's peacebuilding objectives, where peace outcomes and impacts are implicitly advanced by the Decent Work Agenda and social justice.

Key finding 5: ILO programme design in the Arab States often lacks a coherent shared results framework for collecting data on cohesion indicators or indeed any other peacebuilding outcome. Various projects, however, have likely contributed to peace as they tackle key conflict drivers, from limited contact across social groups to few job opportunities and grievances related to inequality. Addressing such gaps will allow the ILO to situate itself in a better place within emergent Humanitarian, Development and Peacebuilding (HDP) Nexus strategies.

Key finding 6: At the design level, independent project evaluations reviewed note frequent gaps related to key outcomes concerning the strength of initial capacity assessments. This problem has been most pronounced in Yemen, where tripartite constituents questioned whether project design was coherent with the country capacity needs.

Key finding 7: The ILO Arab States programme design shows limited coherence with accountability frameworks. At the upstream level, there is strong interpersonal "relational accountability" with partners, but little systematic monitoring or tracking of issues faced during implementation. At the downstream level, the ILO would benefit from adopting "Accountability to Affected Populations" (AAP).

64. The ILO's intervention model in post-conflict recovery settings is generally coherent, but design often lacks explicit integration of peacebuilding. While the ILO is not a peacebuilding organization, recent Programme and Budgets encouraged a greater ILO focus on resilience and social cohesion towards social justice in recovery contexts. This is being directly addressed at the regional office level (Regional Office for Arab States). Accountability to Affected Populations can also be part of this effort, where creating forums allowing beneficiaries to provide feedback on projects and help shape future interventions will ensure more valid project design.

C. Effectiveness

Key finding 8: The ILO has effectively engaged in post-conflict recovery contexts by tackling unemployment, social protection and the erosion of labour standards. Even in challenging contexts, there are examples of successful policy engagement, capacity-building programmes and employment generation. Notable achievements include Iraq's ratification of the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), which was followed by the passing of a new social protection law, a sweeping reform of the social security system, and expansion of coverage and benefits to all Iraqi workers, including informal workers and the self-employed.

Key finding 9: While the ILO has in some cases effectively leveraged its normative mandate to engage other UN agencies in the Decent Work Agenda in some Arab States, more can be done. A plethora of agencies are enacting cash-for-work programming. By not always asserting itself in relevant humanitarian forums, the ILO is missing opportunities to complement and enhance those programmes in upholding principles and values of decent work.

Key finding 10: At the project level, the ILO has made acceptable progress in mainstreaming cross-cutting issues as they relate to gender and non-discrimination, but has made limited progress on environmental sustainability, which is often incorporated more as an ad hoc adaptation. Broader challenges relating to gender, non-discrimination and the environment in the Arab States are significant with, for example, the lowest rates of female labour participation in the world. The ILO does not have the resources needed to alter such trajectories. At the implementation level, there were many project-specific beneficiary complaints that could be addressed through stronger monitoring.

Key finding 11: Tripartism and social dialogue face challenges in post-conflict settings – namely, politicized splintering and the collapse of legal institutions. Effective tripartism is a fundamental assumption within the ILO intervention model itself, yet addressing splintering is rarely considered a priority for recovery efforts. Instead, discord and disagreement are sometimes sidestepped for the sake of project implementation.

65. The ILO has made achievements in addressing conflict drivers and recovery needs in the Arab States. Many of these are at the level of policy uptake, with notable examples on social protection reform in Iraq and Lebanon, the Labour Law in Jordan, and occupational safety and health and child labour reform in the Syrian Arab Republic. However, effectiveness in conflict areas is hindered by operational and logistical barriers. Nevertheless, there is good evidence that issues relating to gender and non-discrimination are being considered and acted upon, despite broader challenges. While environmental progress is limited, solar panel maintenance and repair training are core components of the ILO's work in Yemen. Other than internal procedures, the biggest challenge for the ILO model to ensure effectiveness is political fragmentation among tripartite constituents.

D. Efficiency

Key finding 12: The ILO's operational procedures, security protocols, bureaucratic mechanisms and contracting rules hamper project efficiency, impact and sustainability, particularly in high-risk settings where external expert deployment is restricted. As a result, most projects examined for the high-level evaluation experienced delays and higher costs, often due to internal institutional blockages and capacity bottlenecks at the regional level, and on the basis of ILO corporate procedures. These challenges may adversely affect relationships with tripartite constituents, routine monitoring and evaluation, and staff morale.

Key finding 13: While some projects in the Arab States demonstrated strategic use of resources, such as harnessing cost-sharing and making savings due to online shifts during the pandemic, there were instances where joint partnerships did not lead to planned efficiency savings. Greater and closer coordination with other agencies will further improve efficiency.

Key finding 14: When countries emerge from conflict, the ILO Regional Office for Arab States requires resources and institutional efficiency to increase swiftly the presence of international staff with relevant skills and experience. In Yemen, the current team relies on national colleagues without diplomatic immunities, operating in a challenging and fractured political environment. The limited relationship with de facto authorities in Sana'a hampers permissions, approvals and efficient resource allocation for implementation and monitoring purposes.

66. Every project considered within the scope of this high-level evaluation experienced delays made significantly worse by inefficient operational procedures, bureaucratic slowdowns and capacity bottlenecks. These efficiency issues are, in essence, dragging down other achievements. On the positive side, the ILO's tripartite constituents, specifically the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Iraq, felt that the close partnership approach helped ensure efficient and effective resource allocation. However, they also maintained that the slowness of ILO implementation meant that, for more short or medium-term projects, they were more likely to request the help of other agencies. In Yemen, tripartite members considered that the ILO was not efficient in bringing its programming into line with specific contexts. For example, there was frustration from the de facto authorities in Sana'a, which felt that the ILO was not dealing with them as a partner, whereas in Aden, ministerial representatives felt that the ILO was neglecting them when the time was ripe for further systematic upstream engagement.

E. Emerging impact

Key finding 15: The long-term impact of the ILO's model of intervention for post-conflict recovery is difficult to measure. Moving into development is complex and non-linear, where external factors can scupper gains. While some downstream projects have immediate impact, other projects unfold over an extended period, making it challenging to attribute any outcome solely to ILO interventions.

Key finding 16: There are strong examples of short and medium-term impact, particularly in policy adoption, legal reform, curriculum development and tripartite capacity-building. However, at this level, operational and contextual challenges have limited the collection of impact data or research, while in more conflict-prone settings, such as Yemen, there are several project-level examples where longer-term impact pathways were missed in project design and implementation.

Key finding 17: At the regional and global levels, an emerging body of reports and strategy documents positions the ILO as an agency with an "HDP Nexus" mandate. As yet, at the project level, there remains a lack of systematic understanding of, or reporting on, nexus impacts.

67. The evaluation team found that ILO programmes of work in the Arab States have adhered to core principles, but there is limited analysis on broader recovery impacts. The ILO model of intervention is, by its nature, long-term in scope, and its operations are difficult to assess at the macro impact level. As a result, independent evaluations during 2019–23 have also tended to highlight short and medium-term outcomes. As already mentioned, in Iraq there has been significant progress on policy adoption, but the evaluation team could not yet find evidence of impact at the beneficiary level, whereas in Yemen there is some short-term but weak long-term impact documentation.

F. Sustainability

Key finding 18: At the strategic level, the ILO intervenes in post-conflict settings by establishing institutional foundations for decent work, prioritizing system-building, capacity-strengthening and employment generation. This approach offers inherent sustainability advantages, as it focuses less on immediate humanitarian needs and more on long-term solutions. It counters short-termism within the humanitarian system, which has left many countries reliant on "life support". Additionally, the ILO's normative function aligns its programmes with legal reform. However, the bulk of the ILO's work examined for the high-level evaluation suffers from "projectization", with distinct (and quite short) timelines. This is not unique to the Arab States, but the ILO as a whole. While there are some attempts at "joining up" different projects, more could be done to ensure longer-term sustainability and synergies, which is, in theory, the purpose of a decent work country programmes.

Key finding 19: One of the main means for the ILO's model to be sustainable is the tripartite constituent approach. However, in post-conflict situations in the Arab States, there is often a de-prioritization of certain partners for the sake of smoothing implementation and avoiding areas of discord. While understandable contextually, it also potentially hinders sustainability.

Key finding 20: Learning in order to improve sustainability is also missed, due to operational and resource limitations which hinder regular monitoring. More regular outcome-based monitoring and follow-ups can help ensure that programmes remain relevant and responsive, and that sustainability issues can be addressed moving forward.

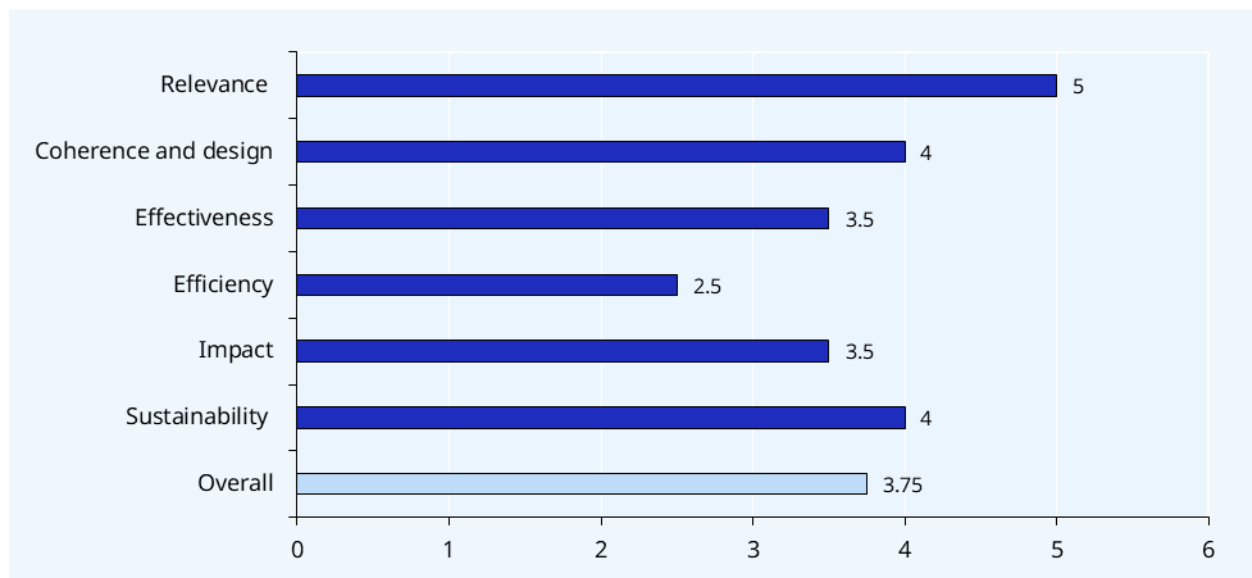
68. The ILO model of intervention has a number of features that make it sustainable. Indeed, despite multiple contextual challenges at the level of governance in the Arab States, there have been impressive achievements in policy formulation. However, many of these countries are also locked in protracted crises, where intermittent emergencies can risk undoing that progress. The ILO does not have the resources needed to mitigate against all of these risks or address every crisis driver. However, working to ensure greater coherence across various ILO interventions, working in partnership with other agencies, and improving monitoring will create more opportunities to ensure sustainability.

Conclusions and lessons learned

69. The Arab States are one of the most conflict-prone regions on Earth. In Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, direct fighting has become intermittent or reached a stalemate. Yet they remain caught in a spiral of protracted crises. Neighbouring countries – Lebanon and Jordan – face associated impacts on stability.
70. At the same time, the UN increasingly acknowledges that the humanitarian system is stretched to its limit, with funding running dry, and few coherent strategies on how to break the cycle and shift to durable solutions.
71. Lessons from Iraq underscore the vital role the ILO can play in assisting with this transition, moving from short-term needs into longer-term development. Despite various challenges, good progress has been made on social protection reform, labour rights advocacy and Convention adoption, as well as policy dialogue. Lessons from Yemen underscore the need for greater efficiency, agility in relation to operational constraints, and readiness to change programming in line with fluid conflict dynamics.
72. While the decent work pillars tackle key conflict drivers, more strategic thought is needed on how to deal with splintering and discord among tripartite constituents and their role in the HDP Nexus. Effective social dialogue between representatives of governments, employers and workers is a key process in achieving the Decent Work Agenda.
73. Recovery contexts are rarely safe and stable. If the ILO wishes to be a key player in these contexts, then it needs to learn lessons from countries such as Iraq, reform operational procedures and address bureaucratic bottlenecks, to ensure a more agile and streamlined response. Moreover, contexts such as Yemen have significantly higher costs and ILO allocations, and resource mobilization needs to reflect this.

Overall assessment

► **Figure 3. Overall assessment of the ILO’s post-conflict and recovery work in the Arab States region**



6 = Highly satisfactory, 5 = Satisfactory, 4 = Somewhat satisfactory, 3 = Somewhat unsatisfactory, 2 = Unsatisfactory, 1 = Highly unsatisfactory

Recommendations

74. Recommendation 1: Provided the ILO wants to engage effectively and efficiently in post conflict settings, it should reform operational, logistical and security procedures, in line with other UN agency standards.

While the ILO intervention model is relevant to post-conflict recovery contexts, for it to be more effective and efficient the Office needs to urgently address institutional bottlenecks and contextually inappropriate rules. Addressing these barriers will improve use of resources, monitoring and oversight.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DG • AP/CRISIS • ADG/CS: INTSERV and PROGRAM 	High	Short-term	Low

75. Recommendation 2: The ILO must ensure swifter engagement jointly with other UN agencies at the onset of a crisis.

This is **not** to launch programmes during the high points of violence or war, but so that the ILO can be included in subsequent coordinated humanitarian and HDP Nexus response mechanisms. Given the relevance of the ILO’s model for conflict recovery, greater participation in UN coordination forums will allow the ILO to position itself better as a key agency that can provide information on decent work standards.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ADG/ECR: PARTNERSHIPS Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS) 	High	Long-term	Low

76. Recommendation 3: Provided the ILO wants to engage in post-conflict country settings, it should match that commitment with a robust presence of international staff possessing relevant skills and experience.

The ILO should conduct a systematic review of its operations and policies in conflict contexts, intervening earlier in the recovery process with the appropriate staff presence, as shortcuts are risk-prone.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DG ADG/CS: PROGRAM and HRD ROAS 	Medium	Medium-term	High

77. Recommendation 4: Position the ILO further within the HDP Nexus; the ILO should develop distinct theories of change for post-conflict recovery contexts.

The ILO Regional Office for Arab States has made progress in reviewing programmes and commissioning research that explores the peacebuilding outcomes of its projects. This work should continue, while ensuring there is coherent internal and external understanding of what the ILO hopes to achieve beyond specific projects. Producing context-specific theories of change can help explain what the ILO hopes to contribute towards peace and recovery efforts.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AP/CRISIS ROAS 	Medium	Medium-term	Low

78. Recommendation 5: The ILO should develop a coherent strategy on how to work with tripartite constituents in fragmented political contexts.

A primary obstacle to the ILO model of intervention in early conflict recovery periods and conflict prevention is fragmentation and the collapse of various governance institutions. The ILO should work towards adapted strategies for ensuring effective tripartism in situations of post-conflict political fragmentation.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AP/CRISIS ROAS in consultation with ACTRAV and ACTEMP 	Medium	Medium-term	Low

79. Recommendation 6: The ILO should review project design and monitoring processes in post-conflict settings.

While carrying out routine monitoring is challenging in fragile recovery contexts, multiple project evaluations reviewed for this high-level evaluation noted gaps in data and missing indicators. To intervene in these contexts, the ILO should conduct a review to identify these issues and develop a plan to ensure they are not replicated going forward.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADG/CS: PROGRAM • ADG/ECR: PARTNERSHIPS • ROAS 	Low	Long-term	Low

80. Recommendation 7: The ILO should design and implement an accountability strategy in line with Accountability to Affected Population.

Improved accountability policies and monitoring will enhance lesson learning across programmes, helping the ILO to learn and adapt to post-conflict contexts. Indeed, various issues that emerged during project implementation could be tackled through feedback workshops with programme beneficiaries that can facilitate bottom-up learning.

Responsible units	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADG/ECR: PARTERSHIPS • ADG/CS: PROGRAM • ROAS • EVAL 	Medium	Long-term	Medium

Office response

81. On **Recommendation 1**, the Office agrees with this recommendation, which is closely related to relevant sections of the Programme and Budget for 2024–25.⁴ The Priority Action Programme on Decent Work in Crises and Post-Crisis Situations (AP/CRISIS) will coordinate follow-up action across the Office through its enabling functions, focusing on improvements identified in the report and in internal reviews previously undertaken.⁵ In relation to the Arab States Region, key steps taken include the creation of positions of an international regional human resource coordinator and an international security officer. The roll-out of the Integrated Resource Information System (IRIS) to the Occupational Palestinian Territory, Jordan and Iraq is improving administrative performance. The current modest scale of operations and limited extrabudgetary funding in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen make it challenging to reap economies of scale. Efforts are under way to ramp up programme development and resource mobilization, create a 12-month position of ILO Coordinator in Damascus, and secure the detachment of a senior adviser to the ILO programme in Yemen.

⁴ See Programme and Budget proposals for 2024–25, paras 211 and 212.

⁵ This includes the internal rapid assessment “Project Implementation at the Frontline”, December 2021.

82. On **Recommendation 2**, the Office agrees, noting that implementation will have resource implications to be considered, and this approach is in line with ILO engagement in the HDP Nexus and the recently adopted UN Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes. See Recommendation 3.
83. On **Recommendation 3**, such engagement in crisis contexts requires an experienced international staff member at the P4 or P5 level, able to work in difficult circumstances with UN partners to determine entry points for ILO programmatic engagement across the HDP Nexus. A dedicated staff deployment mechanism, including a global roster to allow such assignments, could be considered. The experience in the Arab States of out-posting DWT specialists for such assignments could be replicated.
84. On **Recommendation 4**, the Office agrees. In fact, such specific theories of change or possible intervention models do exist but could be revisited and grouped together in a better manner, also as a platform for engagement with UN partners and donors. AP/CRISIS is currently developing further guidance focusing on different policy areas, as a contribution to enhancing capacity to effectively address the HPD Nexus. The July 2023 report *ILO Arab States' Strategic Engagement in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Challenges and Opportunities* provides a good basis, and the experience from programmes such as the Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities (PROSPECTS) will also be harnessed.
85. On **Recommendation 5**, the Office agrees and seeks to engage constituents actively. Specific approaches will be needed for ministries, trade unions and employer organizations. The issue is possibly less one of fragmentation of constituents, and more the increased capacity development support needed to allow ILO constituents to play their role in post-conflict settings.
86. On **Recommendation 6**, the Office agrees. Though the AP/CRISIS work has already developed a set of design, monitoring and evaluation tools to work across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, this can be expanded with a menu of relevant indicators for field offices to draw on.
87. On **Recommendation 7**, the Office agrees. This point was also made in the recent Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network assessment of the ILO. A first step will be to develop adequate guidelines modelled, for instance, on those prepared by the FAO.

▶ Draft decision

88. **The Governing Body requested the Director-General to take into consideration the recommendations of the three independent high-level evaluations presented in document GB.349/PFA/5 (paragraphs 17-21, 49-54 and 74-80), and to ensure their appropriate implementation.**