Third item on the agenda

Matters arising out of the work of the 111th Session (2023) of the International Labour Conference

Plan of action for the implementation of the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208)

Purpose of the document

This document provides a brief overview of the rationale, objective and content of the new Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208), adopted by the International Labour Conference on 16 June 2023. It also establishes the priorities of a possible strategy for follow-up action by the Office for the period 2024–27 aimed at supporting constituents’ efforts to implement the Recommendation.

The Governing Body is invited to provide guidance on the proposed follow-up action and to request the Director-General, within existing resources, to take into account its guidance in pursuing the plan of action for the implementation of the Recommendation No. 208, (see the draft decision in paragraph 55).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Main relevant outcome: Outcome 3: Full and productive employment for just transitions.

Policy implications: The plan of action will guide the work of the Office concerning quality apprenticeships for the next two biennia as well as the wider related role of the Organization at the international level, including in relation to the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None.
**Follow-up action required:** Adjustment of the plan of action and its implementation and notification of Recommendation No. 208 by the Director-General.

**Author unit:** Skills and Employability Branch (SKILLS).

**Related documents:** Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208).
Introduction

1. At its 111th Session (2023), the International Labour Conference adopted the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208), based on a strong tripartite consensus and following a two-year process of consultations.

2. This new Recommendation is of strategic significance to social justice, as it contributes to the realization of the right of all human beings to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, economic security and equal opportunity through the promotion of quality apprenticeships that provide skills development opportunities for all, with a strong emphasis on equality, diversity, social inclusion and improved protection of apprentices.

3. Apprenticeships are of particular importance for the future of work, as the development and promotion of quality apprenticeships can provide opportunities for people of all ages, particularly youth, to skill, reskill and upskill continuously in the context of rapid transformations, including those resulting from the challenges of climate change, globalization, demographic shifts and technology. Apprenticeships can lead to decent work and enhance productivity, resilience, employability, the transition to the formal economy, entrepreneurship and the growth and sustainability of enterprises.

4. This document presents the main features of the Recommendation and proposes a plan for its implementation by the Office. Action will be taken through global, regional and country-level interventions, based on the Governing Body’s discussion of and decision on this plan of action. The envisaged time frame for the plan of action is four years (2024–27). It will therefore be relevant for the Programme and Budget for 2024–25 and for future programme and budget discussions (2026–27).

5. The plan of action is fully integrated in the ILO strategy on skills and lifelong learning for 2022–30, in particular with respect to Pillar 5: Quality apprenticeships and work-based learning promoted for employability, productivity and sustainable enterprises. In preparing this plan of action, previous Governing Body decisions on relevant issues have also been taken into account, notably the follow-up plan of action on youth employment for the period 2020–30, the ILO Development Cooperation Strategy 2020–25, the ILO-wide strategy for institutional capacity development and the International Labour Conference resolution concerning a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.

6. The plan of action will leverage the existing ILO Skills Innovation Facility, which implements three interlinked initiatives, namely Skills Innovation Challenge Calls, Skills Innovation Labs and the Skills Innovation Network, to develop innovative tools and approaches to promote apprenticeships.

7. The plan of action will be implemented in close partnership with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and will seek to capitalize on the opportunities it presents, including through collaboration on apprenticeships with UN country teams at the country level and various UN agencies at the global and regional levels and the inclusion of apprenticeships in various high-level global events.

8. Recommendation No. 208 provides guidance on different aspects of apprenticeships to Members, which may, in consultation with representative employers’ and workers’ organizations, give effect to its provisions through national laws and regulations, collective agreements, policies and programmes or other measures, for all enterprises and all sectors of economic activity.

9. The Recommendation provides definitions of the terms “apprenticeship”, “intermediary”, “pre-apprenticeship programme” and “recognition of prior learning”.

10. The Recommendation calls for the incorporation and promotion of quality apprenticeships within the relevant national education, vocational training, lifelong learning and employment policies. It also prescribes the establishment of a comprehensive regulatory framework for such apprenticeships.

11. The Recommendation specifies that representative employers’ and workers’ organizations should be involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of frameworks, systems, policies and programmes for quality apprenticeships and that they should be represented in public authorities responsible for regulating apprenticeships.

12. The Recommendation calls on Members to establish occupation-specific or general standards for quality apprenticeships by taking measures that provide, among other things, for the minimum age for admission, occupational safety and health, the supervision of apprentices by qualified personnel, the appropriate balance between apprentices and workers in the workplace, the expected minimum and maximum duration of the apprenticeship, the appropriate balance between off-the-job learning and on-the-job learning, the procedures for assessing and certifying the competencies acquired, and the qualification acquired.

13. In addition, the Recommendation suggests that Members should prescribe the conditions under which enterprises may offer apprenticeships, educational and training institutions may provide off-the-job and on-the-job training and intermediaries may coordinate, support or assist in the provision of apprenticeships.

14. The Recommendation lays down the measures necessary to ensure the adequate protection of apprentices. It calls on Members to take measures to respect, promote and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work in relation to apprenticeships. In addition, it addresses the working conditions of apprentices by calling on Members to take measures to ensure that apprentices receive adequate remuneration or other financial compensation, are not required to work hours that exceed limits specified by national legislation and collective agreements, are entitled to holidays with adequate remuneration or other financial compensation, have access to paid maternity or paternity leave and parental leave and to social security and maternity protection, are afforded freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining and, lastly, are entitled to protection of personal data.

15. The Recommendation states that apprenticeships should be governed by a written agreement and further details the elements that should be covered by such an agreement. It also provides for the development of a model agreement to facilitate consistency, uniformity and compliance.

16. The Recommendation invites Members to take measures to promote equality, diversity and social inclusion in apprenticeships, taking special account of the situation and needs of persons
belonging to groups in situations of vulnerability. This includes promoting gender equality and balance in all aspects of apprenticeships, promoting apprenticeships for adults seeking to change industry or occupation and promoting access to quality apprenticeships as a means to facilitate the transition from the informal to the formal economy. It also calls on Members to take measures to prevent and eliminate any discrimination, violence, harassment and exploitation against apprentices.

17. The Recommendation also specifies measures to be taken by Members, in consultation with representative employers' and workers' organizations, to create an enabling environment for promoting quality apprenticeships. These include establishing sectoral or occupational skills bodies, implementing effective and sustainable financing models, providing incentives and support services, and increasing awareness of apprentices' rights, entitlements and protections. It also calls for the promotion of a culture of lifelong learning, skilling, reskilling and upskilling and the adoption of measures to facilitate the transition from the informal to the formal economy and from insecure to secure work.

18. Lastly, the Recommendation calls on Members to take measures to enhance international, regional and national cooperation for quality apprenticeships and to exchange information on good practices, to cooperate to offer expanded learning opportunities to apprentices and to recognize competencies acquired by apprentices, to build effective partnerships to promote quality apprenticeship programmes and to promote the recognition of apprenticeship qualifications nationally, regionally and internationally.

Proposed plan of action for the implementation of the Recommendation

19. As an integral part of the ILO strategy on skills and lifelong learning for 2022–30, the proposed plan of action for the implementation of Recommendation No. 208 aims to support constituents' action in the development and implementation of quality apprenticeship systems and programmes for the period 2024–27. The plan of action is articulated around four interrelated components, namely: (1) Awareness-raising and advocacy; (2) Policy advice, development cooperation and capacity development; (3) Knowledge development and dissemination; and (4) International cooperation and partnerships.

20. Building on the ongoing work on apprenticeships, the plan of action proposes deepening and realigning current activities in coherence with Recommendation No. 208, as well as initiating work or prioritizing and scaling up activities regarding new aspects introduced by the Recommendation.

21. In order to implement the proposed plan of action and meet the growing demand for work by the ILO in the area of apprenticeships, additional efforts will be made to maximize the use of existing resources and to mobilize extrabudgetary funding particularly for the expansion of technical support, capacity-building and knowledge development and dissemination.

Awareness-raising and advocacy

22. As Recommendation No. 208 includes guidance on a number of new areas, as well as measures to promote apprenticeships, a comprehensive awareness-raising and advocacy campaign will be developed to promote a common understanding of how the guidance contained in the
Recommendation can be acted upon in various contexts, at the global, regional, country and sectoral levels.

23. The Office will develop wide-ranging communication products, tools and advocacy materials for distinct audiences in different languages and formats, including social media. A communication package will be developed and made available to ILO field and headquarters staff to support local promotional efforts.

24. The Recommendation will be promoted through the Decent Work Country Programmes, country programme outcomes, regional outcomes and global products as part of the programme and budget framework. The Recommendation will also be promoted through relevant ILO conferences, workshops and training activities in close collaboration with the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITC–ILO), the ILO’s Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training (ILO–CINTERFOR) and its partner technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions network in the Latin America and Caribbean region, and other international, regional and national training institutions and networks working on skills development and apprenticeships, such as the Office for Africa of the International Institute for Educational Planning of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Senegal, UNESCO’s International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (UNESCO–UNEVOC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, among others.

25. Policy advocacy on apprenticeships will be prioritized by ILO field and headquarters specialists as part of support to countries through the country programme outcomes. Specific policy advocacy activities and events will be organized at the country level to mainstream quality apprenticeships in national development strategies, particularly in education, vocational training, lifelong learning and youth employment policies, and to promote the implementation of the Recommendation.

26. Awareness-raising relating to the Recommendation will be carried out in close collaboration with employers’ and workers’ organizations and their networks at the national, regional and global levels.

27. Dissemination of information relating to the Recommendation will also be carried out through ILO participation in relevant international forums and events, such as WorldSkills Competitions, European Vocational Skills Week and World Youth Skills Day, among others. As part of its information dissemination efforts, the Office will collaborate with such global and regional networks and institutions as the Global Apprenticeship Network (GAN), the European Apprentices Network, the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth network, the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, the Generation Unlimited (GenU) initiative led by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the African Union and the European Union, and with the networks of such partner agencies as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, UNICEF, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the World Bank, among others.

28. Specific awareness-raising plans and communication materials will be developed to enhance the attractiveness of quality apprenticeships by highlighting the benefits of apprenticeships to workers, young people, families, teachers, career counsellors, employers’ and workers’ organizations and employers, particularly micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.
29. Awareness campaigns will be implemented through development cooperation programmes and projects in order to promote gender equality and balance in apprenticeships in all sectors of the economy. Awareness-raising activities will also address the issues touching upon apprenticeships in the informal economy and the promotion of the transition to the formal economy.

30. Knowledge-sharing platforms such as the ILO Skills and Lifelong Learning Knowledge Sharing Platform and YouthForesight, hosted by the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth and GenU, will be regularly updated in order to reflect progress in the implementation of the Recommendation and to provide access to all relevant resources including tools, publications and communication products.

Policy advice, development cooperation and capacity development

31. Within the framework of the programme and budget and extrabudgetary development cooperation resources, the Office will provide governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations and educational and training institutions with technical assistance in designing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and promoting quality apprenticeship systems and programmes, drawing on the guidance contained in the Recommendation.

32. The Office will offer policy advice in order to facilitate national tripartite dialogues aimed at reviewing countries' regulatory and policy frameworks on apprenticeships, including on the protection of apprentices. Specific guidance on how to facilitate such dialogues will be designed.

33. The actions taken under policy advice will closely align with the ILO strategy on skills and lifelong learning for 2022–30 with a view to promoting the employability of apprentices and the productivity and sustainability of enterprises, by ensuring the quality of apprenticeship programmes and their attractiveness to apprentices and enterprises.

34. The actions taken under development cooperation will closely align with the ILO Development Cooperation Strategy 2020–25 with a view to enhancing the Office's services to constituents and its efficiency, decent work results and transparency. The Office will strengthen and expand partnerships for policy coherence and funding, while promoting the normative and tripartite added value of the ILO for advancing its social justice and decent work objectives.

35. Taking advantage of the momentum created by the Recommendation, the Office will build on ongoing initiatives and expand new development cooperation programmes and projects to assist Members in developing and strengthening quality apprenticeship programmes, which are linked to the Decent Work Country Programmes, in collaboration with the UN country teams. Special efforts will be made to develop joint projects in partnership with a wide range of partners including the ADB, AfDB, IADB, EBRD, IOM, ITU, OECD, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIDO, the World Bank and other international and national implementing partners of development partners.

36. The Office will support the capacity development of governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations, educational and training institutions and host enterprises, including micro, small and medium-sized economic units, on apprenticeships, in collaboration with the ITC–ILO, ILO–CINTERFOR, UNESCO–UNEVOC and other relevant partners, with a view to promoting the implementation of the Recommendation. This will include building on existing manuals and dedicated training courses, such as e-learning courses on quality apprenticeships, and upgrading informal apprenticeships. The Office will also promote South–South and triangular cooperation to collaborate on and share knowledge, skills, know-how and good practices in
the field of apprenticeships through events such as the Global Knowledge-sharing Event on Apprenticeships.

37. The actions taken under capacity development will closely align with the ILO-wide strategy for institutional capacity development with particular attention being given to coordinated actions at the interdependent levels of individual, organizational and resulting from the enabling environment, based on constituents’ evolving needs in the area of apprenticeships. These actions will enhance the ability of constituents to engage in advocacy on apprenticeships, based on the guidance contained in the Recommendation.

38. The Office will identify and partner with national and regional public training institutions, such as the African Union Development Agency, the National Skill Development Corporation in India, the European Training Foundation in Italy and the National Industrial Learning Service in Brazil, in order to support the capacity of these institutions to act as resource centres on apprenticeships, to enhance the capacity of government agencies involved in apprenticeship programme development, regulatory framework, monitoring and evaluation and to promote gender equality and achieve gender balance.

39. Specific capacity-development plans will be developed and implemented through ongoing and new development cooperation programmes and projects for employers’ and workers’ organizations, on the subject of the Recommendation and a wide range of apprenticeship topics, with a view to increasing their capacity on apprenticeships. Specific attention will be paid to developing resource persons from employers’ and workers’ organizations on apprenticeships, as this will have a multiplier effect through their organizations, reaching more employers and workers and enabling them to participate in policy dialogues, events, programme implementation and monitoring of apprenticeship programmes at the local, regional and national levels.

40. The policy advice, development cooperation and capacity development services of the Office will be continuously enhanced in order to keep abreast of the latest developments, technologies and innovation and to remain fit for purpose. These activities will also pay particular attention to increasing the capacity of tripartite partners to promote apprenticeships in priority economic sectors of the respective countries, including agriculture and the rural economy and the green, care and digital economies.

41. The ILO tools and methodologies on apprenticeships that already exist in a number of thematic areas covered by the Recommendation will be reviewed and updated in order to align with the Recommendation. These include:

(a) an evaluation tool to assess a country’s apprenticeship system; ²
(b) toolkits on apprenticeships for policymakers and practitioners; ³
(c) a guide on upgrading informal apprenticeships; ⁴ and
(d) Massive Open Online Courses developed with the ITC-ILO. ⁵

The updated tools and methodologies will be translated into various languages and made available to tripartite partners, partner institutions and agencies.

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42. An annotated guide to the Recommendation providing technical and legal guidance on all its aspects will also be developed in order to facilitate its implementation. In addition, a standard presentation and briefing note will be produced to support governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations and ILO staff in providing policy advice, development cooperation and capacity development, based on the Recommendation.

43. Lastly, the Office will develop a template for a model apprenticeship agreement based on the Recommendation with a view to facilitating consistency, uniformity and compliance.

Knowledge development and dissemination

44. The availability, quality and comparability of data on apprenticeships is a challenge owing to the different methods, concepts and definitions used across countries. To address these challenges, a conceptual framework for defining and measuring apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning will be developed, building on recent initiatives and based on the guidance provided by Recommendation No. 208, to be presented at the 21st International Conference of Labour Statisticians, to be held in October 2023. Using this conceptual framework, statistical tools for collecting relevant data through labour force surveys and other household-based surveys will be developed, tested and implemented as part of the country programme outcomes under the programme and budget.

45. Developing practical knowledge about what works in different contexts is central to supporting the successful implementation of quality apprenticeships. In order to support ongoing and new country-level actions towards improved apprenticeship programmes and systems, the Office will design and implement country-level, sectoral and regional-level research to generate evidence on the effectiveness of apprenticeships, as well as on new trends and the role of apprenticeships in the green and digital transitions and the transition from the informal to the formal economy. Research and good practice collection and dissemination will also be carried out regarding how apprenticeships can be promoted for adults as part of lifelong learning approaches.

46. In addition, and upon request, the Office will support the implementation of impact evaluation to generate knowledge of the causal effects of apprenticeship policies and programmes and thereby assess their effectiveness in such areas as apprentices’ work transitions and enterprise productivity. Meta-analyses of training programmes including apprenticeships, as well as analyses based on currently available data on apprenticeships, will also be included in the World Employment and Social Outlook thematic report on skills and lifelong learning scheduled for 2025.

International cooperation and partnerships

47. Partnerships are key for leveraging expertise and knowledge, widening outreach and advancing ILO values and labour standards. The Office will create and strengthen effective partnerships with the UN and other multilateral and bilateral agencies and international financial institutions to promote the application of Recommendation No. 208 and hence reinforce the technical and financial support Members can call upon in order to give effect to it.

48. In particular, the Office will collaborate with existing and new national and international networks already focusing on apprenticeships, including GAN, the European Apprentices Network, UNESCO–UNEVOC networks, ILO–CINTERFOR and its TVET institutions network in the Latin America and Caribbean region and other networks, in order to promote the
Recommendation and mainstream it within their own activities, generate and share knowledge, facilitate cooperation and collaboration and support the inclusion of the Recommendation's principles and provisions in their programmes. In addition, partnerships with bilateral and multilateral agencies and international organizations, including the ADB, AfDB, EBRD, IADB, IOM, ITU, OECD, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIDO and the World Bank, will be further strengthened with a view to promoting the implementation of the Recommendation through international cooperation.

49. The Office will also actively engage with other relevant networks that the ILO co-facilitates in order to further promote the Recommendation. These may include, for example, the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth in relation to the rights and entitlements of apprentices; the Climate Action for Jobs initiative in relation to the role of apprenticeships in climate change adaptation and mitigation; Alliance 8.7 in relation to apprentices at risk of being involved in forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour; the ILO Global Business and Disability Network in relation to disability inclusion in apprenticeships; the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions in relation to mainstreaming apprenticeships as part of its interventions; and the Equal Pay International Coalition in relation to equal pay in apprenticeships.

50. Upon request, the Office will actively support partnerships for the recognition of apprenticeship qualifications nationally, regionally and globally.

51. Building on the momentum created by the adoption of the Recommendation at the International Labour Conference in 2023, resource mobilization will be prioritized in collaboration with regional offices and headquarters departments. Efforts will be made to expand the traditional development cooperation partner base to include new partners, including international financial institutions such as the AfDB, ADB, EBRD, IADB and the World Bank, as part of South–South and triangular cooperation.

Institutional framework for implementation

52. The Skills and Employability Branch of the Employment Policy Department will lead the implementation of the proposed plan of action. A coherent interdisciplinary approach will be followed in close collaboration with technical departments at headquarters, the Bureau for Workers’ Activities and the Bureau for Employers’ Activities, regional offices, decent work teams (DWTs), country offices and action programmes, the ITC–ILO and ILO–CINTERFOR. This Office-wide coordination will cover all four action areas outlined above at the global, regional and country levels.

53. The Skills and Employability Branch will work with policy departments at headquarters to develop technical guidance, tools and materials by co-creating them with the relevant technical and policy departments, taking advantage of their domain knowledge, expertise and experience of implementing other international labour standards, programmes and projects.

54. DWT specialists and the UN country teams will be closely involved in developing the research, new knowledge and materials required for the implementation of the Recommendation, promoting the active involvement of field and headquarters therein. Interregional knowledge-sharing events and meetings on the implementation of the plan of action will be held regularly with a view to sharing good practices and lessons learned between the regions and providing insights for the subsequent stages of the plan of action.
55. The Governing Body requested the Director-General to:

(a) take into account its guidance in pursuing the plan of action for the implementation of the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208), and to draw on it when preparing future programme and budget proposals and in developing resource mobilization initiatives; and

(b) communicate the Recommendation in the standard manner to the governments of Member States and, through them, to national employers’ and workers’ organizations and, also, to partner agencies in the multilateral system.