



Quick Facts

► Independent high-level evaluation of ILO's Development Cooperation Strategy, 2020-25 (evaluation period 2018-24)

► October 2024



► Description and purpose of the evaluation

This independent high-level evaluation (HLE) assesses the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and emerging impact of the ILO's Development Cooperation Strategy for 2020-25, covering the evaluation period from 2018 to 2024. This evaluation builds on previous reviews, including the 2015 HLE of the ILO's technical cooperation strategy (2010-15) and the 2021 Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessment.

The HLE identifies good practices, lessons learned and provides recommendations to guide the future of ILO's development cooperation work and strategy. The Governing Body, being the evaluation's main client, is responsible for governance-level decisions on its findings and recommendations. Other key stakeholders include the Director-General and members of the Global Management Team, the Evaluation Advisory Committee, staff, along with regional and country offices. The evaluation should also inform the ILO's funding partners and other interested policy-makers.

► Methodology

The evaluation followed [EVAL's high-level evaluation protocol for strategy and policy evaluations](#) and used a mixed-methods approach, including:



Comprehensive document review



Survey administered to 3000 ILO constituents and staff



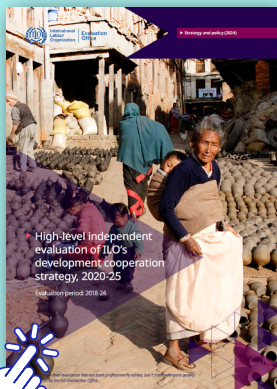
266 interviews with ILO staff, constituents, funding partners, and implementing agencies



Data analysis of project data, funding trends and staffing allocation



Case studies: Deep dives into Bangladesh, Kenya, Uganda and Uzbekistan, as well as thematic studies on Better Work, PROSPECTS and the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions provided in-depth insights into DC implementation.



KEY FINDINGS

1 The strategy lacks a clear vision for improvement and does not effectively outline desired impacts beyond the completion of activities. Its purpose and measures of success are unclear and it lacks a theory of change.

2 The Development Cooperation strategy broadly follows directions set by key International Labour Conference documents and other ILO plans, but the level of coherence is inconsistent. Its efforts to better align development cooperation with constituent needs and to specific programme and budget outcomes lack detail and measures of success.

3 The mechanism to drive and implement the strategy was ineffective. Monitoring and reporting stalled after the 2023 mid-term review.

4 Tools and guidelines were introduced to foster national ownership of Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) and support South-South and triangular cooperation. Development cooperation often aligns with national priorities, but challenges persist. Gaps remain in using development cooperation to promote social dialogue and tripartism, and to address the organizational needs of constituents.

5 The ILO maintained its trajectory in promoting decent work through better policy coordination, but evidence of added value from the strategy's actions is unclear. The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions has established its management structure, and volunteer pathfinder countries are formulating road maps. The Global Coalition for Social Justice shows promise for improved coherence but is still in its early stages.

6 There is little evidence that the strategy significantly contributed to the recent increase in development cooperation funding, much of which relates to geopolitical events. Funding partners emphasized the need for the ILO to promote its unique blend of normative mandate, technical expertise and country-level activities more strongly for sustainable results.

7 The ILO delivered most of the planned tools, guidelines, training initiatives and communication products. It improved transparency in development cooperation work and took steps to enhance social and environmental safeguards. However, progress was less evident in introducing systems for continuous improvement in the way the ILO delivers and supports development cooperation.

8 The strategy paid little attention to the overall efficiency of the ILO's delivery of development cooperation projects, despite ongoing concerns about this issue. Various internal and external reviews have highlighted problems with the speed and complexity of systems and procedures, and these concerns were further highlighted by the high-level evaluation.



KEY LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned for the new strategy to consider include the following:

Need for a more focused and ambitious strategy. The existing strategy covers many strategic issues, but largely focuses on tweaking what is already in place, rather than seeking to be more transformative and addressing entrenched systemic weaknesses. Stakeholders expressed a need for innovation, rather than a slightly upgraded version of more of the same.

Need for a strategy that provides clarity on the centrality of development cooperation. Many people consulted stressed how vital development cooperation was for reinforcing the realization of the ILO's core role. Others, however, noted that some people in the ILO saw development cooperation as secondary to this role or even a distraction. The centrality of the ILO's approach to development cooperation – built on tripartism, social dialogue and normative action – needs to be unapologetically reinforced as a primary mechanism for the ILO to achieve its goals and to meet constituent needs. Direction from senior management is needed to encourage two-way accountability between administrative and development cooperation delivery units.

Need for a strategy that emphasizes the importance of balanced growth, diversification and focus in development cooperation work – doing fewer things better. Funding partners seek clarity on the ILO's priorities, but it struggles to articulate these beyond the programme and budget, which covers the full gamut of the ILO's work. Saying that “everything we do is a priority” lets the ILO cast its net very widely when seeking development cooperation funding, but it leads to resource

mobilization gravitating more towards meeting the strategic priorities of funding partners. It is necessary to be more intentional in setting development cooperation priorities so that the ILO can, as the 2018 International Labour Conference resolution on development cooperation urges, “promote all the pillars of decent work in a balanced manner” and “take a longer-term, programmatic and focused approach”.

Need for a strategy that enhances national ownership and constituent empowerment. While the high-level evaluation found some improvement in constituent involvement in development cooperation, mechanisms to consolidate this trend are needed, including a more robust and transparent framework to ensure constituent satisfaction.

Need for a strategy that strives towards continuous improvement of ILO systems and approach for developing, delivering, monitoring and supporting development cooperation projects. There is no one part of the ILO that has a span of control that covers all the critical functions necessary for the effective and efficient delivery of development cooperation. The mechanism used by the current strategy left no one ultimately accountable. A new approach is needed, either through a dedicated development cooperation monitoring function or through a system driven by senior management mechanisms that can achieve change (as was demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic).



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The ILO should:

Initiate consultations on the need for and form and scope of a new ILO development cooperation strategy 2026–29, aiming for possible submission to the Governing Body by late 2025 via a transparent process involving constituents, senior management, policy specialists, development cooperation project practitioners, oversight functions, and administrative and financial management specialists.

The ILO should develop a new policy and mechanism for monitoring development cooperation that promotes accountability, compares planned outcomes with results, allows flexibility to respond to changing needs, and makes visible not just what has been spent, but what projects have done and what they have achieved.

The ILO should either as part of the new development cooperation strategy or under the plans of the relevant Corporate Services cluster at headquarters and in regional offices, identify and implement specific and measurable steps to improve the efficiency of support provided to development cooperation practitioners working in the field.

The ILO should strengthen communication strategies tailored and adapted for different audiences covering the unique contributions of the ILO to decent work and the humanitarian–development nexus, emphasizing the significant value added by its normative foundation, high-quality technical research and tripartite approach.

QUOTES

► Voices from constituents

“It is important that constituents are consulted on ILO projects and programmes in country. It is also recommended that timelines of projects are kept within minimal to ensure effective measures are in place.”

“It is important that copies of the ILO Development Cooperation Strategy is shared to constituents for their reference.”

► Voices from ILO staff

“DC allows ILO to showcase its mandate through practical and visible action. DC is imperative in advancing ILO's mandate”.

“ILOs strategic objectives as defined in the P&B cannot be met without significant XBTC funding.”

