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A young man with dark hair, wearing a tan military-style jacket and a black helmet with a clear visor, is smiling at the camera. He is holding the sides of his helmet with both hands. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with greenery and a blue sky. A large, stylized geometric pattern of overlapping triangles in shades of purple and blue is overlaid on the right side of the image.

► Independent high-level evaluation
of the ILO's strategies and actions
under the ILO strategy on skills and
lifelong learning, 2022 – 26

August 2026

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ACRONYMS

ACCEL	Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour
ACJEMP	Accompagnement et Coaching des Jeunes et renforcement de leur Employabilité
ADB	African Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIM	Building Information Modelling
BIM	Building Information Modelling
BNQF	Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework
BRMM	Better Regional Migration Management project
BRMM	ILO's Better Regional Migration Management programme
CAF	Banco de Desarrollo de América Latina y el Caribe
C-BED	Community-Based Enterprise Development
CBT&A	Competency-Based Training and Assessment
CCE	Club de Recherche d'Emploi
CONACOM	Comisión Nacional de Competencias-Panamá
CPOs	Country programme outcomes
DC	Development cooperation
ELMIS	Employment and Labour Market Information System
EU	European Union
EV	Electric Vehicle
EVAL	ILO Evaluation Office
GB	Governing Body
GERME	Gérez Mieux Votre Entreprise
GSP	Global Skills Programme
HLE	High-level evaluation
HLE	High-level evaluation
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILO-CINTERFOR	Centro Interamericano para el Desarrollo del Conocimiento en la Formación Profesional
ILS	international labour standards
INADEH	Instituto Nacional de Formación Profesional y Capacitación para el Desarrollo Humano-Panamá
InSIGHT-2	Integrated Systems for Better Employment Outcomes project-Philippines
ITC-ILO	International Training Centre of the ILO
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
KAB	Know About Your Business

KNQF	Kenya National Qualifications Framework
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finances-Panama
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
P&B	Programme and Budget
PPDP	Public-Private Development Partnership Project-Kenya
PROSPECTS	Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities
RBSA	Regular Budget Supplementary Account
RBTC	Regular Budget Technical Cooperation
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SCORE	Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SECO	Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SPEED	Skills for Productivity, Environment and Economic Diversification
STED	Skills for Trade and Economic Diversification
TESDA	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority-Philippines
TOC	Theory of Change
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
WBL	Work-Based Learning
XBDC	Extra-budgetary development cooperation resources



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01

► Executive summary

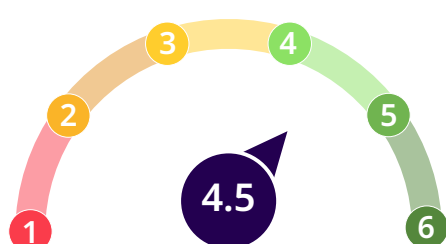
► EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This High-Level Evaluation (HLE) provides an independent assessment of the ILO's implementation of the [Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030](#) and its associated [action plan](#) over the 2022–2026 period. It assesses the ILO's contribution to strengthening national skills and lifelong learning systems and presents recommendations to inform implementation of the Strategy through 2030. The evaluation covers the broader portfolio of ILO skills-related interventions, including the Global Skills Programme (GSP).

The high-level evaluation presents expert-level analysis grounded in data derived from: a review of ILO documentation; six country case studies; interviews and surveys with ILO staff, constituents, donors, United Nations (UN) and other partners;¹ and a synthesis review of 95 relevant evaluation reports.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT²



The ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning (2030) remains highly relevant and provides a credible framework to position skills and lifelong learning as drivers of decent work, productive employment, social inclusion and just transitions. The evaluation finds that the principal challenge lies not in the Strategy's relevance, but in translating its strategic ambition into sustainable implementation, institutionalization and scale.

Consistent with its comparative advantage in policy reform and system-level support, the ILO's strongest contributions have been in strengthening governance, evidence-informed skills policies, institutional capacity, qualifications systems, recognition of prior learning (RPL), quality apprenticeships, and social dialogue. The ILO has also strengthened labour market and skills-needs intelligence to inform TVET reform, occupational standards and sectoral planning, reflecting its normative mandate, technical expertise and convening role. Progress has been more limited in supporting operational implementation and the institutionalization of reforms in national systems. Maintaining this comparative advantage will require strategic partnerships and stronger evidence of the ILO's contribution.

Across the Strategy's five pillars, performance remained uneven, with comparatively less progress in the institutionalization and routine use of labour market and skills-needs intelligence, sustainable financing and capacity to implement and scale reforms. In an increasingly constrained financing environment, implementation of the Strategy should complement support for policy and governance reform with greater attention to operational implementation, institutional capacity of skills system actors and sustainable financing. Prioritization of resource allocation may be needed towards interventions with the greatest potential to strengthen national systems, while further reinforcing ILO's enabling and partnership role. The sustainability of results will ultimately depend on sustained national ownership, domestic financing and implementation capacity.

¹ Case studies included: Colombia, Panama, Kenya, Ethiopia, Republic of Moldova and Bangladesh. A total of 237 informants were interviewed (60 per cent men; 40 per cent women), while 15 per cent of staff, 15 per cent of constituents and 35 per cent of partners completed the survey.

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

KEY FINDINGS BY EVALUATION CRITERIA

Relevance

KEY FINDING 1:

The ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning is well aligned with national priorities and positioned to support nationally owned reforms. Its greatest relevance lies in system-level support—particularly governance, institutional development and policy reform—reflecting its comparative advantage in policy dialogue, institutional strengthening and support to national training providers. International labour standards (ILS), including the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208), are well reflected in policy frameworks, although their implementation and institutionalization have progressed at different rates.



KEY FINDING 2:

Tripartite engagement differs across constituent groups. While TVET and lifelong learning remain largely government-led, employers' organizations contribute to identifying skills priorities, whereas workers' organizations, despite formal governance roles, have exercised more limited influence. Constituent participation has been predominantly consultative rather than strategic and operational, reflecting capacity, resource and enabling-environment constraints. These findings point to opportunities for more targeted support to engage in skills governance, particularly for workers' organizations.

KEY FINDING 3:

The ILO has generated valuable work on skills anticipation, skills for green jobs, greening of TVET systems, digitalization and emerging artificial intelligence (AI)-related skills issues, including labour market diagnostics, sector-based methodologies and global tools. However, the institutionalization, scaling and systematic application of these approaches across the wider portfolio remain uneven.

The ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning remains closely aligned with country-owned agendas, with strongest relevance in supporting governance and developing skills and lifelong learning systems. Its demand-driven approach enables the Office to respond to evolving constituents' needs while reinforcing its comparative advantage in system-level support.

While responsive to priorities, there is scope to more systematically apply ILO's expertise on skills anticipation, green and just transitions, digitalization and emerging AI-related issues into forward-looking country support. Stakeholders identified growing demand for support on lifelong learning systems, workforce transitions and evolving labour market needs. The evaluation also found that implementation remained concentrated on initial skills development and TVET reform, with comparatively less emphasis on upskilling and reskilling throughout working life.

Coherence

KEY FINDING 4:

The Strategy provides a common framework for action on skills and lifelong learning, but its potential to drive coherent implementation across ILO's policy portfolios and regions is not yet fully realized. Coordination is strongest where supported by headquarters (HQ) guidance, common methodologies, regional technical expertise and structured programme mechanisms such as the GSP. Outside these arrangements, collaboration across HQ portfolios and systematic cross-country learning are less consistent, limiting knowledge sharing and synergies.



KEY FINDING 5:

The GSP has strengthened internal coherence by operationalizing the Strategy through pooled funding, country coordination and peer learning. While retaining a global dimension through innovation initiatives and implementation across regions, its recent operational focus has been concentrated mainly in Africa, reducing its visibility and influence across the wider portfolio.

KEY FINDING 6:

The ILO's work is externally recognized for its distinctive and comparative technical advantage alongside other development partners, reflecting its unique tripartite mandate, social dialogue and normative leadership. However, the crowded and fragmented skills landscape, with no clear lead agency, and some overlap across initiatives, highlights the need for the ILO to strengthen the evidence and communication of its distinct contribution to leverage strategic partnerships and mobilize resources.

The Strategy is widely recognized across the Organization as the principal framework for designing and implementing skills and lifelong learning reforms. The GSP has reinforced this role by structuring country-level action and promoting knowledge exchange and common operational approaches among participating countries.

Overall, coordination has been strong within projects and country programmes but relies heavily on informal relationships, with limited institutional mechanisms for systematic cross-country learning and stronger integration with related employment and enterprise portfolios.

Externally, while the ILO's normative leadership and technical expertise are recognized, monitoring and knowledge management arrangements are not yet sufficiently advanced to consistently capture and aggregate portfolio-level results. Tools such as the Service Tracker remain under development and are not yet able to demonstrate the outcomes of technical support. This limits the availability of consolidated evidence on the portfolio's contribution to national skills and lifelong learning systems.

Effectiveness

KEY FINDING 7:

Effectiveness across the Strategy's five pillars remained uneven. The ILO's strongest contribution was in upstream policy reform, institutional capacity development, qualifications systems, quality apprenticeships and RPL, strengthening the foundations for longer-term reform. Progress was less consolidated in areas critical to sustaining and scaling reforms, particularly the institutionalization and routine use of skills anticipation systems, sustainable financing and implementation capacity. Advancing these areas requires longer timeframes, domestic investment and sustained national commitment.



KEY FINDING 8:

The GSP strengthened the effectiveness of the ILO's skills and lifelong learning portfolio by promoting policy coherence, institutional innovation and cross-country learning, notably in Africa. Its contribution demonstrates the value of a programmatic approach to implementing the Strategy. Sustaining these initial gains, however, will depend on continued national ownership, resources, and institutional capacity.

The absence of a dedicated results framework limited the measurement of the Strategy's overall performance against predefined targets. Nevertheless, the ILO's Programme and Budget reporting during 2022–25 indicates substantial implementation, with 176 reported results under the relevant outcomes and outputs (24% above the target) and 367 CPO-biennium entries related to skills and lifelong learning.

Across diverse country contexts, the ILO contributed to strengthening the institutional foundations of skills and lifelong learning systems and, where possible, connecting reforms with employment, productivity, inclusion and just transition agendas. This included support for innovative approaches such as competency-based training, RPL, micro-credentials and digital or blended delivery. Interventions also strengthened inclusion by targeting women, youth, refugees, migrants, persons with disabilities and workers in the informal economy.

The pace of reforms varied across contexts, reflecting differences in institutional capacity and implementation readiness. Many initiatives remained at pilot or early implementation stages, highlighting the importance of sustained national investment and long-term institutional commitment beyond project support. Furthermore, broader labour market transformation continues to depend on factors beyond the ILO's direct influence, including labour demand, and wider economic conditions.

The GSP demonstrated the added value of a programmatic approach by connecting country interventions with global expertise and common methodologies, facilitating knowledge exchange and more consistent implementation across participating countries.

Efficiency

KEY FINDING 9:

Funding remained below the level envisaged to implement the Strategy and was unevenly distributed across Strategy pillars and regions. Nevertheless, the portfolio used available resources efficiently through catalytic approaches, including training of trainers, south-south collaboration, cost-sharing, and scalable delivery models that extended the reach of limited funding.



KEY FINDING 10:

Although extra-budgetary development cooperation (XBDC) funds accounted for 97.5 per cent of total funding through 2022 – 25, regular budget resources (RBSA and RBTC) financed more than half of all reported deliverables by number. This underscores the strategic role of regular budget resources in sustaining broad-based Strategy implementation, particularly in areas receiving limited XBDC.

KEY FINDING 11:

The ILO's technical support model, combining expertise from HQ, regional offices and Decent Work Teams, enabled an efficient delivery of high-quality technical support. However, scarce technical capacity has become a structural constraint to implement the Strategy, reducing the Office's ability to deploy expertise strategically, provide sustained technical support, and scale successful approaches across countries. The GSP demonstrates that dedicated coordination and specialist capacity strengthen efficiency gains, although these functions have yet to be institutionalized across the wider skills and lifelong learning portfolio.

Between 2022 and 2025, USD 197.0 million was allocated to skills and lifelong learning³, with an expenditure rate of 87.5 per cent. The overall funding envelope remained below the level envisaged in the Action Plan and was unevenly distributed across pillars and regions, with the largest share allocated to Africa, followed by Asia and the Pacific. The ILO maximized available resources through catalytic interventions, cost-sharing, pooled funding and disseminating tools and methodologies for replication across countries.

The quality of ILO's technical support is widely recognized, but staffing levels remain insufficient relative to the ambitions of the Strategy and constituents' demand. Skills specialists are central to maintaining technical quality and coherence but are often stretched across multiple countries and workstreams. The GSP's brought efficiency within its target countries by strengthening coordination, technical backstopping and peer learning, although these approaches remained limited to its geographical scope, with more limited influence on coordination and knowledge-sharing across the wider skills portfolio.

While the portfolio maintained efficient delivery, performance increasingly relied on overstretched technical capacity, creating risks to the timeliness and continuity of implementation. As resources become more constrained, proactive risk management and effective implementation planning remain essential to sustain performance and maximize resource efficiency.

³ Resources allocated exclusively to Outcome 5 (2022 – 23) and Output 3.2 (2024 – 25)

Orientation towards impact and sustainability

KEY FINDING 12:

The ILO's strongest contribution to long-term impact lies in embedding skills and lifelong learning reforms within national policy processes, institutions and broader development agendas. Interventions that strengthened governance, qualifications frameworks, RPL, labour market intelligence and quality apprenticeships, while aligning with wider employment priorities, showed greater prospects to support institutionalization and scale. The GSP demonstrated the value of a programmatic approach in advancing system-level reform.



KEY FINDING 13:

The ILO has contributed to establishing conditions for sustainable reform; however, sustaining results depends on embedding these changes within national policy frameworks, institutions, sustainable domestic financing and strengthened institutional capacity.

The evaluation found that the ILO has made a significant contribution to strengthening the institutional foundations of national skills and lifelong learning systems, creating credible pathways towards long-term impact. The strongest evidence relates to reforms that strengthened governance, institutional capacities, qualifications systems, labour market relevance and tripartite engagement, influencing how skills and lifelong learning systems function over time. The GSP further demonstrated the value of a programmatic, system-oriented approach that strengthens institutional ownership, policy coherence and coordinated implementation.

Evidence of large-scale labour market impacts remains limited, as employment, productivity and inclusion outcomes depend not only on effective skills and lifelong learning reforms, but also on broader economic conditions, labour demand, domestic financing, institutional capacity and sustained political commitment. While the ILO has successfully supported the establishment of policies, frameworks and institutional mechanisms, the long-term impact of these reforms ultimately depends on factors that extend beyond its direct influence.

Prospects for sustaining reforms are greatest where they are embedded within broader national systems, institutional mandates and development priorities rather than remaining as stand-alone project activities. Across the evidence base, domestic financing emerged as the principal determinant of sustainability, with reforms remaining vulnerable where national ownership, institutional capacity and investment were insufficient to sustain implementation beyond externally funded projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. Update the Strategy's implementation, results and monitoring framework for 2026–2030

The ILO should update the Skills and Lifelong Learning Action Plan as the implementation framework for the Strategy for 2026 – 2030. The revised Action Plan should establish a roadmap with milestones, measurable results, and monitoring and reporting arrangements aligned with corporate planning and reporting systems, while strengthening the tracking of beneficiaries and results achieved through ILO support. It should incorporate evaluation findings and recommendations from the first implementation cycle, prioritizing resource allocation to interventions with greatest potential for systemic change, institutionalization and national ownership. The framework should strengthen outcome-level monitoring and knowledge management, relying primarily on existing Programme and Budget, CPO and development cooperation reporting mechanisms. Complementary tools, such as the Service Tracker, should be upgraded to support cross-portfolio analysis and reporting, organizational learning and adaptive management without increasing reporting burdens.

RESPONSIBLE UNITS	PRIORITY	TIME IMPLICATION	RESOURCE IMPLICATION
Employment, Skills and Sustainable Enterprises (SKILLS) Strategic Programming and Management (PROGRAM)		Short-Term	Low

Recommendation 2. Focus implementation on areas of highest systemic leverage and comparative advantage

In an increasingly constrained funding environment, the Office should focus its technical and financial resources where they add the greatest value, while remaining responsive to constituent priorities. Implementation should continue to build on the ILO's comparative advantage in policy reform, institutional development, governance and social dialogue, while strengthening institutional capacity, labour market intelligence and sustainable financing through evidence-based approaches. The Office should continue enhancing the capacities of governments, employers' and workers' organizations to contribute to skills and lifelong learning policy and implementation, promoting strategic tripartite engagement. Skills should remain integrated within broader employment, productivity, enterprise transformation, social protection and just transition agendas, including workforce transitions linked to technological and environmental change.

RESPONSIBLE UNITS	PRIORITY	TIME IMPLICATION	RESOURCE IMPLICATION
SKILLS		Short- to Mid-term	Medium

Recommendation 3. Strengthen sustainability, institutional change-management and scale-up

The ILO should place greater emphasis on sustainability, institutional change management, financing and scale-up from the outset of programme design. The evaluation found that reforms often progressed faster at policy than operational levels, with long-term success dependent on domestic financing, institutional capacity, implementation incentives and political continuity. Future interventions should continue to define realistic pathways for financing, institutionalization and sustained implementation by aligning with nationally owned reform processes and using pilot initiatives to generate evidence that informs domestic financing and scale-up. Particular attention should be given to institutional capacity-building, RPL, quality apprenticeships, sector skills council, labour market intelligence, lifelong learning systems and skills for green jobs.

RESPONSIBLE UNITS	PRIORITY	TIME IMPLICATION	RESOURCE IMPLICATION
SKILLS		Short- to Mid-term	Low

Recommendation 4. Institutionalize the Global Skills Programme's core functions in the implementation of the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning

The ILO should define how the core functions demonstrated by the GSP—including strategic portfolio coordination, dedicated capacity building, technical backstopping, cross-country learning, common methodologies, and support to system-oriented reforms—can be sustained and adapted across regions, regardless of future financing arrangements. These functions enhance coherence, technical continuity and implementation, and will become increasingly important if external resources remain constrained during the Strategy period. Building on GSP evidence, the ILO should articulate a clear financing proposition demonstrating to funding partners the added value of pooled, flexible funding as means to advancing the objectives of the Strategy.

RESPONSIBLE UNITS	PRIORITY	TIME IMPLICATION	RESOURCE IMPLICATION
SKILLS		Short-term	High

Recommendation 5. Strengthen the ILO's strategic positioning and partnerships to mobilize resources and scale impact

The ILO should strengthen its position as the partner of choice for national skills and lifelong learning systems by leveraging its comparative advantages in normative guidance, technical expertise, tripartite engagement and convening capacity. This requires continuing the shift from project-centred delivery towards a stronger enabling and partnership role, grounded in long-term engagement with national TVET actors and training institutions and country-tested proof of concepts that support adaptation, national ownership and scale-up.

The Office should strengthen long-term partnerships with national training entities, international financing institutions, UN and regional organizations, seeking collaboration where the ILO has a clearly defined strategic role, and contributes recognized technical expertise. Such partnerships should reinforce the ILO's comparative advantage while enhancing visibility and resource mobilization. The Office should also embed core GSP functions—including technical backstopping, common methodologies, coordination and peer learning—within broader financing and partnership arrangements to sustain them if dedicated GSP funding declines. Continued attention should be given to embedding skills and lifelong learning and social dialogue into employment, productivity and just transition initiatives, including through multi-partner financing mechanisms such as the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions.

RESPONSIBLE UNITS	PRIORITY	TIME IMPLICATION	RESOURCE IMPLICATION
SKILLS Multilateral Partnerships and Development Cooperation (PARTNERSHIPS) Regional and Country Offices		Short- to Mid-term	Medium



02

► Introduction

► INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE HIGH-LEVEL EVALUATION

The Evaluation Office (EVAL) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) conducted an **independent high-level evaluation (HLE) of the ILO's strategy and actions on skills and lifelong learning 2030**. This evaluation forms part of EVAL's approved rolling workplan and constitutes a governance-level assessment of the Office's performance in this strategic area.

High-level evaluations are designed to assess performance at the level of strategies, institutional arrangements and aggregated results across the Organization. They examine how strategic priorities are translated into operational approaches and results across the ILO's normative, policy, knowledge and development cooperation functions. In this context, the present HLE analyses the extent to which the ILO has effectively operationalized its strategy on skills and lifelong learning, including its internal coherence, external positioning, and contribution to results at global, regional and country levels. A **dedicated focus on the Global Skills Programme** has been integrated throughout all sections of this evaluation report.

The evaluation was conducted by an independent team of external experts, including EVAL staff, and follows established quality assurance processes to ensure methodological rigor and independence. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation, together with the Office response, will be submitted to the ILO Governing Body (GB), contributing to accountability and organizational learning.

The evaluation report is organized in **three parts** as follows:

- **Part I:** Evaluation background and approach, introduces the evaluation by describing its purpose, scope, approach and methodological framework.
- **Part II:** Analytical context, provides the background necessary to interpret the evaluation findings. It comprises an [overview of the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030](#), and a [review of the implementation of the Strategy during the evaluation period \(2022–2026\)](#). Together, these chapters provide the institutional and programmatic context that informs the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations.
- **Part III:** Evaluation results, presents the [evaluation findings](#), organized according to the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. Building on these findings, part 3 presents the [evaluation conclusions, lessons learned and emerging good practices](#), as well as the [evaluation recommendations](#). The last section introduces the [Office response to these recommendations](#).



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Part 1

- Evaluation background and approach

▶ PART 1: EVALUATION BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The **purpose** of this HLE is to provide an independent review and analysis to the GB of the achievements and challenges in the implementation of the first action plan related to the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning.

Overall, the high-level evaluation is intended to provide the necessary context on the evolution and progress of ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning in the period 2022 – 26, helping member States to make informed decisions to develop and improve actions in this area over the remaining years of the strategy's implementation through 2030. Based on its findings and conclusions, the evaluation produced detailed recommendations and described good practices and lessons learned.

The HLE provides a specific focus on evaluating the progress made in implementing actions under the Global Skills Programme (2021 – 2026) since its last evaluation in 2023⁴. As regard this programme, the ILO was due to carry out an independent evaluation of the ILO GSP during the same period as the HLE. Taking into consideration the shared focus of work, and the strategic contribution of the Global Programme to advancing the achievement of the Strategy results, this evaluation ensured that there was only one evaluation process covering both the evaluation and the HLE. This approach allowed for a more strategic coverage, showed coherence and integration amongst components, limited stakeholder evaluation fatigue and reduced the administrative burden as well as the financial costs. Specific objectives for the HLE as regard the GSP included:

- ▶ Assess the effectiveness of the Global Skills Programme through selected country programmes that measure results against the planned objectives and long-term goals, notably those of the Strategy on skills and lifelong learning.
- ▶ Determine the progress on programme sustainability strategies.
- ▶ Identify good practices and document lessons learned that would contribute to learning and knowledge development of the programme and its stakeholders.

In operational terms, the integration of the GSP into the High-Level Evaluation was reflected throughout the evaluation framework and methodology. Rather than treating the GSP as a separate evaluative stream, GSP-related analysis was mainstreamed into the overarching evaluation questions, judgement criteria, data collection tools and country case studies developed during the inception phase. This ensured that the evaluation assessed the GSP not as an isolated programme, but as one of the principal implementation and resource mobilization mechanisms supporting the operationalisation of the ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning across global, regional and country levels. Specific evaluation questions therefore examined the coherence, coordination, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and value added of the GSP in relation to the broader Strategy and Action Plan.

The skills and lifelong learning strategy for the period 2022 – 30 constitutes the **thematic scope** of the evaluation, and more concretely the related first plan of action that describes short to medium-term milestones for the period 2022 – 25. This evaluation covers ILO's interventions linked to the biennia of Programme and Budget: 2022-2023, 2024 – 25, and 2026 – 27⁵, both globally and across all regions. The scope, as previously mentioned, includes the assessment of the [Global Skills Programme since its previous evaluation in 2023](#).

⁴ Norway is key contributor to this area of work, together with Flanders, ISDB, GIZ. The evaluation provides specific attention to these contributions and how they support the achievement of overarching outcomes of the action plan and strategy.

⁵ As introduced in Table 3, the evaluation will cover actions that align with outcome 5 of the P&B frameworks for 2022 – 23, and output 3.2 in the period 2024 – 26.

In addition, the evaluation considered relevant corporate monitoring and performance management tools, including the ILO Training Feedback / Service Tracker, as complementary sources of evidence on the delivery, perceived relevance and responsiveness of skills-related technical support and capacity development services.

The scope of the evaluation was informed by the results of the analysis of information related to the Programme and Budget (P&B), the relevant country programme outcomes (CPOs), the budgetary allocations to ILO's work relevant to skills and lifelong learning, and the data on development cooperation (DC) initiatives, as presented in the following section.

In terms of the **scoping of ILO actions globally and geographically**, a detailed mapping and portfolio analysis of ILO's P&B, CPOs, DC portfolio, financial allocations and reported deliverables identified relevant interventions across multiple P&B Outcomes and Outputs, beyond those explicitly dedicated to skills and lifelong learning. This reflected the transversal nature of skills within the ILO's broader decent work agenda, including linkages with employment promotion, enterprise development, labour migration, just transition, social inclusion and productivity. As a result, **the HLE assessed initiatives contributing to the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning across all five pillars of the Strategy and the five interrelated operational components of action**. The integration of the GSP within the broader evaluation framework allow to examine its contribution as a key implementation and resource mobilisation mechanism supporting the operationalisation of the Strategy at global, regional and country levels. This approach aligned with the overarching objective of the HLE to assess the breadth, coherence and strategic contribution of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning across the Organisation.

Overall, the HLE addressed the following lines of inquiry, as captured in table 1.

TABLE 1. PRIORITY HLE LINES OF INQUIRY

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN	OUTCOMES
▶ Responsiveness to constituents' priorities and needs. ▶ Focus of implementing efforts on the ILO's comparative advantage and specialized areas of expertise relative to other international agencies and development partners.	▶ Progress in the implementation of the five inter-related components of the Strategy. ▶ Effectiveness using knowledge and learning to refine the strategy and related work. ▶ Adequacy of resources to implement the plan	▶ Progress in strengthening capacities effectively, which have led to: ▶ Improved policies, governance and financing for effective skills development and lifelong learning, ▶ Strengthened skills intelligence ▶ Innovative and flexible learning programmes and pathways ▶ Inclusive skills programmes for diverse needs of labour markets ▶ Promoted quality apprenticeships and work-based learning for employability, productivity and sustainable enterprises ▶ Unintended outcomes as a result of the implementation of the plan

METHODOLOGY

Evaluation approach and analytical framework

The HLE of the ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030 was conducted in accordance with ILO EVAL Protocol No. 2.1 on Policy Outcomes and Institutional Evaluations (High-Level Evaluations), the ILO Evaluation Policy, and the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). The evaluation applied the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and orientation towards impact.

The methodology was designed to respond to the dual purpose of the HLE: (i) accountability to the Governing Body regarding the implementation of the Strategy and its first Plan of Action (2022–2025); and (ii) organizational learning and forward-looking reflection to support the continued implementation of the Strategy through 2030. As such, the evaluation combined **summative and formative** dimensions. It assessed the extent to which the ILO's strategies and actions on skills and lifelong learning contributed to intended results during the evaluation period while also identifying lessons learned, emerging good practices and strategic considerations for the remaining implementation period of the Strategy.

During the inception phase, the evaluation team undertook a structured process to translate the Terms of Reference and the Strategy's Theory of Change into an **operational assessment framework**. The agreed evaluation questions were further refined into explicit judgement criteria (assessment dimensions), designed to guide evaluative reasoning and ensure consistency across levels of analysis. These judgement criteria go beyond descriptive indicators. They reflect key analytical dimensions such as alignment, coherence, institutionalisation, catalytic effects, sustainability conditions, and coordination performance. For each evaluation question, the framework specifies:

- ▶ The analytical focus and sub-questions;
- ▶ The structured judgement criteria against which performance will be assessed;
- ▶ The corresponding sources of evidence and triangulation approach.

The full assessment framework, including the detailed Evaluation Matrix and structured judgement criteria, is presented in **Annex 1 and 2**. The framework is explicitly aligned with the Strategy's Theory of Change. Questions under Relevance and Coherence examine the enabling environment and strategic alignment required for the Strategy's causal logic to function. Questions under Effectiveness and Efficiency assess progress across the five pillars and operational components, including coordination and resourcing mechanisms. Questions under Sustainability and Orientation towards Impact examine the institutional, financial, and systemic conditions necessary for long-term durability and scale. This architecture ensures that the evaluation assesses not only whether results occurred, but whether the underlying causal pathways and assumptions of the Strategy are holding.

The HLE adopted a **mixed-method, theory-based and systems-oriented evaluation approach**. Given the corporate and strategic nature of the evaluation, the methodology did not focus on assessing individual projects in isolation. Instead, it examined how the ILO's combined means of action, including policy advice, technical cooperation, research and knowledge development, normative work, partnerships and resource mobilization, contributed to skills and lifelong learning outcomes at global, regional and national levels.

The evaluation integrated four complementary analytical perspectives:

- ▶ a theory-based approach, aimed at assessing the coherence and plausibility of the Strategy and its operational components, and analysing the extent to which observed results aligned with expected pathways of change;
- ▶ a systems and portfolio-level perspective, examining how different interventions, actors and instruments interacted across contexts and levels of intervention;
- ▶ case-based inquiry, providing in-depth evidence from selected country contexts and thematic areas; and
- ▶ a participatory and utilization-focused approach, ensuring systematic engagement of tripartite constituents, ILO staff and partners throughout the evaluation process and promoting the practical use of findings and recommendations.

The evaluation considered normative work, social dialogue, gender equality and non-discrimination, environmental sustainability, just transition and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as cross-cutting analytical dimensions throughout the methodology, evidence collection and analysis. Particular attention was given to how the ILO's interventions addressed barriers faced by women, persons with disabilities, migrants, workers in the informal economy and other vulnerable groups within skills systems and lifelong learning pathways.

To operationalize the scope of the evaluation, the HLE undertook a detailed mapping and portfolio analysis of ILO interventions related to skills and lifelong learning using P&B outcomes and outputs, CPOs, DC portfolio data, financial allocations and delivery channels. This analysis enabled the evaluation to identify interventions contributing to the five pillars and operational components of the Strategy, including actions embedded across multiple areas of the ILO's broader decent work agenda. The assessment of the GSP was integrated within this broader analytical framework rather than treated as a separate evaluative stream.

The evaluation framework and evaluation questions were developed during the inception phase through document review, portfolio analysis and consultations with ILO stakeholders. The framework included judgement criteria and scales for each evaluation criterion and was informed by a reconstructed high-level theory of change for the Strategy and the Global Skills Programme. The evaluation matrix identified the key questions, indicators, data sources and methods for each evaluation criterion and guided all subsequent data collection and analysis.

Evaluation criteria and questions

For each evaluation question, evidence from document review, synthesis review, portfolio and financial analysis, surveys, interviews, and case studies was triangulated and weighed against the defined judgement criteria. A qualitative bottom-line judgement was then be formulated at question level using a structured three-point scale (Strong, Moderate, Limited), as defined in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex 1) and Judgement criteria (Annex 2). At the level of the overarching evaluation criteria, summary ratings were assigned using the six-point scale defined by ILO EVAL (Highly satisfactory to Highly unsatisfactory), in line with High-Level Evaluation practice. This structured approach ensured transparency in how evidence was translated into evaluative conclusions, while maintaining proportionality appropriate to a corporate, strategy-level evaluation.

RELEVANCE AND COHERENCE

The relevance and coherence criterion assessed the extent to which the ILO's Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning and related actions respond to the priorities, needs, and practical requirements of ILO constituents. The evaluation examined whether the Strategy and Action Plan were perceived by governments, employers' and workers' organizations, and key stakeholders as appropriate, timely, and responsive, and whether they are effectively translated into action at global, regional, and country levels.

The analysis placed particular emphasis on the operationalization of the ILO's tripartite mandate and normative role. It assessed how social dialogue mechanisms and international labour standards are embedded across the five components of the Action Plan, including their integration into programme design, governance, policy dialogue, and implementation, and how these elements are reflected along the normative continuum.

The evaluation also assessed internal and external coherence. This includes examining how the Global Skills Programme has supported the translation of the Strategy into coordinated and demand-driven action across organizational levels, as well as assessing alignment with global strategies and initiatives and complementarity with the work of other UN entities and international partners, with a view to identifying added value, synergies, and potential duplication.

TABLE 2. EVALUATION QUESTIONS FOR RELEVANCE AND COHERENCE

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
EQ 1.1 – Relevance to constituents <i>To what extent have the ILO's Strategy and actions on skills and lifelong learning responded to the priorities, needs and practical requirements of ILO constituents?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ To what extent do the Strategy and actions reflect the priorities of governments, employers and workers? ▶ Have constituents' priorities evolved during the implementation period?	Synthesis review report Strategic ILO documents (Strategy/Action Plan; Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong Learning; GB progress reports; Programme and Budget; Strategic Plans; PIRs; DWCPs; regional skills strategies) DW Results analysis Interviews with ILO staff, tripartite constituents and partners Surveys Country case studies
EQ 1.2 – Normative framework and social dialogue <i>To what extent are social dialogue and the ILO's normative framework effectively embedded in the design and implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan across global, regional and country levels?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ How are tripartite mechanisms integrated into governance, implementation and monitoring? ▶ To what extent are international labour standards mainstreamed into programme design and policy dialogue?	Strategic and programme documents Normative analysis Synthesis review report Evidence of tripartite consultation mechanisms Interviews Surveys Country case studies
EQ 1.3 – Coherence of the Global Skills Programme <i>To what extent has the Global Skills Programme translated the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy into coherent, coordinated and demand-driven action across global, regional and country levels?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Has the GSP reduced fragmentation of skills-related interventions? ▶ To what extent has the GSP provided a clear and shared results logic linking the Strategy and Action Plan to concrete activities across levels? ▶ To what extent has the GSP functioned as a unifying framework (e.g. common priorities, approaches, sequencing) rather than a loose aggregation of projects? ▶ To what extent has the GSP facilitated alignment and complementarity between global, regional and country-level actions?	Global Skills Programme documentation Strategy and Action Plan GB reports Interviews Surveys Country case studies
EQ 1.4 – External coherence <i>To what extent has the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning aligned with and complemented global strategies and the initiatives of the UN system and other international partners?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Where is complementarity with UN agencies and international partners most evident? ▶ Are there overlaps, gaps or missed opportunities for synergy?	Review of global and UN strategies Mapping of complementarities Synthesis review report Interviews with partners Surveys Country case studies

Effectiveness and efficiency

The effectiveness and efficiency criterion assessed the extent to which the ILO's work on skills development and lifelong learning across the five inter-related components is translating into concrete actions and initiatives at global, regional, and country levels, and whether these actions are achieving the intended short- and medium-term outcomes defined in the Strategy and Action Plan. This includes examining how standards-related actions and the ILO's global leadership functions support or enable results at country level.

The evaluation analysed the extent to which observed results are likely to contribute to addressing key skills development and lifelong learning gaps, including their underlying causes and consequences, and identified any unexpected or unplanned results emerging across levels. It also assessed how effectively ILO actions are responding to new and emerging global opportunities and challenges, including labour market transformations, technological change, and just transition dynamics.

Particular attention was given to the extent to which country-level actions were implemented in line with cross-cutting principles, notably tripartism and social dialogue, gender equality, non-discrimination, and just transition, and to whether governments, employers' and workers' organisations were meaningfully engaged. The analysis further examined the specific value added of the Global Skills Programme in accelerating results, fostering innovation, and enabling scale beyond what would have been achievable through fragmented or stand-alone interventions.

From an efficiency perspective, the evaluation assessed whether actions have been adequately resourced and whether financial, human, and technical resources were used in an economical and timely manner. It also examined how internal coordination within the ILO and external coordination with constituents, ITC-ILO, CINTERFOR, UN agencies, and other partners supported or constrained integrated delivery and the realization of outcomes on skills development and lifelong learning.

TABLE 3. EVALUATION QUESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
EQ 2.1 – Achievement of intended results <i>To what extent has ILO work across the five interrelated components contributed to achieving the intended short- and medium-term outcomes of the Strategy and Action Plan at country level?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Which components have translated most effectively into country-level results? ▶ How have global standards-related actions and global leadership functions supported or enabled these outcomes?	DW Results analysis/ILO dashboard/CPOs Implementation reports Interviews with ILO staff and constituents Synthesis review report Country case studies
EQ 2.2 – Addressing skills and lifelong learning gaps <i>To what extent are the results likely to contribute to addressing key skills development and lifelong learning gaps and their underlying causes?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Which gaps (institutional, governance, financing, inclusion) are being addressed most effectively? ▶ To what extent are root causes of skills mismatches being tackled?	Theory of Change and contribution analysis Synthesis review report Interviews Surveys Country case studies
EQ 2.3 – Intended and unintended results <i>What intended and unintended results have emerged from the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning at global, regional and country levels?</i>	Progress and implementation documentation Interviews Surveys Synthesis review Country case studies
EQ 2.4 – Responsiveness to emerging challenges <i>To what extent has ILO work on skills and lifelong learning responded to emerging global challenges and opportunities?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ How have actions addressed issues such as digitalisation, green transition, demographic change or crises? ▶ Is there evidence of adaptive programming?	Progress and implementation documentation Interviews Surveys Synthesis review Country case studies

EQ 2.5 – Cross-cutting principles

To what extent have ILO actions been implemented in line with cross-cutting principles, including tripartism and social dialogue, gender equality, non-discrimination, and just transition?

Sub-questions:

- ▶ Are social partners meaningfully involved at country level?
- ▶ How are gender equality, disability inclusion and just transition operationalised in practice?

Country-level documentation
Gender and inclusion analysis
Interviews
Surveys
Synthesis review
Country case studies

EQ 2.6 – Value added of the Global Skills Programme

What has been the specific value added of the Global Skills Programme compared with stand-alone development cooperation initiatives?

Sub-questions:

- ▶ Has the GSP accelerated results?
- ▶ Fostered innovation?
- ▶ Enabled scale that would not otherwise have been achieved?

Global Skills Programme portfolio review
Partner interviews
Surveys
Contribution analysis
Synthesis review
Case studies

EQ 2.7 – Efficiency and resourcing

To what extent have actions been adequately resourced and implemented efficiently?

Sub-questions:

- ▶ Are financial and human resources aligned with strategic priorities?
- ▶ Are there efficiency gains through coordination, pooling or joint delivery?

Budget and expenditure data
Interviews
Synthesis review report

EQ 2.8 – Internal and external coordination

How effective have internal ILO coordination mechanisms and external partnerships been in supporting integrated delivery of the Strategy?

Sub-questions:

- ▶ How effective is coordination across ILO units and levels?
- ▶ How effective is coordination with constituents, ITC-ILO, CINTERFOR, UN partners and donors?

Coordination documentation
Global Skills Programme governance documentation
Interviews
Surveys
Synthesis review
Country case studies

EQ 2.9 Coordination enabled by the Global Skills Programme

To what extent has the Global Skills Programme effectively enabled internal coordination across ILO units and levels, and external coordination with constituents, partners (e.g. GIZ, World Bank, UNESCO) and other projects or interventions, in support of integrated delivery of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy?

Sub-questions:

- ▶ To what extent has the Global Skills Programme functioned as a coordination platform across headquarters, regional and country levels?
- ▶ To what extent has the Programme facilitated cross-unit collaboration within the ILO (e.g. between technical departments, regions, and country offices)?
- ▶ How effectively has the Programme enabled coordination and complementarity with constituents and external partners at global, regional and country levels?
- ▶ To what extent has coordination supported integrated delivery, reduced duplication, or generated synergies with other skills-related projects and initiatives?
- ▶ What coordination mechanisms have worked well, and where have gaps, bottlenecks or transaction costs persisted?

Global Skills Programme governance and coordination documentation
Internal coordination mechanisms (meeting records, guidance notes, joint workplans, platforms)
Interviews with ILO HQ, regional and country-level staff
Interviews with constituents and external partners (e.g. UN agencies, IFIs, bilateral partners)
Surveys
Synthesis review report
Country case studies

Sustainability and orientation towards impact

The sustainability and orientation towards impact criterion assessed the extent to which the ILO's strategy and actions on skills development and lifelong learning were designed and implemented to generate lasting change beyond the period of external support. The evaluation examined whether interventions strengthen national institutional capacities, policy frameworks, financing arrangements, and systems in ways that reduce dependency on international assistance and enhance national ownership.

Particular attention was given to the role of the Global Skills Programme in strengthening conditions for sustainability and scaling, including institutional ownership, national budget earmarking and diversified financing, the positioning of Technical Vocational Education and training (TVET) and skills development within national education systems, and broader system-level reforms that extend beyond individual projects. The analysis also assessed the degree of political commitment and ownership demonstrated by governments and social partners, as well as the key institutional, financial, and contextual challenges that affect the sustainability of results.

Finally, the evaluation assessed the extent to which the ILO's strategies and actions have contributed, or are likely to contribute, to sustainable country-level impacts through strengthened capacities, enhanced tools and methodologies, and policy improvements. It also identified the enabling conditions, actions, emerging lessons, and good practices needed to achieve broader and longer-term impact and to inform implementation of the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning through to 2030.

TABLE 4. EVALUATION QUESTIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND ORIENTATION TOWARDS IMPACT

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
EQ 3.1 National capacity and ownership <i>To what extent have ILO interventions strengthened national capacities and ownership for skills development and lifelong learning?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Is there evidence of political will and leadership among national stakeholders? ▶ Have institutional roles and responsibilities been strengthened?	Programme and project documents Capacity development reviews Interviews Surveys Synthesis review report Country case studies
EQ 3.2 Sustainability and scaling (Global Skills Programme) <i>To what extent has the Global Skills Programme strengthened conditions for the sustainability and scaling of results beyond the life of individual projects?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Has it strengthened institutional ownership and governance? ▶ Has it supported sustainable financing mechanisms? ▶ How are TVET and skills development positioned within national education systems? ▶ Are there system-level reforms supporting scale-up?	National policy and education sector documents Global Skills Programme portfolio review Interviews Surveys Synthesis review report Country case studies
EQ 3.3 Financing sustainability <i>To what extent do national budget allocations and diversified funding sources support the sustainability and scaling of skills systems?</i>	Budget and financing documents Interviews Donor information Financial reports Synthesis review report Country case studies
EQ 3.4 Challenges to sustainability <i>What are the main challenges and risks to sustaining results achieved under the Strategy and the Global Skills Programme?</i>	Risk assessments Interviews Surveys Synthesis review report Country case studies
EQ 3.5 – Orientation towards long-term impact <i>To what extent have ILO strategies and actions contributed, or are likely to contribute, to sustainable long-term impacts at country level?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Have institutional capacities been durably strengthened? ▶ Have policy frameworks and tools been improved in ways likely to endure?	Contribution analysis Policy and institutional reviews Interviews Surveys Synthesis review report Country case studies

EQ 3.6 – Lessons learned and forward-looking orientation

What lessons learned and good practices should inform the implementation of the Strategy up to 2030?

Synthesis review report

Interviews

Surveys

Country case studies

Evaluation design and data collection

The HLE combined multiple qualitative and quantitative data collection tools in order to generate evidence across global, regional and national levels and ensure robust triangulation. The evaluation relied on both primary and secondary sources of information and adopted a layered evidence-generation approach combining portfolio analysis, documentary review, interviews, surveys and country case studies.

Documentary review and secondary data analysis

The documentary review constituted one of the main analytical pillars of the evaluation and served multiple purposes throughout the evaluation process: refinement of the scope of the evaluation, reconstruction of the Strategy's implicit theory of change, portfolio mapping, identification of evidence gaps, triangulation of findings and assessment of results across the OECD/DAC criteria.

The review covered both strategic and operational documentation related to the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning between 2022 and 2026. The documentation reviewed included:

- ▶ The ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2022–2030 and its first Plan of Action;
- ▶ Global Skills Programme documentation and related governance materials;
- ▶ P&B documents and implementation reports;
- ▶ Country Programme Outcomes;
- ▶ DC project documents and progress reports;
- ▶ Previous independent evaluations and synthesis reviews;
- ▶ Technical studies, policy tools, guidance materials and research outputs;
- ▶ Donor reports and partnership documentation;
- ▶ Regional and country-level strategies and policy documents;
- ▶ Relevant Governing Body and International Labour Conference documentation.

A substantial part of the documentary analysis focused on reconstructing and mapping the overall skills and lifelong learning portfolio across the organization. Since skills-related interventions are distributed across multiple P&B outcomes, delivery channels and technical units, the evaluation undertook a detailed mapping exercise to identify interventions contributing to the Strategy and its five pillars.

The documentary review was complemented by quantitative portfolio analysis drawing on:

- ▶ CPO reporting data;
- ▶ P&B reporting across biennia;
- ▶ Financial and delivery-channel information;
- ▶ Development cooperation databases;
- ▶ Project and donor mapping exercises;
- ▶ Service Tracker data; and
- ▶ Pillar and component classification analysis.

This quantitative mapping exercise allowed the evaluation team to identify:

- ▶ The geographical distribution of interventions;
- ▶ Concentration of funding and delivery channels;
- ▶ Thematic and pillar coverage;
- ▶ Relative weight of regular budget and extra-budgetary resources;
- ▶ Regional implementation patterns;
- ▶ Systemic reform-oriented interventions;
- ▶ Countries with high density of skills-related engagement.

The documentary and portfolio review also served as the main analytical basis for the country case study selection process.

Synthesis Review

A synthesis review of existing evaluative evidence constituted a component of the methodology. This synthesis review drew on a structured selection of 95 evaluations from an initial pool of 129 ILO Evaluation Office (independent and internal) evaluations related to skills and lifelong learning. In addition to project and cluster evaluations, it includes relevant high-level evaluations, such as those on the ILO's COVID-19 response (2020–2022), post-conflict and recovery work in the Arab States, Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) strategies in Central America and West Africa, the ILO Development Cooperation Strategy 2020–25, and the Youth Employment Action Plan 2020–30.

Evaluations were selected using predefined criteria to ensure methodological rigor, thematic relevance, strategic significance, and balanced representation across regions and the five interrelated components and pillars of the Theory of Change. The review consolidated findings, conclusions and lessons from the selected sample of independent evaluations, and enabled the evaluation to identify recurrent patterns, systemic issues, emerging themes and cross-country trends across a large and diverse intervention portfolio, while also informing the selection of country case studies and triangulation of evidence from interviews, surveys and portfolio analysis. Artificial intelligence was used to support the systematic organization, coding, and analysis of evaluation evidence, improving the consistency and efficiency of the synthesis process.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews constituted the principal primary data collection tool of the HLE. Interviews were conducted both virtually and during country missions and targeted a broad range of stakeholders involved in the design, implementation, financing or use of ILO skills and lifelong learning interventions.

Interviewees included:

- ▶ ILO headquarters staff from technical departments and programme units;
- ▶ Regional specialists and country office staff, including decent work teams;
- ▶ Representatives from ACTEMP and ACTRAV;
- ▶ Government institutions and TVET authorities;
- ▶ Ministries responsible for labour, education and skills development;
- ▶ Employers' and workers' organizations;
- ▶ Other beneficiaries of ILO's direct support in the country case studies
- ▶ Development partners and donor agencies;
- ▶ UN agencies and international financial institutions;
- ▶ Training institutions and sectoral organizations;
- ▶ Research centres and implementing partners.

During the data collection phase, interviews generated qualitative evidence across all evaluation criteria, including strategic coherence and alignment, institutional coordination, implementation dynamics, resource allocation and delivery mechanisms, partnership effectiveness, sustainability conditions, systemic reform processes, operational bottlenecks and constraints, and emerging results, including unintended effects. This evidence complemented the documentary review by providing contextual insights, stakeholder perspectives, and explanations of factors influencing implementation and outcomes.

Interview guides were tailored to stakeholder categories but aligned systematically with the evaluation matrix and OECD/DAC criteria. The guides combined structured analytical questions with open-ended discussion areas to allow stakeholders to elaborate on implementation experiences and contextual factors.

Particular attention was paid to ensuring geographical balance and institutional diversity in interview sampling. Interviews were not limited to the five case study countries. The evaluation deliberately included stakeholders from countries and regional contexts beyond those covered through field missions in order to maintain global representativeness and avoid over-generalisation from a limited number of country contexts. This included targeted interviews with regional specialists, technical departments, global programme managers and donor representatives operating across multiple regions, including the Arab States region, which was not covered through an in-depth country case study.

Online surveys

To complement the qualitative evidence and broaden stakeholder coverage, the evaluation implemented global online surveys targeting three stakeholder groups: ILO staff, tripartite constituents, and external partners and development agencies. The surveys were administered in English, French, and Spanish and distributed globally through purposive stakeholder lists developed during the inception phase, providing additional evidence from a diverse range of perspectives across regions and stakeholder groups.

The surveys aimed to capture stakeholder perceptions regarding:

- ▶ The relevance and strategic positioning of the Strategy;
- ▶ Coherence across the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning;
- ▶ Effectiveness of implementation mechanisms;
- ▶ Institutional coordination;
- ▶ Operational strengths and weaknesses;
- ▶ Sustainability prospects;
- ▶ Comparative advantage of the ILO;
- ▶ Effectiveness of partnerships and resource mobilisation;
- ▶ Perceived gaps and future priorities.

The surveys also served an important validation function by allowing the evaluation team to test whether patterns emerging from documentary analysis and interviews were reflected more broadly across stakeholder groups and regions.

Given the strategic and organizational nature of the HLE, survey findings were used primarily for triangulation and trend identification rather than statistical representativeness.

Response rates varied across stakeholder categories, reaching approximately 15 per cent among ILO staff, 15 per cent among tripartite constituents and 34 per cent among external partners and development agencies. While the surveys provided valuable perception-based evidence across regions and stakeholder groups, the relatively uneven response rates and varying levels of familiarity with the Strategy and specific interventions limited their use. Survey results were considered primarily for triangulation and trend identification alongside interviews, documentary analysis and country case study evidence.

Country case studies

Country case studies constituted a central methodological component of the HLE and represented the main mechanism for generating contextualized evidence on how the ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning translated into implementation dynamics and results at country level.

The HLE included **six in-depth country case studies in Ethiopia, Kenya, Bangladesh, Moldova, Panama, and Colombia**⁶. The case studies combined desk review and portfolio analysis with field missions, semi-structured interviews, stakeholder consultations and project and institutional mapping. They examined implementation dynamics and reforms across macro, meso and micro levels, including policy and legislative reform, governance and institutional strengthening, sector skills systems, apprenticeships and work-based learning, skills anticipation, recognition of prior learning (RPL), digital and green skills, labour market inclusion, training delivery systems, partnerships and financing mechanisms.

Country case study selection process

The country case study selection process followed a structured and evidence-based analytical approach developed during the inception phase. The selection process combined three main analytical streams:

- ▶ Quantitative portfolio analysis;
- ▶ Qualitative evidence from the synthesis review;
- ▶ Consultations with ILO stakeholders at headquarters, regional and country levels.

The evaluation team first conducted a detailed mapping of the global skills and lifelong learning portfolio using CPO data, P&B reporting, development cooperation databases and financial information. This analysis identified countries with significant concentration of interventions, funding allocations, deliverables and pillar coverage.

The synthesis review then provided comparative evidence regarding implementation patterns, systemic reform trajectories, operational bottlenecks and sustainability conditions across regions and thematic areas.

Finally, consultations with ILO stakeholders helped validate the analytical relevance and feasibility of potential case study countries and ensured that selected cases reflected substantive reform experiences rather than isolated project implementation.

The selection process involved several filtering stages. An initial global mapping identified countries reporting significant skills and lifelong learning interventions during the evaluation period through CPOs, Programme and Budget reporting, development cooperation portfolios and financial allocations. Countries were subsequently grouped by region and screened against a combination of standard ILO HLE case study selection criteria and skills-specific analytical criteria developed during the inception phase. This process generated an initial pre-selection of approximately 25 countries across all ILO regions, including countries such as Colombia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, Bangladesh, India, Philippines, Moldova, Panama, Lebanon and Jordan, among others. The evaluation team then progressively narrowed the selection through triangulation with synthesis review findings, consultations with ILO stakeholders and feasibility considerations.

The final selection was guided by six interrelated criteria combining standard ILO HLE selection principles with skills-specific analytical considerations developed during the inception phase:

1. **Portfolio scale and strategic weight.** Priority was given to countries with significant concentration of skills and lifelong learning interventions during the evaluation period, including substantial financial allocations, broad pillar coverage, multiple funding streams and sustained engagement across biennia.

6 The main evaluation report is available [here](#)

2. **Depth of systemic reform.** The evaluation prioritised countries demonstrating evidence of broader institutional and system-level reform processes, particularly in areas such as TVET governance, qualifications systems, apprenticeships, RPL, labour market intelligence and sector skills systems.
3. **Alignment with synthesis review findings.** Case studies were selected to reflect recurrent patterns, implementation dynamics and sustainability issues emerging from the synthesis review and broader evaluative evidence base.
4. **Relevance to the Global Skills Programme (GSP).** Given the importance of the GSP within the broader Strategy implementation framework, the selection ensured inclusion of countries with significant GSP engagement and system-strengthening interventions.
5. **Analytical balance.** The selection sought balance across geographical regions, intervention modalities, institutional maturity levels, thematic priorities and reform trajectories, including both advanced reform contexts and more operationally constrained environments.
6. **Global representativeness.** Although only five country case studies could be undertaken, the evaluation ensured broader representativeness through complementary interviews, surveys and documentary evidence covering countries and regions beyond the selected cases, including the Arab States region.

TABLE 5. SUMMARY OF COUNTRY CASE STUDY SELECTION AND ANALYTICAL RATIONALE

COUNTRY	REGION	MAIN RATIONALE FOR SELECTION	ILLUSTRATIVE REFORM AND INTERVENTION AREAS
Ethiopia	Africa	High-ranking country in quantitative portfolio analysis, with extensive coverage across Strategy pillars, large budget allocations, multiple projects and strong focus on vulnerable groups and inclusion.	National RPL strategy and implementation support Skills anticipation studies and institutional capacity building Sector Skills Councils and employer-led governance Skills programmes for refugees and host communities Digital and renewable energy skills Work-based learning and employability support
Kenya	Africa	Large and diversified skills portfolio combining systemic TVET reform, inclusion, migration and apprenticeship interventions, supported through multiple funding streams and partnerships.	Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) reforms Apprenticeship systems and work-based learning Support to TVETA, CDACC and KNQA RPL system for refugees and host communities Skills facilitating labour market integration, both nationally and internationally Private sector and county-level engagement
Bangladesh	Asia-Pacific	Important Asia-Pacific case reflecting large-scale interventions on skills systems, industry engagement and labour market inclusion within a high-density skills portfolio.	Skills system strengthening Industry and enterprise engagement Skills for vulnerable populations Employment-oriented training systems Institutional coordination and governance
Moldova	Europe and Central Asia	Selected primarily because of the depth of systemic reform and innovation-oriented interventions despite smaller overall portfolio size compared to Africa and Asia.	Skills anticipation and labour market intelligence RPL and tracer systems Micro-qualifications and certification pilots Digital skills integration Renewable energy curricula and qualifications Gender-focused outreach and career guidance

Panama	Latin America and the Caribbean	Selected due to the strong governance-to-delivery reform dimension and institutional transformation processes within the national TVET system.	Sector Skills Councils and governance reform National Qualifications Framework integration Competency-based certification systems Apprenticeship reforms linked to Recommendation No. 208 -Green skills foresight (SPEED study) Gender and inclusion mainstreaming in TVET
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Colombia was selected as a country case study as it provides a strategically important and information-rich example of the ILO's support to skills development and lifelong learning. It is particularly relevant due to the scale, diversity, and continuity of its recent interventions, their strong alignment with national public policies and institutional reforms, and their integration with governance mechanisms for the national skills ecosystem. The country offers a valuable opportunity to assess how a sustained portfolio of domestically funded interventions (2022–2026) has contributed to strengthening key components of the national skills system—including public policy, the National Qualifications Framework, technical and vocational education and training systems, territorial implementation models, social dialogue, and institutional coordination—while also generating transferable lessons on systemic change, sustainability, and impact that can inform the global assessment of the ILO Skills Strategy.

SUMMARY OF RATINGS

In line with ILO EVAL practice for high-level evaluations, the assessment of the ILO's performance is synthesized through an overall set of ratings based on the evaluation criteria: relevance and coherence, effectiveness and efficiency, sustainability and orientation towards impact.

The ratings are based on a six-point scale ranging from “highly satisfactory” to “highly unsatisfactory,” reflecting the extent to which the ILO's performance meets expectations in relation to each criterion. These ratings are derived from a combination of evidence sources, including the synthesis review of evaluations, primary data collected through interviews and surveys, and the analysis conducted by the evaluation team.

- ▶ **Highly satisfactory:** when the findings related to the evaluation criterion show that ILO performance related to criterion has produced outcomes which go beyond expectation, expressed specific comparative advantages and added value, produced best practices.
- ▶ **Satisfactory:** when the findings related to the evaluation criterion show that the objectives have been mostly attained and the expected level of performance can be considered coherent with the expectations of the national tripartite constituents, beneficiaries and the ILO itself.
- ▶ **Somewhat satisfactory:** when the findings related to the evaluation criterion show that the objectives have been partially attained and that the expected level of performance could be for the most part considered coherent with the expectations of the national tripartite constituents, beneficiaries and the ILO itself.
- ▶ **Somewhat unsatisfactory:** when the findings related to the evaluation criterion show that the objectives have been partially attained and the level of performance show minor shortcomings and are not fully considered acceptable in the view of the ILO national tripartite constituents, partners and beneficiaries.
- ▶ **Unsatisfactory:** when the findings related to the evaluation criterion show that the objectives have not been attained and the level of performance shows major shortcomings and are not fully considered acceptable in the view of the ILO national tripartite constituents, partners and beneficiaries.

- **Highly unsatisfactory:** when the findings related to the evaluation criterion show that expected results have not been attained, and there have been important shortcomings, and the resources have not been utilized effectively and/or efficiently.

The purpose of the rating system is not only to provide a concise summary of performance, but also to support comparability across evaluations and to facilitate communication of findings to decision-makers. The ratings are presented in the specific section of the report on the "[overall assessment](#)".

Methodological limitations

As with any high-level strategic evaluation covering a large and highly diversified institutional portfolio, the present HLE faced a number of methodological and operational limitations.

First, the transversal nature of skills and lifelong learning within the ILO's Programme and Budget structure created important scoping and attribution challenges. Skills-related interventions are implemented across multiple technical departments, policy outcomes, funding streams and delivery modalities rather than through a single institutional results framework. As a result, considerable analytical effort was required during the inception phase to identify, map and classify relevant interventions across the Organization. While the portfolio mapping exercise substantially strengthened the robustness of the evaluation scope, the absence of a centralized and fully integrated institutional tracking system for skills-related interventions limited the possibility of constructing a completely exhaustive portfolio.

Second, the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning does not include a fully operationalized organization-wide results framework with standardized indicators, baselines and consolidated reporting mechanisms. This limited the evaluation's ability to systematically aggregate and compare results across regions, projects and implementation modalities. In several cases, evidence on outcomes and longer-term institutional changes remained fragmented across project-level reporting systems and donor frameworks. Consequently, the evaluation relied heavily on triangulation across documentary evidence, interviews, portfolio analysis and country case studies to assess contribution to results and systemic reforms.

Third, the breadth and global scope of the evaluation necessarily implied trade-offs between depth and coverage. Although the evaluation examined interventions across all regions and implementation levels, only five in-depth country case studies could be conducted within the available timeframe and resources. The evaluation team addressed this limitation through a structured and evidence-based case study selection methodology, complemented by extensive interviews and survey coverage beyond the selected countries. Nevertheless, the findings from the case studies should not be interpreted as statistically representative of the entire global portfolio.

Fourth, the diversity of interventions included under the Strategy, ranging from policy advice and governance reform to training delivery, apprenticeships, digital skills, migration-related interventions and green skills initiatives, created challenges for cross-country comparability. Interventions varied substantially in scale, maturity, institutional complexity and funding structure. The evaluation therefore adopted a contribution-oriented and systems-based analytical approach rather than attempting direct comparison of heterogeneous interventions.

Fifth, the evaluation period partially overlapped with ongoing implementation processes, particularly under the 2024–25 and early 2026–27 biennia. In some countries and programmes, reforms and institutional changes were still underway at the time of data collection. As a result, the evaluation was in certain cases only able to assess early signs of institutionalisation and likely sustainability rather than fully observable long-term impacts.

Sixth, some limitations affected the availability and quality of monitoring data at project and country levels. While many interventions generated substantial technical outputs and reporting documentation, evidence on downstream outcomes, such as institutional behavioural change, system utilisation or long-term sustainability, was often less systematically documented. This was particularly relevant for assessing orientation towards impact and sustainability at portfolio level.

Seventh, the evaluation faced important limitations in assessing behavioural and labour market outcomes among beneficiaries of skills and lifelong learning interventions. While many projects reported outputs such as numbers trained, certifications obtained, or institutional capacities strengthened, systematic evidence on post-training trajectories was considerably more limited. Across the portfolio, tracer studies, longitudinal follow-up mechanisms, graduate tracking systems and comparable beneficiary outcome data were not consistently available. This is not specific to skills interventions and reflects a broader development cooperation challenge, as longitudinal impact measurement can be resource-intensive and is not always adequately funded. As a result, the evaluation was generally unable to assess at scale whether participation in ILO-supported interventions resulted in sustained changes in employment status, earnings, career progression, enterprise performance or other longer-term behavioural outcomes. This limitation reflects broader monitoring and measurement gaps within the implementation of the Strategy and the wider skills portfolio, rather than a limitation specific to the HLE methodology itself.

Finally, response rates for surveys and stakeholder availability for interviews varied across regions and stakeholder groups. Participation from ILO staff, external partners and constituents was uneven. To mitigate this limitation, the evaluation combined surveys with extensive semi-structured interviews and triangulated all findings across multiple evidence sources.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation methodology combined multiple complementary evidence streams, extensive triangulation and a structured analytical framework, providing a sufficiently robust basis for the findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in this report.



Part 2

- Analytical context: Overview of ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning

▶ PART II. ANALYTICAL CONTEXT: OVERVIEW OF ILO'S WORK ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Part II provides the background necessary to interpret the evaluation findings. It comprises:

1. An overview of the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030, including:

- ▶ [The skills and lifelong learning challenge](#)
- ▶ [ILO mandate, comparative advantage and strategic approach](#)
- ▶ [The ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030](#)
- ▶ [Operationalisation of the Strategy](#)

2. A review of the implementation of the Strategy during the evaluation period (2022-2026), including:

- ▶ [Strategic alignment and delivery architecture](#)
- ▶ [Implementation patterns and systemic trends since 2022](#)
- ▶ [Positioning of skills and lifelong learning within the ILO and its Programme and Budget framework](#)
- ▶ [Country programme outcomes and the transversal nature of skills and lifelong learning](#)
- ▶ [Scale, distribution and budgetary weight of skills and lifelong learning interventions \(2022 – 25\)](#)

Together, these chapters provide the institutional and programmatic context that informs the evaluation.

1. OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGY ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING 2030

This section includes the following chapters:

- ▶ [The skills and lifelong learning challenge](#)
- ▶ [ILO mandate, comparative advantage and strategic approach](#)
- ▶ [The ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030](#)
- ▶ [Operationalisation of the Strategy](#)

The skills and lifelong learning challenge⁷

Skills development and lifelong learning systems are operating in a context of profound economic, technological, demographic and environmental transformation. Digitalisation, automation, artificial intelligence, climate change, demographic shifts and changing patterns of global production are reshaping labour markets and generating new skills requirements across sectors and occupations. At the same time, these transformations are increasing the pace at which skills become obsolete, creating growing demand for continuous reskilling and upskilling throughout working lives.

Across regions, labour markets continue to face persistent and multifaceted skills mismatches. These include skills shortages in priority sectors, gaps between training provision and labour market demand, underutilisation of available skills, overqualification, and difficulties in anticipating future skills needs. Weak skills anticipation systems and insufficient coordination between education, training, employment and economic policies often limit the responsiveness of skills systems to labour market developments. As a result, many employers struggle to find workers with relevant skills, while many workers and jobseekers experience difficulties accessing decent employment opportunities that match their qualifications and aspirations.

These challenges are particularly significant in the context of ongoing structural transformations associated with the digital and green transitions. The transition towards environmentally sustainable economies is generating new demand for green skills and creating requirements for workers and enterprises to adapt to changing production processes, technologies and value chains. Similarly, digital transformation is creating new employment opportunities while simultaneously transforming or displacing existing occupations.

Access to skills development and lifelong learning opportunities also remains highly unequal. Women, workers in the informal economy, migrants, refugees, persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups frequently face barriers to accessing quality education, training and recognition of prior learning. Digital divides, financial constraints and institutional barriers further limit participation in lifelong learning opportunities. Without deliberate and inclusive policy responses, skills systems risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than contributing to more equitable labour market outcomes.

In this context, skills development and lifelong learning are increasingly recognised not only as education and training concerns, but as central elements of labour market functioning, productivity growth, social inclusion and economic transformation. Effective skills systems contribute to employability, competitiveness, resilience and sustainable development, and are therefore central to the ability of countries to respond to current and future labour market challenges.

ILO mandate, comparative advantage and strategic approach

The ILO's engagement in skills development and lifelong learning is rooted in its constitutional mandate, including the Declaration of Philadelphia, which calls for the employment of workers in occupations where they can make the fullest use of their skills and attainments. Education,

⁷ Sources: Resolution concerning skills and lifelong learning. International Labour Conference – 109th Session, 2021 / ILO Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong learning (2022–2027) / ILO Global Skills Programme (2025–2027)

vocational training and skills development have long been recognised by the Organization as essential components of labour market functioning and employment policy.

The ILO's normative framework provides the foundation for its work in this area. Central instruments include the Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142), the Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195), and the Paid Educational Leave Convention, 1974 (No. 140). Together with other relevant international labour standards⁸, these instruments promote lifelong learning, equal access to training opportunities, social dialogue and the development of coherent national skills systems. More recently, the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208), has strengthened the normative basis for promoting inclusive, high-quality apprenticeship systems governed through social dialogue and aligned with labour market requirements.

A defining feature of the ILO's approach is its emphasis on tripartism and social dialogue. Governments, employers' organizations and workers' organizations are recognised as key actors in the governance, design and implementation of skills policies and systems. Through social dialogue, the ILO seeks to improve the relevance, legitimacy and sustainability of skills development interventions, while ensuring that the perspectives of both enterprises and workers are reflected in skills development strategies.

The ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning is also embedded within broader organizational and global policy frameworks. The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019) identified lifelong learning as a central pillar of a human-centred approach to the future of work, while the Global Call to Action for a Human-Centred Recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis (2021) highlighted reskilling and upskilling as essential elements of recovery and resilience. Within the ILO's P&B framework, skills and lifelong learning are primarily addressed under the employment policy agenda, while contributing across multiple policy areas, including employment promotion, enterprise development, social protection, labour migration and just transition.

Skills development and lifelong learning are also central to the achievement of broader sustainable development objectives. Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, they contribute directly to SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, while also supporting progress towards poverty reduction, reduced inequalities and climate action.

The ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning is led by the Skills and Employability Branch (SKILLS) within the Policy Cluster for Employment, Skills and Sustainable Enterprises, working in collaboration with regional and country offices, the Africa Skills Hub, ILO-CINTERFOR and the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITC-ILO).

Strategic leadership, normative work, policy development, research and global knowledge generation remain anchored at headquarters, while implementation support is increasingly delivered through regional and country-level structures and partnerships. The Africa Skills Hub plays an important role in programme coordination, technical support, knowledge sharing and implementation of selected global initiatives, particularly in Africa, while ILO-CINTERFOR and the ITC-ILO contribute through knowledge exchange, capacity development and learning services. These arrangements reflect the Strategy's emphasis on tripartism, partnership building and systemic approaches to skills development and lifelong learning.

⁸ This core framework is reinforced by other international labour standards that embed skills development within a broader decent work and social justice agenda. The [Employment Policy Convention, 1964 \(No. 122\)](#) underscores the importance of skills strategies that support full, productive and freely chosen employment, while the [Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention, 1958 \(No. 111\)](#) and the [Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment \(Disabled Persons\) Convention, 1983 \(No. 159\)](#) strengthen the principles of equality, non-discrimination and inclusive access to training for all groups, including persons with disabilities. Together, these instruments emphasize the right to training, equal access to learning opportunities and the central role of coherent national systems that respond to changing labour-market needs.

The ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030

The ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030 was developed in response to the resolution and conclusions concerning skills and lifelong learning adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 109th Session in 2021. These conclusions reflected growing recognition among ILO constituents that structural transformations in the world of work required a more coherent, systemic and forward-looking approach to skills development and lifelong learning, anchored in social dialogue and aligned with broader employment, social and economic policies.

The ILC conclusions explicitly requested the Director-General to elaborate a comprehensive strategy and an associated plan of action to guide the Organization's work in this domain. The Strategy was presented to and endorsed by the Governing Body at its 346th Session in October–November 2022, together with a Plan of Action covering the first phase of implementation from 2022 to 2025. The Strategy covers the period 2022–2030 and is aligned with the ILO P&B cycles, ensuring its integration into the Organization's core planning and accountability framework.

The Strategy also built upon operational experience accumulated through earlier ILO global skills initiatives and the ILO–Norway Programme Cooperation Agreements implemented since 2016. These initiatives supported the development of global knowledge products, practical tools, partnerships, capacity development approaches and country-level skills systems reforms, providing an operational foundation for the Strategy's subsequent formulation and implementation. The 2023 evaluation of the ILO–Norway Programme Cooperation Agreements notes that Norway-funded phases from 2016 onwards supported global, regional and country-level work on skills systems, work-based learning, recognition of prior learning, skills anticipation and knowledge generation.

The overarching goal of the Strategy is to enable the development of resilient skills and lifelong learning systems, based on social dialogue, that provide inclusive access to high-quality learning opportunities for all, in order to promote human development, full and productive employment, and decent work. The Strategy adopts a systems-based vision of skills development, moving beyond fragmented or project-based interventions. **Skills and lifelong learning are framed as an integrated public policy function**, closely linked to employment policy, labour market institutions, industrial and sectoral strategies, social protection systems, education policies and climate action frameworks.

As depicted in Figure 1, the Strategy is structured around **five mutually reinforcing pillars**: (i) improved policies, governance and financing for skills and lifelong learning; (ii) strengthened skills-needs intelligence; (iii) innovative and flexible learning programmes and pathways; (iv) inclusive skills programmes for diverse labour market needs; and (v) quality apprenticeships and work-based learning. Together, these pillars seek to strengthen the responsiveness, inclusiveness, quality and sustainability of national skills systems. The Strategy explicitly recognises the interdependence of these areas and views systemic change as the result of coordinated progress across all five pillars rather than isolated interventions.

As found in the Strategy document, the Theory of Change links the ILO's operational interventions to system-level outcomes and longer-term socio-economic impacts. It distinguishes between what the ILO will do and how, what is expected to change in skills systems, and the socio-economic impacts to which these changes are expected to contribute. These impacts include more inclusive and resilient economies, improved access to productive employment and decent work, enhanced employability and adaptability, increased enterprise productivity and a more gender-sensitive and inclusive approach to skills and lifelong learning. The Theory of Change links short- to medium-term outcomes, including those supported through development cooperation projects, with broader institutional and system-level change.

To translate the Strategy into practice, the ILO identified **five interrelated operational components**. These define what the ILO will do and how it will support constituents in strengthening skills and lifelong learning systems. The components are: (i) policy advice, capacity development and technical support; (ii) research, knowledge management and dissemination; (iii) resource mobilization; (iv) standards-related actions; and (v) ILO leadership and partnerships.

Policy advice, capacity development and technical support constitute the main channel through which the ILO engages directly with constituents at national, subnational and sectoral levels. Research, knowledge management and dissemination are intended to generate evidence, tools and good practices and to feed learning from field experience into global products and policy advice. **Resource mobilization is treated not only as fundraising, but as a means of supporting longer-term investment in systemic change.** Standards-related actions reflect the ILO's normative mandate and seek to promote the application of relevant international labour standards. ILO leadership and partnerships aim to strengthen global, regional and national collaboration on skills and lifelong learning, leveraging the Organization's tripartite structure and convening role.

FIGURE 1. THEORY OF CHANGE



Source: [ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning, 2030](#)

Operationalisation of the Strategy

The Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030 provides the overarching framework for the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning. Its implementation does not rely on a single programme, funding mechanism or organizational unit. Rather, the Strategy is operationalised through a combination of regular budget activities, development cooperation projects, global and regional initiatives, country-level interventions, partnerships, knowledge products and normative action.

Implementation takes place across headquarters, regional and country levels and involves multiple technical departments, field offices, constituents and development partners. The Strategy therefore functions as a corporate framework intended to guide, align and strengthen a diverse set of interventions rather than as a stand-alone programme with a dedicated implementation structure.

The principal mechanism for translating the Strategy into operational priorities during its initial phase was the **Plan of Action 2022–2025**, adopted alongside the Strategy by the Governing Body. The Plan of Action identified priority areas for implementation across the five strategic pillars and operational components, while providing a common framework to guide programme development, resource mobilization, knowledge generation and technical support activities. It also served as an important bridge between the Strategy's long-term vision and the operational delivery of skills-related interventions through regular budget resources, development cooperation projects and global initiatives.

The Strategy is operationalised through several complementary channels. These include the integration of skills and lifelong learning priorities into the ILO Programme and Budget and related outcomes; Decent Work Country Programmes and country-level policy support; development cooperation projects and programmes; global and regional initiatives; technical advisory services and capacity development activities; research, knowledge management and dissemination; standards-related actions; and partnerships with governments, employers' and workers' organizations, development partners, international financial institutions, UN agencies and other stakeholders.

A significant share of the ILO's skills-related work continues to be delivered through development cooperation projects and programmes implemented at country and regional levels. These interventions vary considerably in scale, thematic focus, funding sources and implementation modalities, but collectively constitute an important vehicle through which the Strategy's objectives are translated into operational activities and results.

Within this broader architecture, the Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong Learning and the Global Skills Programme represent important instruments for supporting implementation of the Strategy. However, they do not encompass the entirety of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning. Rather, they provide programmatic frameworks intended to strengthen coherence, facilitate learning and support the aggregation of results across a wider range of interventions and contexts.

Within this broader architecture, **several global programme initiatives** have played an important role in supporting implementation of the Strategy and in shaping the evolution of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning. Understanding this evolution is important for situating the Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong Learning and the more recent Global Skills Programme within the broader strategic framework. A brief overview is presented below.

A. Evolution of ILO global skills programming

The ILO's current global architecture for skills and lifelong learning has evolved progressively over the last decade. While the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030 provides the current overarching framework for ILO action in this area, many of the concepts, approaches and implementation modalities embodied in the Strategy emerged through earlier programme cooperation arrangements and global initiatives.

A major milestone was the establishment of the Norway–ILO Programme Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), which from 2016 onwards provided flexible, outcome-based funding to support innovation, knowledge generation and systems strengthening in a number of thematic areas, including skills and lifelong learning. These arrangements enabled the ILO to work simultaneously at global, regional and country levels, combining policy development, research, capacity building, partnerships and field implementation.

The PCAs also introduced an outcome-based funding modality that provided greater flexibility than traditional project funding and enabled the ILO to combine global knowledge generation, regional initiatives and country-level support within a single framework. According to the 2023 PCA evaluation, this funding model played an important role in expanding the ILO's skills-related work and provided much of the operational experience that later informed both the Strategy and subsequent global programme initiatives.

Within the skills domain, these initiatives supported the development of methodologies, tools, partnerships and institutional approaches in areas such as skills anticipation, recognition of prior learning, work-based learning, apprenticeships, digital skills, green skills and labour market transitions. They also contributed to strengthening global knowledge-sharing mechanisms and building communities of practice across countries and regions.

The experience generated through these programmes helped shape the development of the ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030. Many of the Strategy's core principles, including

systems thinking, lifelong learning approaches, social dialogue, institutional strengthening and policy coherence, built on lessons emerging from these earlier interventions.

The adoption of the Strategy in 2022 marked a transition from a collection of related interventions towards a more explicit corporate framework for ILO action on skills and lifelong learning. Subsequent programme initiatives sought to align operational delivery more closely with the Strategy's pillars, Theory of Change and results framework.

B. Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2022 - 24

The Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong Learning (funded by Norway -NORAD, the Government of Flanders, GIZ and the Islamic Development Bank) became a major vehicle for supporting implementation of the Strategy during its initial phase, while also building on earlier programme cooperation arrangements and global skills initiatives that predated the Strategy. It provided an important bridge between earlier skills systems interventions and the implementation of the Strategy's more comprehensive and system-oriented framework. The Programme sought to provide a coherent framework for skills-related interventions across countries and regions while promoting greater coordination, learning and resource mobilization.

The Programme was associated with a larger ambition to support implementation of the Strategy across a large number of countries through a combination of regular budget resources, development cooperation projects and flexible donor contributions. It also served as a platform for testing approaches, generating operational learning and supporting longer-term engagement with national skills systems.

The Programme was designed to support a broad range of interventions covering policy reform, institutional strengthening, skills anticipation, training delivery, inclusion, apprenticeships, work-based learning and knowledge generation. Rather than operating as a stand-alone project, it functioned as an umbrella framework bringing together multiple interventions implemented through different funding streams, countries and partnerships.

A distinctive characteristic of the Global Programme was its strong emphasis on country-level results. Its results framework was articulated primarily through country outcomes reflecting changes in policies, institutions, stakeholder coordination and service delivery. While broadly aligned with the objectives of the Strategy, these outcomes frequently cut across multiple Strategy pillars and operational components.

As a result, the relationship between the Strategy and the Global Programme was not always linear. The Programme translated the Strategy's systemic ambitions into context-specific interventions and country-level outcomes, prioritising flexibility and responsiveness to national circumstances. This facilitated adaptation and country ownership but also created challenges for aggregation, reporting and traceability of results at global level.

The Programme was implemented through collaboration among headquarters, regional offices, country offices, constituents and development partners. Coordination arrangements evolved over time, with the Africa Skills Hub playing an increasingly important role in programme coordination, technical support, knowledge sharing and implementation support, particularly in Africa. Financing combined regular budget resources with substantial extra-budgetary contributions from development partners, including Norway and other bilateral and multilateral partners that supported different phases of global skills programming.

While operational management increasingly involved the Africa Skills Hub, strategic oversight of skills policy, normative development, knowledge generation and implementation of the Strategy remained anchored within the SKILLS Branch at headquarters. The Programme therefore operated through a distributed governance arrangement combining headquarters leadership with regional and country-level implementation support.

C. Global Skills Programme, 2025-26

The Global Skills Programme (2025–2026) (financed by NORAD) represents the next stage in the evolution of the ILO's global skills programming. Building on lessons from previous programme experiences and the initial implementation of the Strategy, it seeks to strengthen alignment between strategic objectives, operational interventions and expected results.

A defining characteristic of the Global Skills Programme is its closer alignment with the architecture of the Strategy. Whereas the Global Programme articulated results primarily through country-level outcomes, the Global Skills Programme organises its priorities and results framework explicitly around the Strategy's five pillars and Theory of Change.

This stronger alignment is intended to improve strategic coherence, facilitate aggregation of results across countries and regions, and strengthen monitoring and reporting against the Strategy's objectives. It also seeks to enhance the visibility of the ILO's contribution to systems change by creating clearer links between interventions, intermediate outcomes and long-term impacts.

At the same time, the Programme retains the flexibility required to operate across diverse national contexts. Country-level interventions continue to be adapted to local priorities, institutional capacities and funding opportunities, while remaining linked to a common strategic framework.

Implementation relies on partnerships with governments, employers' and workers' organizations, development partners, international financial institutions, UN agencies and regional organizations. The Programme therefore combines greater strategic coherence with the adaptive and partnership-based implementation approach that characterises much of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning.

Building on partnerships established through earlier global initiatives, the Programme also seeks to strengthen collaboration with development agencies, international financial institutions, regional organizations and knowledge partners in support of policy dialogue, resource mobilization, dissemination of good practices and scaling of successful approaches.

Partnerships have become an increasingly important feature of the ILO's skills work, supporting policy dialogue, knowledge generation, resource mobilization and implementation. These include collaboration with governments, social partners, development agencies, international financial institutions, UN organizations, regional bodies and specialized technical partners. Through these partnerships, the ILO seeks to leverage complementary expertise, facilitate scaling and promote the integration of skills and lifelong learning within broader development agendas.

The Programme is implemented through collaborative arrangements involving headquarters, the Africa Skills Hub, regional and country offices, as well as external partners. This structure seeks to combine global strategic leadership and knowledge generation with regional support and country-level implementation capacities.

The Global Skills Programme similarly relies on close collaboration between headquarters, the Africa Skills Hub, and relevant country offices. While global strategic leadership and stewardship of the Strategy remain located within the SKILLS Branch, implementation draws on regional structures and partnerships to facilitate knowledge exchange, technical support and learning across countries.

BOX 1: ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE STRATEGY, THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME AND THE GLOBAL SKILLS PROGRAMME

The ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030 articulates change at a **systemic and normative level**, structured around **five strategic pillars** that define the intended *system-level outcomes*, and **five interrelated operational components** that specify *what the ILO will do and how it will act* to support these outcomes. The Strategy's Theory of Change thus clearly distinguishes between **ends** (systemic transformation of skills and lifelong learning systems) and **means** (modalities of ILO action).

The *Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong Learning* served as a broad framework to implement the Strategy across diverse country contexts. Its results framework was articulated primarily through **country-level outcomes**, which were framed around changes in national policies, institutional capacities, coordination mechanisms and service delivery. These outcomes typically **cut across multiple Strategy pillars and operational components**, reflecting an integrative and adaptive approach rather than a direct replication of the Strategy's pillar-based structure. As a result, there is **no one-to-one correspondence** between the Strategy's pillars, its operational components, and the Global Programme's country-level outcomes.

By contrast, the *Global Skills Programme* represents a more recent and more tightly structured programmatic instrument that is **explicitly aligned with the Strategy's conceptual architecture**. Its design mirrors the Strategy's conceptual framework more closely, with programmatic priorities and expected results organised in direct reference to the Strategy's pillars and Theory of Change. In this sense, the Global Skills Programme can be understood as an effort to **re-align programmatic implementation with the Strategy's systemic results framework**, while retaining flexibility for contextual adaptation at country level.

Taken together, these two global instruments illustrate different operational translations of the Strategy:

- ▶ the Global Programme prioritised **contextualisation and aggregation of country-level change**, while
- ▶ the Global Skills Programme emphasises **structural alignment and coherence with the Strategy's pillar-based framework**.

This distinction is relevant for understanding how alignment, contribution and results aggregation are examined in the evaluation, particularly when assessing coherence between global strategic objectives, programmatic design and country-level achievements.

2. REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY DURING THE EVALUATION PERIOD (2022–2026)

This section includes the following chapters:

- ▶ [Strategic alignment and delivery architecture](#)
- ▶ [Implementation patterns and systemic trends since 2022](#)
- ▶ [Positioning of skills and lifelong learning within the ILO and its Programme and Budget framework](#)
- ▶ [Country programme outcomes and the transversal nature of skills and lifelong learning](#)
- ▶ [Scale, distribution and budgetary weight of skills and lifelong learning interventions \(2022 – 25\)](#)

Strategic alignment and delivery architecture

A. Assessment of the strategic framework for skills and lifelong learning

The ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030 sets out an ambitious and conceptually broad institutional framework for the Office's work on skills systems and lifelong learning. Its five pillars cover the main functional dimensions of skills systems which are within the scope of ILO's work: policies, governance and financing; skills needs intelligence; innovative and flexible learning pathways; inclusive skills programmes; and quality apprenticeships and work-based learning. In strategic terms, the Strategy is well aligned with the ILO's mandate, normative role and tripartite

identity, and it positions skills and lifelong learning not simply as a supply driven but as a demand oriented systemic lever for productive employment, just transitions, inclusion and enterprise productivity.

The Strategy is built around a **coherent conceptual proposition: stronger governance, better intelligence, more flexible learning systems, greater inclusion and stronger work-based learning should together contribute to more resilient and inclusive skills systems and better labour-market outcomes**. This is analytically sound and well aligned with the ILO's comparative advantage at the intersection of employment, skills, enterprise development, tripartism and social dialogue. Stakeholders interviewed by the HLE, including ILO staff, constituents and partners, consistently emphasized that the **ILO's comparative advantage in this domain lies primarily in policy advice, institutional and regulatory reform, system development, and its tripartite convening role**. The Organization is particularly valued for its ability to support the development of legal, institutional and financing frameworks for skills systems and their associated support functions, rather than for large-scale delivery of training programmes. This positioning shapes the nature of the operational architecture beyond policies rather than direct training provision at the local level.

The high-level evaluation identified that, **since 2023, the Strategy has helped to structure and improve the articulation and delivery of skills-related interventions vis-à-vis constituents and partners**. However, while the Strategy provides a clear conceptual framework for action, the extent to which it actively governs operational decision-making, resource allocation and programmatic prioritization across the Office appears uneven. While these issues are discussed in greater detail in [Part 3](#), the evidence reviewed by the evaluation suggests that **the Strategy has not yet been supported by a fully developed results architecture capable of systematically tracking progress towards its longer-term objectives**. The Strategy was accompanied by a Plan of Action covering the period 2022–25, which provided operational guidance through the biennial planning cycle. However, the evaluation found less evidence of a longer-term roadmap extending to 2030 with agreed milestones, indicators and mechanisms for monitoring cumulative progress across implementation periods.

In this regard, **the Strategy appears more a direction-setting vision and policy framing instrument than as an operational management framework**. There is no clearly articulated strategy-level results chain with agreed indicators, or an implementation road map with baselines, milestones and reporting responsibilities that would allow the Office or the Governing Body to assess on a recurring basis whether implementation is on track, where results are strongest and where corrective action is needed. Its **limited measurability and systematic performance tracking of the Strategy itself is missing**. While this is identified as a limitation from an evaluative and accountability perspective, this reflects, to some extent, the Strategy's intended nature as a high-level guidance document designed to set direction and priorities rather than function as a detailed implementation framework, as confirmed in stakeholder consultations.

Without a defined monitoring framework for implementation, the Strategy risks remaining primarily a reference document rather than a living management instrument guiding evidence-based decision-making, which helps prioritization and performance tracking across the Office. This has important implications for strategic steering. **Without stronger implementation and monitoring architecture, it becomes difficult to use evidence to determine whether observed intervention patterns reflect deliberate strategic prioritization or the aggregation of multiple independently developed initiatives responding to donor opportunities, regional dynamics and country demand**. From an evaluative perspective, this distinction between conceptual guidance and operational steering is significant. **A strategy may successfully articulate principles and priorities yet still have limited influence over the allocation of resources and the configuration of programmes if its implementation mechanisms are not clearly embedded in corporate planning and reporting systems**. The emergence of broader corporate initiatives such as the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions further reinforces the need for a clearer strategy-level monitoring and reporting framework

BOX 2. THE GLOBAL ACCELERATOR AND THE STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF SKILLS

Launched in 2021 by the United Nations Secretary-General, the **Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions** seeks to support countries in accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals through integrated investments in employment creation, skills development and social protection. The initiative brings together governments, UN agencies, development banks, social partners and other stakeholders around nationally owned pathways that combine economic transformation with social inclusion and decent work.

Skills development and lifelong learning are positioned as one of the key enabling pillars of the Accelerator. The initiative recognises that just transitions, digital transformation, demographic change and climate adaptation require large-scale investments in reskilling, upskilling and workforce development. The ILO plays a leading role in the Accelerator and contributes through its normative mandate, technical expertise and support to skills systems, labour market governance and social dialogue.

From the perspective of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy, the Global Accelerator represents an important opportunity to position skills more centrally within broader employment, productivity and social protection agendas. However, interviews conducted for this evaluation suggest that links between the Strategy and the Accelerator are not yet systematically reflected in planning, monitoring and reporting systems. As a result, **while many skills-related interventions contribute directly to Accelerator objectives, the extent of these contributions is not easily visible through existing strategy-level monitoring arrangements.**

In practice, the figures on implementation progress presented in this report were traced indirectly by the evaluation team through the ILO's P&B architecture, CPOs and project portfolio altogether, rather than through a strategy-specific accountability system. This is an important limitation, because it means that evidence on implementation must be reconstructed ex-post from dispersed institutional and project data sources rather than being generated by the Strategy's own governance and monitoring mechanism.

BOX 3. THE ILO SERVICE TRACKER

Purpose and objective: The ILO Service Tracker was developed under the outcome-based financing arrangement with NORAD as a tool to monitor beneficiary-level outcomes from capacity-building and skills development interventions. Managed by the ILO Regional Office in Abidjan, it surveys training beneficiaries on a voluntary basis three and six months after programme completion to assess how training has contributed to changes in their lives, such as improved access to employment. In addition to a set of core questions applicable across interventions, project teams can adapt the survey by adding context-specific questions to reflect the objectives of individual projects. The tracker has also been applied in several large-scale skills programmes to streamline beneficiary data collection and monitor labour market outcomes through a common indicator.

Institutional ambition: Since the 2024–25 biennium, the ILO (PROGRAM) has been working to institutionalize the Service Tracker as a standard mechanism for tracking beneficiaries and measuring the short- to medium-term results of training and capacity-building initiatives across the organization. The intention is for the tool to provide a consistent institutional approach to capturing outcomes beyond immediate training outputs and to strengthen results measurement across the skills portfolio.

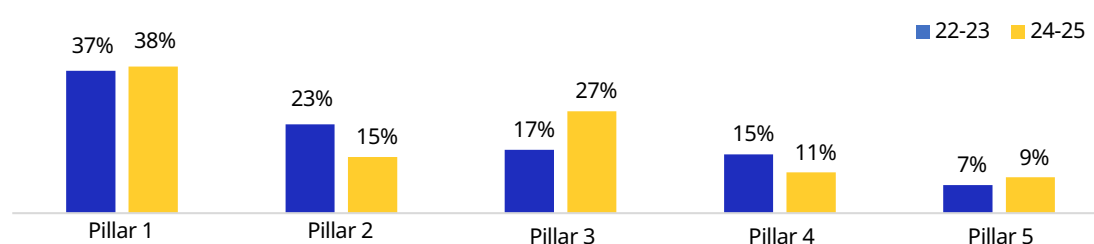
Current situation: However, evaluation evidence indicates that institutional uptake remains uneven. At the time of the High-Level Evaluation, adoption varied considerably across projects and regions, and many project teams were either unaware of the tool or had decided not to use it, for example because they considered beneficiaries difficult to reach through an online survey, for which SMS may be used to notify participants and share the survey link. Moreover, because participation is voluntary, findings are limited to beneficiaries who consent to be contacted and remain reachable after training, creating potential response bias. These factors reduce the comparability and aggregation of data across interventions.

As a result, **while the Service Tracker represents a promising institutional mechanism for monitoring beneficiary outcomes and strengthening evidence on the longer-term effects of ILO-supported skills interventions, its current level of implementation does not yet provide a comprehensive or representative picture of results across the global skills portfolio.**

B. Implementation predominantly oriented towards skills development

The available evidence suggests that **some dimensions of the Strategy, particularly governance reform, employability and institutional strengthening, occupy a much more prominent operational position within the body of interventions than others**, including financing systems and labour market intelligence. Figure 2 shows that Pillar 1 (focused on policies, governance and financing) was the most commonly reflected in CPO deliverables in both biennia. The relative representation of the other pillars varied between biennia, with Pillars 2 and 4 appearing less frequently in 2024–25 and Pillars 3 and 5 somewhat more frequently. These patterns should be interpreted with caution, as the pillars are closely interconnected and individual CPOs may contribute to several dimensions of the Strategy.

FIGURE 2. SHARE OF ACTIVITIES TARGETING EACH PILLAR OF THE STRATEGY (2022-2025)



Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

The distribution should therefore not be interpreted as a direct measure of implementation progress across pillars, but rather as an indication of how different dimensions of the Strategy are reflected in reported CPO deliverables. A further observation emerging from the programme base analysis concerns the **relative balance between skills development and lifelong learning in the ILO's operational work**. While the Strategy explicitly frames the agenda as “skills and lifelong learning”, the HLE analysis of CPOs suggests that **96% of interventions implemented since 2022 are primarily oriented toward skills development, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and work-based learning systems**. Explicit lifelong learning approaches, understood as policies and institutional arrangements supporting continuous learning across the life course, including adult learning systems, reskilling and upskilling pathways beyond initial training, appear less visible in the intervention landscape, although reskilling, upskilling and adult learning are often embedded within broader skills, anticipation and transition interventions, as illustrated by Moldova. In this regard, across the 22-23 P&B, the CPO analysis found that among the 721 relevant deliverables, only 4.2% included “lifelong learning” in the description, and only 0.7% of activities focused solely on lifelong learning. Similarly, among the 495 unique deliverables in 24-25, 3.8% explicitly mention lifelong learning but only 0.6% of deliverables focuses on lifelong learning.

While elements of lifelong learning are present across a range of interventions, dedicated institutional mechanisms, financing models and large-scale programmes explicitly framed around lifelong learning remain comparatively limited. Consultations with ILO staff suggest that this imbalance partly reflects issues of conceptual framing and visibility, as **several interventions incorporate elements of reskilling, upskilling, workplace learning or adult training without necessarily identifying them explicitly under a lifelong learning framework**.

C. Implementation landscape characterized by fragmentation and coordination challenges: limited internal coherence

Available evidence suggests a situation in which **the ILO's engagement in skills and lifelong learning is both extensive and institutionally significant, yet only partially structured and effectively covered by the Strategy itself**. Moreover, skills interventions are implemented through a wide range of projects, funding arrangements and institutional channels that are not always directly connected or held together by the Strategy framework and action plan.

Within this broader landscape, **the GSP represents an important institutional vehicle for structuring part of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning**. The programme has provided a recognizable platform for mobilizing development cooperation resources, coordinating selected activities and giving visibility to the Strategy in donor and programme discussions. While significant, the programming landscape analysis indicates that the GSP constitutes only one component of a much broader set of skills and lifelong learning interventions implemented across the Organization. While the programme contributed to both skills development and selected lifelong learning objectives, particularly through RPL, reskilling and systems-oriented reforms, a substantial share of the ILO's wider skills and lifelong learning work continued to be implemented outside the GSP framework. The section on the effectiveness of the ILO in achieving results provides critical findings in this area.

Several factors help explain this dispersed implementation landscape. First, skills and lifelong learning interventions are delivered primarily through development cooperation projects, which account for the vast majority of resources devoted to this area of work. These **interventions are often designed in response to specific donor priorities, country demands and funding opportunities rather than through a single centrally managed implementation framework**. Second, the **Strategy was conceived as a corporate framework intended to guide a broad range of interventions rather than as a dedicated programme with its own implementation structure, budget and accountability mechanisms**. Third, regular budget resources available for strategic management, knowledge management, monitoring and cross-country coordination remain limited relative to the scale and diversity of the portfolio. Together, these factors help explain why implementation has expanded significantly while mechanisms for strategic oversight, consolidation and results aggregation have developed more gradually.

Interviews and evaluation evidence also point to important staffing and technical capacity constraints affecting the quality, consistency and scale of implementation across countries and regions. Several ILO staff described **a growing mismatch between the breadth and ambition of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy and the human resources available to support it across HQ, regional and country levels**. This situation is partly explained by the strong influence of donor priorities and the limited availability of regular budget resources, which shape both the volume of activities undertaken and the institutional capacity available to support them. As a result, much of the technical expertise underpinning implementation is project-funded and linked to specific interventions, with staffing arrangements often driven by project requirements and donor priorities rather than by the longer-term needs of the Strategy as a whole. While this model has enabled the ILO to expand its operational reach, it has also created challenges for continuity, knowledge management and the sustained provision of technical support across countries and regions.

Evidence further suggests that the implementation landscape relies heavily on development cooperation projects and short-term technical arrangements, resulting in a highly dispersed implementation model contributing to uneven operational continuity. Interviewed stakeholders referred to strong dependence on consultants, project-funded positions and ad hoc technical support, particularly in highly specialized areas such as skills anticipation, statistics, green transition and digital transformation. While this model allows flexibility and operational expansion, it can also limit continuity of technical expertise, institutional memory and long-term support to constituents, particularly in highly specialized areas such as skills anticipation, green transition and digital transformation. In practice, **the scale of the ILO's current operational engagement in skills often exceeds the Organization's consolidated staffing and technical support architecture**.

Implementation patterns and systemic trends since 2022

The analysis presented in this section is structured around the five components of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy and the implementation priorities set out in the accompanying [Action Plan \(2022–2025\)](#)

Since the adoption of the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030 in 2022, the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning has increasingly emphasized governance, institutional coordination and system-level reforms within an approach that was already broadly systems-oriented. The Strategy has reinforced attention to the institutional arrangements, stakeholder relationships and policy coherence mechanisms that shape how skills systems function, alongside more traditional interventions focused on employability, training provision and workforce development. Across the 2022–23 and 2024–25 biennia, implementation increasingly focused on strengthening the institutional foundations of skills systems, embedding lifelong learning within labour market and development policies, and supporting transitions associated with digitalization, green transformation, demographic change, migration and economic restructuring. This growing emphasis was reflected in interventions aimed at strengthening governance arrangements, qualifications systems, skills anticipation mechanisms, sectoral coordination platforms and other institutional features that influence the performance and responsiveness of skills systems.

For analytical purposes, in the following section implementation patterns are examined across three interconnected levels. The macro level focuses on policy frameworks, governance arrangements, institutional structures and enabling environments that shape skills systems. The meso-level examines the capacities and performance of institutions and stakeholders responsible for delivering skills and lifelong learning services. The micro level considers the effects of interventions on final beneficiaries, including individuals, enterprises and their employment, productivity and livelihood outcomes.

A. Macro-level: policy, governance and system reform - implementation progress since 2022

At the macro-level (i.e., policies, governance, institutions), the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning continued to focus on strengthening policy, governance and normative frameworks linked to labour-market transformation, productivity, inclusion and transition agendas. Implementation concentrated on **governance reform, policy coherence, qualifications frameworks, apprenticeship regulation, social dialogue and the integration of skills into broader employment, industrial, digital and green transition strategies**. A major institutional milestone was the adoption and operationalization of the ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030, which provides the legitimacy and the Organization's overarching framework for action in this area. Another critical milestone was the adoption of the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208), which guides members on apprenticeship governance, financing, quality assurance, inclusion and social dialogue, and is an important normative reference point for apprenticeship reforms and work-based learning. These create additional demand from members for services, technical assistance, capacity building, and potentially funding at country level.

During the 2022–23 biennium, the ILO reported 97 achieved results under Outcome 5, exceeding the biennial target by 23 per cent. These included support to six countries in developing or implementing inclusive national skills and lifelong learning strategies; support to six Member States in strengthening governance and financing arrangements for skills systems; strengthening of skills anticipation and matching systems in 21 countries; and support to institutionalized skills measurement and monitoring systems in nine Member States. Country-level reporting also points to concrete governance and reform achievements. Examples include the development of a roadmap for a National Qualifications Framework in Panama; reviews of TVET governance systems in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines; and the integration of skills considerations into transition-related policies associated with digitalization and environmental sustainability.

In the 2024–25 biennium, the ILO reported support to skills and lifelong learning systems in 30 countries, while the operationalization of the Africa Skills Hub reflected efforts to strengthen regional coordination, policy cooperation and institutional capacity-building through the Global Skills Programme.

A key instrument supporting these efforts was the Skills for Trade and Economic Diversification (STED) methodology, which was implemented in 19 countries. STED brings together governments, employers' and workers' organizations and other stakeholders to identify strategic sectors with employment and growth potential, analyse current and future skills needs, and inform sectoral skills, employment and economic development policies. As such, its primary contribution lies in strengthening governance, coordination and evidence-based planning rather than in direct service delivery to workers or enterprises.

B. Meso-level: institutions, labour-market intelligence and delivery systems - implementation progress since 2022

At the **meso**-level, the analysis focuses on the institutions, intermediary structures and delivery systems that translate policy objectives into practice. This includes the capacities of social partners, training institutions and public agencies, as well as labour market intelligence systems, qualifications frameworks, RPL arrangements, sector skills bodies and other mechanisms that influence the relevance, quality and responsiveness of skills provision.

At the meso-level, implementation increasingly concentrated on strengthening the institutional infrastructure linking policy frameworks with labour-market outcomes. Across the evaluation period, the ILO expanded support to **TVET governance systems, labour-market intelligence mechanisms, qualifications systems, recognition processes, apprenticeship delivery systems and institutional capacity-building**.

The Programme reporting during the 2022–23 biennium also indicated that approximately 3,500 representatives of governments, employers' organizations, workers' organizations and training institutions strengthened their capacities through ILO-supported training and institutional support activities. In parallel, Recommendation No. 208 and subsequent policy guidance reinforced technical support to apprenticeship governance, quality assurance and work-based learning systems.

Reporting for the 2024–25 biennium further suggests continued scaling-up of institutional approaches through qualifications systems, labour-market observatories, apprenticeship reforms, institutional capacity-building and regional coordination mechanisms linked to the Global Skills Programme and the Africa Skills Hub. The evidence also suggests that the ILO's comparative advantage increasingly resided not in direct training delivery itself, but in strengthening the institutional architecture through which training systems operate, coordinate and adapt to labour-market transformation.

C. Micro-level: individuals, workers and enterprises - implementation progress since 2022

At this level, implementation focused on improving opportunities and outcomes for final beneficiaries, including workers, jobseekers, young people, entrepreneurs and enterprises. While these target groups remained broadly consistent with earlier periods of ILO skills programming, the evaluation found growing attention to migrants, refugees, displaced populations and host communities, reflecting the increasing integration of skills interventions within migration, crisis-response and resilience-building agendas. RPL, employability support and skills development programmes frequently served as entry points for labour market integration and economic inclusion among these groups.

At the **micro**-level, implementation evidence indicates that the ILO continued supporting workers, learners, enterprises and vulnerable groups through **technical and vocational education and training, employability support, work-based learning and reskilling initiatives linked to labour-market integration and transition processes**. During the 2022–23 biennium, ILO-supported skills programmes reportedly reached approximately 436,780 direct beneficiaries across 14

Member States, including around 225,000 young people in Ukraine who continued TVET through Professional Education Online.

Across the evaluation period, interventions continued targeting youth employment, women's labour-market participation, transitions from informality, inclusion of persons with disabilities, migrant and refugee populations, and adaptation to technological and environmental change. The evidence also suggests increasing integration of lifelong learning into broader inclusion, resilience and transition agendas, particularly in contexts affected by displacement, labour-market restructuring and economic vulnerability.

At enterprise level, interventions increasingly linked skills development to productivity, competitiveness, resilience and sector transformation, particularly in contexts associated with green transition, digitalization and changing production systems.

Sectoral skills programmes and labour market transition initiatives aimed not only to improve workers' employability, but also to strengthen enterprises' capacity to adapt to changing production requirements, technological change and evolving labour-market demands. Overall, the evidence suggests that direct training and employability support remained important throughout the evaluation period but were increasingly embedded within broader labour-market transition, inclusion and resilience agendas rather than implemented as isolated training activities.

D. Overall key pattern from the 2022–25: skills systems as interconnected institutional ecosystems

This **macro-meso-micro** implementation pattern illustrates **the increasingly systemic logic underpinning the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning**. Across the evaluation period, the Organization progressively moved away from viewing **skills primarily as a discrete training sector and toward understanding skills systems as interconnected institutional ecosystems linked to employment policy, enterprise development, labour-market governance and social inclusion**.

In practice, interventions continued to combine policy advice, institutional strengthening, social dialogue, labour-market intelligence, delivery reform and inclusion measures within broader reform packages. What became more prominent during the evaluation period was the stronger emphasis on governance arrangements, tripartite and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms, sector skills bodies, and policy coherence across institutions and ministries. This reflects a growing focus on the institutional conditions that enable skills systems to function effectively, beyond the development of policies and technical solutions alone.

In addition, the evidence suggests that the Strategy contributed to expanding the visibility and institutional **positioning of skills and lifelong learning within the wider ILO agenda, particularly through stronger integration with transition, inclusion and productivity frameworks**. However, implementation remains uneven across pillars, regions and intervention types. The evaluation found that governance reform, institutional strengthening and employability-related interventions occupied a more prominent operational position during the evaluation period than financing systems, adult lifelong learning structures and long-term implementation sustainability. This does not necessarily indicate an intended imbalance in the Strategy itself. Rather, it reflects differences in constituent demand, funding availability, institutional readiness and the varying levels of maturity of the ILO's technical approaches across different areas of work. Nevertheless, the relative concentration of resources and attention in certain domains has implications for the extent to which all dimensions of the Strategy are being advanced in a balanced manner.

In addition, the evidence suggests that the Strategy contributed to expanding the visibility and institutional positioning of skills and lifelong learning within the wider ILO agenda, particularly through stronger integration with transition, inclusion and productivity frameworks. This built on earlier ILO methodologies and approaches, including STED, which had already helped position skills within broader discussions on productivity, economic diversification, sector development and employment policy. During the evaluation period, these linkages became increasingly visible across a wider range of skills interventions.

The resulting implementation landscape is therefore both extensive and strategically significant, but also unevenly consolidated and only partially integrated into a unified strategic management and monitoring architecture. Part 3 of this report provides critical findings in these areas.

Positioning of skills and lifelong learning within the ILO and its Programme and Budget framework

The institutional positioning of skills and lifelong learning within the P&B architecture is significant, although the way it is structured has been changing across biennia. This evolution is reflected within the P&B framework and in the nature of the interventions implemented during the evaluation period.

In the 2022–23 biennium, skills and lifelong learning were organized under a dedicated Outcome 5, with four outputs covering skills anticipation, governance and financing, innovative learning options and digital transitions. In the 2024–25 biennium the architecture changed, with skills and lifelong learning being located primarily under Outcome 3 and especially Output 3.2 on inclusive, sustainable and resilient skills and lifelong learning systems. (Table 6)

TABLE 6. POSITIONING OF SKILLS IN THE 22-23 AND 24-25 BIENNIA

2022-23 PROGRAMME AND BUDGET	2024-25 PROGRAMME AND BUDGET
One dedicated Outcome on skills and lifelong learning, namely Outcome 5: Skills and lifelong learning to facilitate access to and transitions in the labour market. Under this outcome, expected progress is divided into the following outputs: ► Output 5.1. Increased capacity of Member States to identify current skills mismatches and anticipate future skills needs (linked with Pillar 2 of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy) ► Output 5.2. Increased capacity of Member States to strengthen inclusive skills and lifelong learning policies, governance models and financing systems (linked with Pillar 1 and 4 of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy) ► Output 5.3. Increased capacity of Member States to design and deliver innovative, flexible and inclusive learning options, encompassing work-based learning and quality apprenticeships (linked with Pillars 1, 4 and 5 of the strategy) ► Output 5.4. Increased capacity of Member States to support digital transitions of skills development systems and develop digital skills (linked to Pillar 3 of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy)	Outcome 3 <i>Full and productive employment for just transitions</i> and particularly under Output 3.2. Increased capacity of Member States to develop inclusive, sustainable and resilient skills and lifelong learning systems. The activities foreseen under Output 3.2 included all five Strategy pillars, including national-level capacity and frameworks for skills and lifelong learning; skills needs anticipation; financing mechanisms; innovative systems for quality apprenticeships; flexible skills, reskilling and upskilling systems; and access of disadvantaged groups to skills systems, particularly core work skills.

Source: ILO P&B 22-20 and 24-25

Note: The linkages between P&B outputs and Strategy pillars are indicative rather than exclusive, as individual outputs and interventions may contribute to several interconnected pillars.

The shift from a dedicated Outcome 5 in 2022–23 to Output 3.2 under Outcome 3 in 2024–25 illustrates the **increasingly transversal positioning of skills and lifelong learning within the ILO results architecture**. While this integration reflects the close links between skills, employment, productivity and transitions, it also means that a significant share of skills-related work is reported through outputs that are not explicitly identified as skills outputs in the results framework. As a result, understanding the full scale and distribution of implementation requires analysis beyond the core skills result area.

In the 2022–23 period, performance under Outcome 5 (Skills and lifelong learning) was reported as exceeding expectations (from 97 targets for 14 member states), with reported results pointing at both the scale of programme delivery and the ILO's ability to respond to emerging crises while maintaining support for broader skills development objectives. In 2024–25, reported results reflect

a shift towards institutional and policy-level achievements, showing scale, and concentrating resources on the set-up of the African Skills Hub for more outreach (see Table 7).

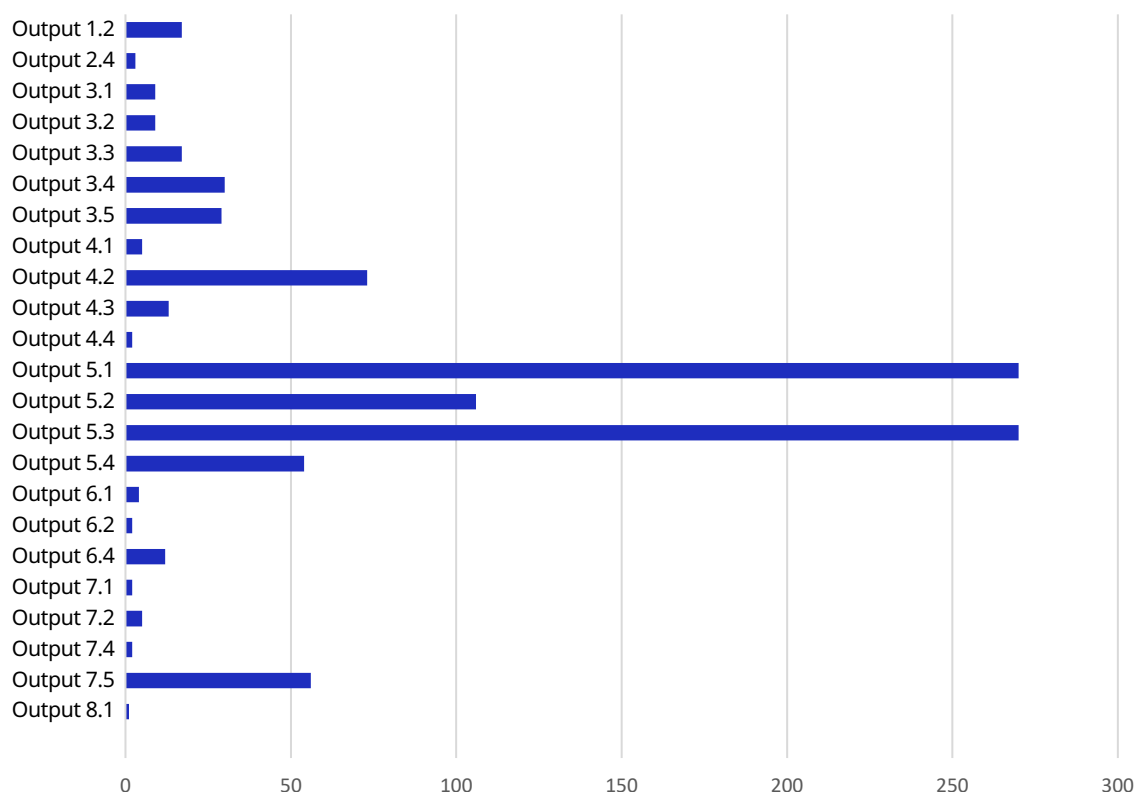
TABLE 7. REPORTED RESULTS PER BIENNIA (PIR 2025 AND 2026)

PERIOD / PIR	SKILLS RESULT AREA	REPORTED RESULTS (KEY HIGHLIGHTS)
2022–23 PIR, published 2024	Outcome 5: Skills and lifelong learning	97 results; 436,780 direct beneficiaries in 14 Member States; 225,000 young people in Ukraine continued TVET through Professional Education Online; 3,500 constituent representatives trained.
2024–25 PIR, published 2026	Output 3.2: inclusive, sustainable and resilient skills and lifelong learning systems	79 results; ILO reports operationalizing the Africa Skills Hub and supporting skills and lifelong learning systems in 42 countries. The related Programme and Budget target for 3.2 included 700,000 beneficiaries of skills and lifelong learning services.

Source: ILO Programme Implementation Report, 2022 – 25

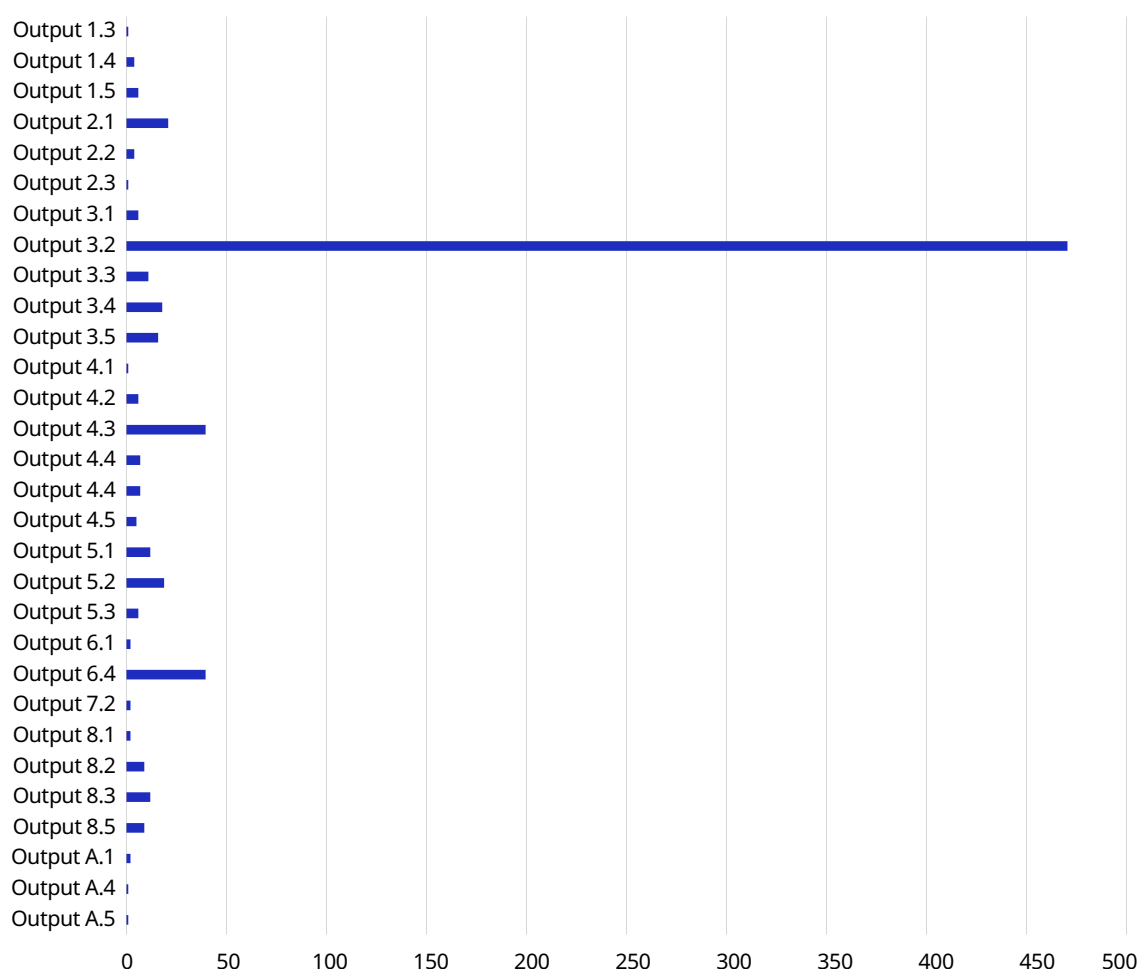
However, the analysis of CPOs conducted by the evaluation illustrates the transversal nature of skills and lifelong learning, with activities and results cutting across several P&B outputs (see Figures 3 and 4).

FIGURE 3. NUMBER OF SKILLS AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING DELIVERABLES PER P&B OUTPUT IN THE 22-23 P&B



Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

FIGURE 4. NUMBER OF SKILLS DELIVERABLES PER P&B OUTPUT IN THE 24-25 P&B



Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

With respect to skills and lifelong learning working transversally, this dispersion is not inherently problematic; indeed, it reflects the cross-cutting nature of skills. However, it does **complicate strategic oversight and monitoring of effectiveness and progress**. At the same time, Figures 3 and 4 suggest greater consolidation of skills-related reporting in 2024–25 compared with 2022–23, indicating a positive evolution in the visibility of skills within the P&B results architecture. The strategy, which is meant to unify the Office's work on skills and lifelong learning, is being implemented through a results architecture in which a significant part of that work is coded, reported and justified under other outputs. This creates a situation in which the strategic narrative of coherence contrasts with an operational reality characterized by dispersion across multiple corporate reporting categories. From a strategic management perspective, this weakens visibility over how resources, activities and results are distributed across pillars and regions and limits the Office's ability to assess whether the set of interventions is evolving in a balanced and strategically coherent manner. It also constrains the ability of the Skills Branch and other corporate oversight functions to systematically monitor implementation progress, aggregate results across interventions and promote consistent reporting and accountability for contributions to the Strategy across the Organization.

In practice, **assembling a comprehensive picture of implementation and financial delivery requires manual consolidation of information across project and programme reporting systems, suggesting that strategic visibility remains partial**. From an evaluation perspective, this fragmentation makes it more difficult to determine whether observed results stem from deliberate strategic prioritization or from the aggregation of multiple independent initiatives across

the Organization. Stakeholder feedback indicates that this fragmentation is not only a function of internal strategic alignment but is also strongly shaped by external factors, particularly donor earmarking practices and the demand-driven nature of ILO programming, which limit the extent to which interventions can be consolidated under unified strategic frameworks.

Country programme outcomes and the transversal nature of skills and lifelong learning

The analysis of CPOs conducted by the HLE confirms that **skills and lifelong learning is both a standalone thematic field and a cross-cutting enabler of results across multiple areas of ILO work**. Relevant deliverables are linked not only to specific skills-related CPOs but also to broader employment, enterprise, migration, protection and social dialogue outcomes. As reflected in Table 8, thematically, the CPO range of interventions spans skills development, TVET and lifelong learning, employment policy and labour-market governance, enterprise development and informality, protection of vulnerable groups and migration, and institutional capacity of social partners in 2022–23; and in 2024–25 it continues to connect strongly to employment creation and policy, skills development and employability, institutional capacity and social dialogue, and protection and rights.

TABLE 8. THEMES OF CPOS ADDRESSED BY SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING DELIVERABLES IN 22-23 AND 24-25

2022-2023 BIENNIUM	2024-2025 BIENNIUM
1. Skills Development, TVET, and Lifelong Learning The vast majority of CPOs include direct references to these core skills topics. Topics include skills Anticipation; Digital and Green Transitions; Apprenticeships; TVET Reform.	A. Employment Creation and Policy (The most frequent category) Topics include national employment and decent work frameworks; their Operationalization; Economic Recovery; Policy coherence; Sustainable Enterprises and decent work.
2. Employment Policy and Labour Market Governance Topics include National Employment Policies; Labour Market Information (LMIS); and Employment Services.	B. Skills Development and Employability Topics include inclusion; Market Alignment; TVET & Apprenticeships:
3. Enterprise Development and Informality Topics include Entrepreneurship (especially for youth and women); formalization; and sustainable MSMEs.	C. Institutional Capacity and Social Dialogue Topics include constituent Strengthening and Tripartism
4. Protection of Vulnerable Groups and Migration Topics include labour migration; Fundamental Rights and child labour; crisis recovery.	D. Protection and Rights Topics include Vulnerable Groups, Non-Discrimination, Violence and Harassment
5. Institutional Capacity of Social Partners Strengthening the core actors of social dialogue.	

Source: HLE-led assessment of CPOs against which skills deliverables were reported.

This reinforces a key analytical point for the evaluation. The ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning is not confined to a narrow sectoral lane. It is structurally embedded in a wider employment and decent work agenda. That is a strength in terms of relevance and potential systemic leverage for the ILO as an agency which promotes decent work. But it also creates a measurement challenge. When skills and lifelong learning are everywhere, it can become difficult to determine where the Strategy is actually driving decisions, where this work is simply part of broader project design, and where reported results can reasonably be attributed to a strategy-led institutional effort.

This creates a risk that strategic ownership becomes diffuse. When skills interventions are embedded across multiple thematic domains and reporting categories without a dedicated strategy-level accountability framework and dedicated staffing for programming, documentation and monitoring, it becomes more difficult to distinguish between deliberate implementation of the Strategy and the broader expansion of skills-related activities across the Office.

The regional distribution of deliverables also shows marked geographical concentration. In Africa, the 22-23 biennium saw deliverables reported against 79 CPOs. The CPOs addressed through skills deliverables in Africa in 22-23 related to skills development and employability; institutional capacity; youth and women's empowerment; employment policy and planning and entrepreneurship and enterprise development.

In the 24-25 biennium, 76 relevant CPOs were identified, related to youth and women's empowerment, skills development and employability, enterprise and SME development and institutional capacity and social dialogue. The following countries reported the most deliverables during both biennia. Duplicates (e.g. activities reported twice under different funding sources) are removed, presenting only the number of unique activities.

TABLE 9. AFRICAN COUNTRIES WITH MOST SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING DELIVERABLES ACROSS BOTH BIENNIA (TOP 5)

22-23 BIENNIUM	24-25 BIENNIUM
Ethiopia	South Africa
South Africa	Tanzania
Morocco	Kenya
Egypt	Cote D'Ivoire
Algeria	Ethiopia

Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

Latin America and the Caribbean saw 34 relevant CPOs in the 2022-23 biennium. The CPOs that skills deliverables are reported against were related TVET and skills development (most common), Employment Policy, Formalization, and Social Protection, Labour migration and mobility, Rights, inclusion and gender equality and Institutional capacity.

In the 24-25 biennium, skills deliverables were reported against 32 CPOs. In this biennium, the CPOs more explicitly referred to skills themselves, notably: Skills Anticipation and Gap Analysis, Strengthening TVET and Lifelong Learning Systems, Apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning (WBL), Inclusion, Gender Equality, and Vulnerable Groups and Institutional capacity. The following countries reported the most deliverables during both biennia.

TABLE 10. LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES WITH MOST SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING DELIVERABLES ACROSS BOTH BIENNIA (TOP 5)

22-23 BIENNIUM	24-25 BIENNIUM
Inter American Region	Inter American Region
Costa Rica	Belize
Panama	Brazil
Central America Regional	Costa Rica
Colombia	Jamaica

Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

In the **Arab States**, for the 22-23 biennium, thirteen relevant CPOs were identified, covering skills development and employability, support for refugees and vulnerable groups, institutional capacity and governance and entrepreneurship and SME development. In the 24-25 biennium, 22 relevant CPOs were identified, with deliverables related to employment policies and frameworks, skills and training, inclusion and gender and enterprise and SME development. The following countries reported the most deliverables during both biennia (duplicates removed).

TABLE 11. COUNTRIES FROM THE ARAB STATES REGION WITH MOST SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING DELIVERABLES ACROSS BOTH BIENNIA (TOP 5)

22-23 BIENNIUM	24-25 BIENNIUM
Lebanon	Iraq
Jordan	Jordan
Saudi Arabia	Lebanon
Arab States regional	Palestine
Yemen	Saudi Arabia

Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

In **Asia and the Pacific**, 38 CPOs in 22-23 were identified, with deliverables associated with employability of youth and vulnerable groups, enterprise and Entrepreneurship Development, transition to formality, OSH and working conditions and institutional capacity. In the 24-25 biennium, 37 relevant CPOs were found, linked to protection of Vulnerable Workers & Fundamental Rights, skills development and the 4th industrial revolution, employment and migration policies, enterprise development and formality and institutional capacity. The following countries reported the most deliverables during both biennia (duplicates removed).

TABLE 12. ASIA AND THE PACIFIC COUNTRIES WITH MOST SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING DELIVERABLES ACROSS BOTH BIENNIA (TOP 5)

22-23 BIENNIUM	24-25 BIENNIUM
Regional	Bangladesh
Bangladesh	Pakistan
Indonesia	China
Cambodia	Cambodia
India	Indonesia

Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

In 2022-23, **Europe and Central Asia** reported the implementation of skills deliverables, covering 21 CPOs. Global themes were institutional capacity of constituents, employment policy and labour market services, skills development and TVET and sustainable enterprise development. The 24-25 biennium, fifteen CPOs were found with topics nearly the same as the previous biennium, with a bit more focus on rights at work and gender equality. The following countries reported the most deliverables during both biennia (duplicates removed).

TABLE 13. EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA COUNTRIES WITH MOST SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING DELIVERABLES ACROSS BOTH BIENNIA (TOP 5)

22-23 BIENNIUM	24-25 BIENNIUM
Ukraine	Ukraine
Russia	Moldova
Moldova	Serbia
Azerbaijan	Montenegro
North-Macedonia	Albania

Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

The uneven geography of implementation points to a model of implementation shaped by both strategic and operational factors. In the case of skills and lifelong learning, **the operational geography of the Strategy reflects institutional priorities and regional demand, as well as differences in donor interest, country office capacity and availability of financing opportunities.**

Scale, distribution and budgetary weight of ILO skills and lifelong learning interventions (2022 – 25)

The implementation of the Strategy relied largely on existing Skills Branch capacities, regional and country-level staff, development cooperation projects and a limited number of pooled funding mechanisms, notably the Global Skills Programme. This context is important for understanding both the achievements and the constraints identified throughout the evaluation.

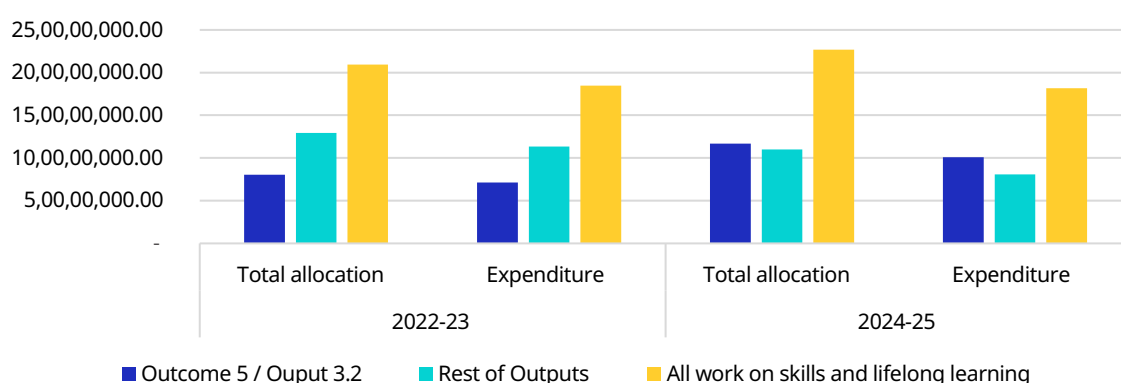
BUDGETARY ALLOCATION AND EXPENDITURE, 2022 – 25

As regards resources, the available evidence suggests that a substantial share of skills-related funding continues to be channelled through the core skills and lifelong learning related outcome 5 (in 2022 – 23) and output 3.2 (in 2024-25). However, a significant volume of skills-related interventions and associated resources is also implemented and reported through other outputs, reflecting the **transversal nature of skills across the ILO's programme architecture**.

The analysis of resource allocation and expenditure conducted by the HLE using official institutional financial information shows that **skills and lifelong learning interventions represent a large and financially significant domain of ILO activity**⁹. Across the 2022–23 and 2024–25 biennia, the ILO invested a cumulative USD 436.1 million in skills and lifelong learning-related interventions¹⁰, of which USD 366.1 million was expended, representing an overall implementation rate of approximately 84 per cent. Of this:

- ▶ Resources dedicated specifically to **Outcome 5 in 2022 – 23 and Output 3.2 (2024 – 25)** amounted to USD 197.0 million in allocations and USD 172.2 million in expenditures over the period. Moreover, funding for Outcome 5/Output 3.2 increased substantially between biennia, with allocations rising from USD 80.3 million in 2022–23 to USD 116.7 million in 2024–25, while expenditures increased from USD 71.4 million to USD 100.9 million (Figure 5). These trends indicate both the scale of the ILO's overall investment in skills and lifelong learning and the growing concentration of resources within the dedicated skills outcome area over time.
- ▶ **Other outcomes and outputs:** across the two biennia, these interventions received cumulative allocations of USD 239.1 million and expenditures of USD 193.9 million, representing 55 per cent and 53 per cent of total skills-related resources, respectively.

FIGURE 5. BUDGET ALLOCATION AND EXPENDITURE 2022-25 (IN USD)



Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

While Outcome 5/Output 3.2 accounted for an increasing share of the skills and lifelong learning portfolio from 2022 to 2025, a **larger proportion of investments continued to be channelled through other outputs**. Although not reported under the dedicated skills outcome, these investments contributed to skills development through related areas such as employment promotion, enterprise development, protection at work, social dialogue and social protection. The continued significance of these expenditures highlights the cross-cutting nature of skills within

⁹ An ad-hoc analysis of resource allocation and expenditure was conducted by the HLE team using the ILO official data dashboard, namely the ILO outcome-based work planning

¹⁰ This is a cumulative figure encompassing XBDC, RBSC and RBTC. It does not include RB staff costs.

the ILO's programme architecture and suggests that a considerable share of skills-related work is embedded within broader decent work objectives rather than captured solely under the dedicated skills result area.

The funding structure from 2022 to 2025 remained highly consistent across the two biennia, with **implementation largely financed through extra-budgetary development cooperation resources (XBDC)**. More concretely:

- ▶ **XBDC** accounted for 95 per cent of both allocations and expenditures in 2022–23, increasing further to 97 per cent of allocations and 98 per cent of expenditures in 2024–25.
- ▶ Regular Budget Technical Cooperation (**RBTC**) and Regular Budget Supplementary Account (**RBSA**) resources together represented only a small fraction of overall funding, declining from a combined 5 per cent of allocations in 2022–23 to 3 per cent in 2024–25.

This distribution underscores the extent to which programme delivery relied on voluntary donor-funded resources (other than RB), highlighting both the Office's strong capacity to mobilize external financing and the continued dependence of implementation on extra-budgetary funding streams.

In **the 2022 – 23 biennium**, the distribution of financial resources demonstrates the prominence of skills and lifelong learning (Outcome 5) within the portfolio, accounting for the largest share of both allocations (USD 80.3 million, 38 per cent of the total allocation to skills and lifelong learning activities) and expenditures (USD 71.4 million, 39 per cent) across by P&B outcomes. This was followed by relevant initiatives linked to Outcome 3 on employment and labour market transitions (27 per cent of allocations) and Outcomes 4 on sustainable enterprises (17 per cent). Together, these represented approximately 98 per cent of total resources. Overall, the portfolio achieved a high expenditure rate of approximately 88 per cent, indicating effective utilization of allocated resources and strong implementation performance.

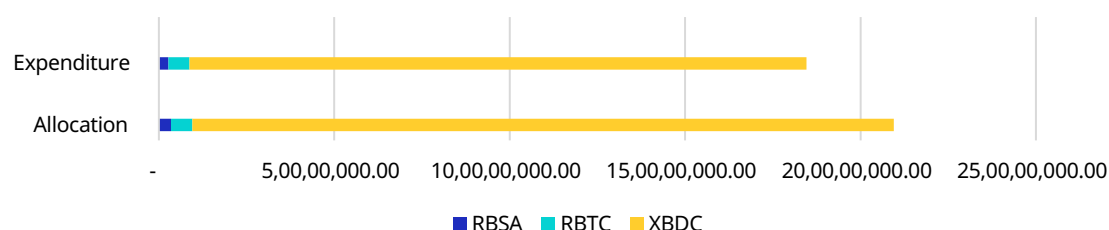
TABLE 14. BUDGET ALLOCATION AND EXPENDITURE TO SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN 22-23 (IN USD)

OUTCOME	TOTAL ALLOCATION	%	EXPENDITURE	%
Outcome 1: Strong tripartite constituents and influential and inclusive social dialogue	3,761,088.00	2%	3,567,899.00	2%
Outcome 2: International labour standards and authoritative and effective supervision	35,000.00	0%	32,125.00	0%
Outcome 3: Economic, social and environmental transitions for full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all	55,923,723.00	27%	48,717,553.00	26%
Outcome 4: Sustainable enterprises as generators of employment and promoters of innovation and decent work	34,969,068.00	17%	31,275,527.00	17%
Outcome 5: Skills and lifelong learning to facilitate access to and transitions in the labour market	80,274,532.00	38%	71,368,737.00	39%
Outcome 6: Gender equality and equal opportunities and treatment for all in the world of work	1,022,383.00	0%	1,036,578.00	1%
Outcome 7: Adequate and effective protection at work for all	33,032,106.00	16%	28,169,026.00	15%
Outcome 8: Comprehensive and sustainable social protection for all	141,600.00	0%	112,133.00	0%
Outcome A: Improved knowledge and Influence for promoting decent work	315,006.00	0%	310,710.00	0%
Total	209,474,506.00		184,590,288.00	

Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

In the **2022 - 23 biennium**, the funding composition by source of funding was **heavily concentrated in extra-budgetary resources across all relevant P&B outputs**, with XBDC accounting for 95 per cent of the total allocations and 95 per cent of total spending (Figure 6). In contrast, RBSA and RBTC resources represented only 2 per cent and 3 per cent of total allocations, respectively.

FIGURE 6. FUNDING COMPOSITION BY SOURCE 2022-23 (IN USD)



Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

Overall, in the **2024 – 25 period**, the portfolio allocated to skills and lifelong learning activities across all P&B outputs was of USD 226.6 million and expended USD 181.5 million (Table 15). The resource distribution was strongly concentrated in employment-related interventions, with Outcome 3 (Full and productive employment for all) accounting for the majority of both allocations (USD 131.0 million, 58 per cent) and expenditures (USD 111.2 million, 61 per cent). Within this outcome, output 3.2 on skills and lifelong learning received alone 56% of the total share of resources. Relevant activities linked to Outcome 4 (Sustainable enterprises for inclusive growth) represented the second-largest area of investment, receiving 19 per cent of total allocations and 18 per cent of expenditures, followed by Outcome 6 (Protection at work for all), which accounted for 13 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively.

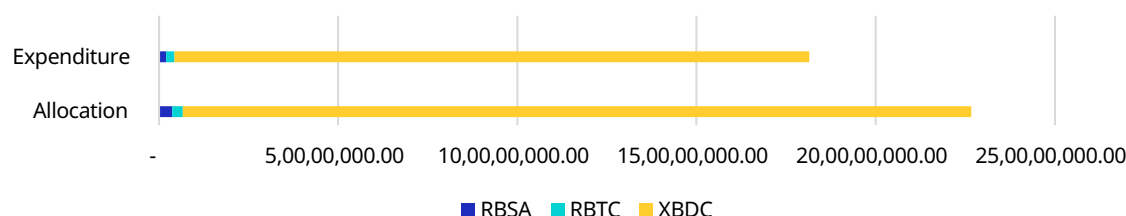
TABLE 15. BUDGET ALLOCATION AND EXPENDITURE TO SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN 24-25 (IN USD)

OUTCOME	TOTAL ALLOCATION	%	EXPENDITURE	%
Enabler A: Enhanced knowledge, innovation, cooperation and communication to advance social justice	179,048.00	0%	129,039.00	0%
Outcome 1: Strong, modernized normative action for social justice	4,970,596.00	2%	3,761,782.00	2%
Outcome 2: Strong, representative and influential tripartite constituents and effective social dialogue	515,887.00	0%	411,022.00	0%
Outcome 3: Full and productive employment for just transitions	130,950,967.00	58%	111,215,131.00	61%
Outcome 4: Sustainable enterprises for inclusive growth and decent work	43,656,773.00	19%	32,290,143.00	18%
Outcome 5: Gender equality and equality of treatment and opportunities for all	7,220,726.00	3%	5,565,478.00	3%
Outcome 6: Protection at work for all	29,801,473.00	13%	20,687,142.00	11%
Outcome 7: Universal social protection	13,576.00	0%	9,863.00	0%
Outcome 8: Integrated policy and institutional responses for social justice through decent work	9,328,028.00	4%	7,436,364.00	4%
Total	226,637,074.00		181,505,964.00	

Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

The funding profile **continued to remain significantly dependent on extra-budgetary resources**, with XBDC financing accounting for 97 per cent of the total allocations and 98 per cent in expenditures. In contrast, RBSA and RBTC resources represented only 2 per cent and 1 per cent of total allocations, respectively, with similarly limited shares of expenditure. (Figure 7)

FIGURE 7. FUNDING COMPOSITION BY SOURCE 2024-25 (IN USD)



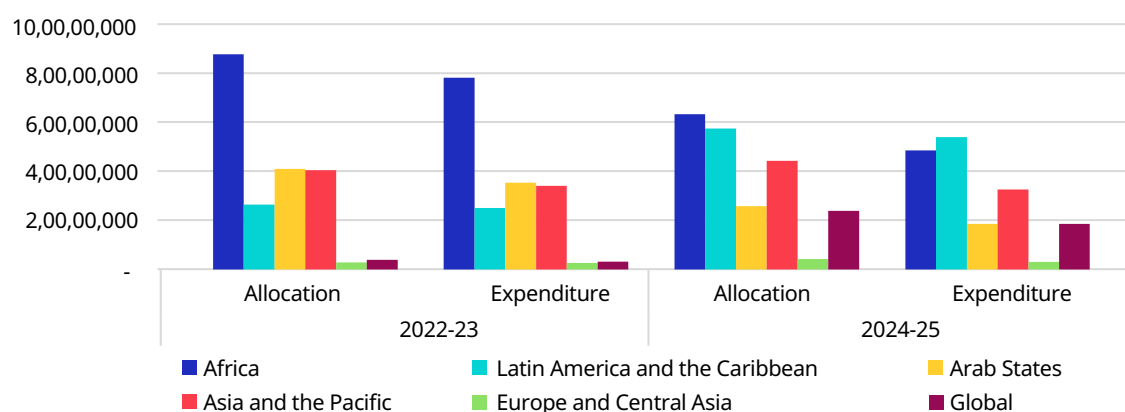
Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

The financial envelope suggests that skills and lifelong learning is not a marginal area but a major field of action in the ILO with very substantial resource flows and a wide operational footprint across the Organization. The available evidence suggests that **the Office has succeeded in mobilizing and deploying substantial resources for skills and lifelong learning across a wide range of countries**, themes and funding streams. Nevertheless, the growth in the volume of skills-related interventions does not automatically demonstrate stronger strategic coherence. Larger financial volumes do not necessarily translate into more integrated implementation. As identified by the high-level evaluation, strategic oversight within the Strategy framework remains challenging because implementation is distributed across multiple outputs, programmes and reporting channels, while no dedicated monitoring architecture exists at Strategy level.

CONCENTRATION OF RESOURCES BY REGION AND COUNTRY

The regional distribution of resources shifted notably between the two biennia. As shown in Figure 8, while **Africa remained the largest recipient of funding**, its share of total allocations declined from 43 per cent in 2022–23 to 29 per cent in 2024–25, with expenditures falling from 44 per cent to 28 per cent. At the same time, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced a substantial increase in its share of resources, rising from 13 per cent of allocations and 14 per cent of expenditures in 2022–23 to 26 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively, in 2024–25. Asia and the Pacific maintained a relatively stable share of the portfolio at around one-fifth of total funding, while the Arab States saw a decline from 20 per cent to 12 per cent of allocations. Comparatively, the portfolio of work in Europe and Central Asia, from a financial angle, was minimal (1 to 2 per cent of total allocation and expenditure in the period under review). Global-level interventions also increased significantly, accounting for 11 per cent of both allocations and expenditures in 2024–25 compared with only 2 per cent in the previous biennium.

FIGURE 8. FUNDING IN USD FOR SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING DELIVERABLES, BY REGION AND BY BIENNIUM



Source: HLE review of all ILO CPOs (period 2022 – 25) based on data retrieved from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard.

The country distribution of the development cooperation landscape shows a marked concentration of resources in a limited number of countries. Kenya, Egypt, Ghana, Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Sudan account for a significant share of resources in Africa; Lebanon and Jordan stand out in the Arab States; Bangladesh dominates in Asia-Pacific; and Colombia emerges as a particularly large portfolio in the Americas. The Republic of Moldova is the country in Europe and Central Asia with the largest portfolio financially.

Large country allocations often reflect major programmes, crisis-response interventions, or long-standing partnerships rather than a balanced global spread of implementation. This is analytically important because it reinforces the conclusion that the operational footprint of the Strategy is uneven and shaped by a combination of strategic intention and opportunity structures.

In the case of Colombia, the scale of the envelope is explained by the presence of government-financed cooperation arrangements. In recent years, the Government of Colombia has supported several cooperation initiatives with the ILO through trust-fund-type mechanisms, particularly in areas related to labour-market policies, formalization and skills development. These arrangements effectively function as government trust funds and increase the volume of development cooperation resources associated with the country interventions. This helps explain why Colombia appears prominently in the skills analysis and illustrates how national financing modalities can significantly affect the geographical distribution of the recorded skills interventions.

The uneven geography of resource concentration reflects strategic priorities and differentiated constituent demand, as well as donor availability, country office capacity, crisis context, historical engagement and the presence of financing arrangements that make large-scale programming possible. This again highlights a central feature of the ILO's implementation model: interventions are shaped both by strategic objectives and by a demand-driven programming approach. As a result, the distribution of activities and resources reflects not only strategic priorities, but also constituent demand, donor interests and the availability of funding opportunities.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: BREADTH, DEPENDENCE AND FRAGMENTATION RISKS

The analysis of development cooperation funded initiatives demonstrates the scale and structure of the operational set of interventions through which much of the Strategy is implemented. The ILO development cooperation dashboard identifies 349 individual projects with skills-related components during the evaluation period, confirming that the portfolio is highly dependent on extra-budgetary resources. Development cooperation therefore represents a central delivery mechanism for the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning.

TABLE 16. COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST INDIVIDUAL SKILLS-RELATED DC PROJECTS

Africa	Americas	Arab States	Asia Pacific	Europe and Central Asia
Egypt	Colombia	Lebanon	Indonesia	Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Moldova
DRC	Haiti	Iraq	Bangladesh	Ukraine and Montenegro
Ethiopia	Belize, Bolivia, Panama,	Jordan	Sri Lanka	
Kenya, Malawi, Ghana, Tanzania	Paraguay, Saint Lucia	Yemen	Cambodia	
		Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine	Philippines	

Source: Extracted from the ILO DC dashboard, duplicate projects were removed.

The breadth of this portfolio is characterized by both the diversity of skills-related interventions and the wide range of policy domains in which skills functions as an enabling instrument. Projects span technical and vocational education and training, skills anticipation systems, apprenticeships and work-based learning, youth employment programmes, enterprise development initiatives, labour migration programmes and targeted interventions aimed at vulnerable groups. This diversity illustrates the versatility of skills interventions within the decent work agenda and reinforces the transversal nature of skills across multiple thematic areas.

At the same time, the development cooperation envelope exhibits a high degree of fragmentation. A large number of relatively small or medium-sized projects coexist alongside a smaller number of major multi-country or regional programmes. The resulting operational model is therefore strongly project-mediated. While this creates flexibility and responsiveness, it also means that implementation continuity, institutional consolidation and strategic coherence frequently depend on the alignment of multiple externally funded interventions rather than on integrated long-term programme frameworks.

In addition, the evidence indicates that the **Global Skills Programme represents an important but not dominant component of the overall set of interventions**. While the GSP constitutes a significant vehicle for mobilizing resources and structuring activities, a substantial proportion of skills and lifelong learning-related development cooperation takes place through projects and initiatives outside the programme. The available evidence therefore suggests that **the GSP plays a catalytic and organizing role rather than functioning as the central operational vehicle for the Strategy**. In practice, the majority of activities appear to be implemented through complementary development cooperation projects, country-level initiatives and thematic programmes that operate alongside, rather than within, the programme framework.



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Part 3

► Evaluation results

PART III. EVALUATION RESULTS

This chapter presents the [evaluation findings](#), organized according to the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria ([relevance](#), [coherence](#), [effectiveness](#), [efficiency](#), [orientation towards impact and sustainability](#)). It includes a dedicated forward-looking section presenting the [strategic implications for implementation through 2030](#).

Building on these findings, the chapter presents the evaluation [conclusions, lessons learned and emerging good practices](#), as well as the [evaluation recommendations](#). The chapter concludes with the [Office response to the recommendations](#).

EVALUATION FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

This criterion focuses the assessment on the [extent to which ILO's global strategy and programming are aligned with the needs and priorities of ILO constituents](#), and the [extent to which the ILO normative framework and principle of social dialogue are mainstreamed across the portfolio](#).

KEY FINDING 1:

The ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning is well aligned with national priorities and positioned to support nationally owned reforms. Its greatest relevance lies in system-level support—particularly governance, institutional development and policy reform—reflecting its comparative advantage in policy dialogue, institutional strengthening and support to national training providers. International labour standards (ILS), including the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208), are well reflected in policy frameworks, although their implementation and institutionalization have progressed at different rates.



KEY FINDING 2:

Tripartite engagement differs across constituent groups. While TVET and lifelong learning remain largely government-led, employers' organizations contribute to identifying skills priorities, whereas workers' organizations, despite formal governance roles, have exercised more limited influence. Constituent participation has been predominantly consultative rather than strategic and operational, reflecting capacity, resource and enabling-environment constraints. These findings point to opportunities for more targeted support to engage in skills governance, particularly for workers' organizations.

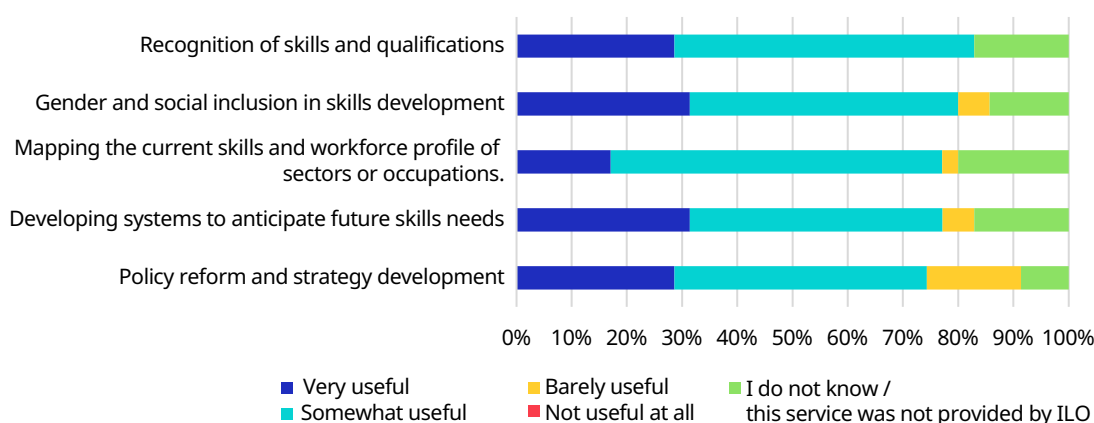
KEY FINDING 3:

The ILO has generated valuable work on skills anticipation, skills for green jobs, greening of TVET systems, digitalization and emerging artificial intelligence (AI)-related skills issues, including labour market diagnostics, sector-based methodologies and global tools. However, the institutionalization, scaling and systematic application of these approaches across the wider portfolio remain uneven.

RELEVANCE OF ILO'S WORK ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING TO PRIORITIES, NEEDS AND PRACTICAL REQUIREMENTS OF CONSTITUENTS

Across the different countries and regions, consulted constituents indicated that **the work of the ILO responds to their most important skills needs**. Across the HLE case study countries, constituents referred to occupational standards and competency-based frameworks as most relevant to them, followed by sector skills bodies; skills anticipation mechanisms; RPL; and (tripartite) policy dialogue. Furthermore, over 90% of surveyed constituents (Figure 9) agreed that the work of ILO focused on their most pressing needs and challenges as regards skills and lifelong learning. ILO interventions most often deemed useful by surveyed constituents include recognition of skills and qualifications; gender and social inclusion in skills development; workforce mapping; and skills anticipation.

FIGURE 9. TOP 5 ACTIVITIES MOST OFTEN DEEMED VERY OR SOMEWHAT USEFUL TO CONSTITUENTS (%)



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among constituents (N=35). "How useful were the following skills and lifelong learning services and support provided by the ILO in meeting your organisation's specific needs?"

Interviewed ILO staff at country and regional level confirmed that the **Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning formed the foundation for the design and implementation of interventions**. Across countries and regions, ILO staff perceived the Strategy as sufficiently broad to encompass all different stakeholders' needs and priorities in the field of skills and lifelong learning at country level. None of the interviews felt that member countries' needs and their interventions fell outside the scope of the Strategy.

Governments are the constituent group most systematically engaged in ILO's portfolio, particularly through its work on Pillar 1 and 2 of the Strategy. The evaluation identified strong patterns amongst ministries and their skills departments, actively leading consultations and validation processes, with relevance being judged strongest in **governance and systems-strengthening interventions** where the ILO's normative and technical mandate is widely recognised.¹¹ This relatively strong strategic and operational role of government institutions contrasts with the more frequently consultative engagement observed among social partners, particularly **workers' organizations**.

Governments consistently value the ILO's technical expertise, normative guidance and ability to structure reforms around qualifications frameworks, occupational standard development, curricula and teacher training methods, governance arrangements and labour market information systems. Across countries, ILO is generally perceived as strongest when supporting system reform and institutional development rather than acting as a capacity building for training providers, reflecting its comparative advantage in working on the architecture of skills systems.

¹¹ Source: A synthesis review of the ILO's implementation of the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning (2020–2030): Evaluation period 2022–2026, HLE own evaluation, 2026

Interviewed ILO staff consistently described a demand-driven programming model in which government requests are the primary trigger for new activities or shifts in direction. The examples are numerous and concrete. For example, in **Ghana**, a direct government request to shift from supply-driven to demand-driven TVET led to the setting up of an entire sector skills body architecture under the GSP programme; in **Tanzania**, presidential-level prioritisation of work-based learning caused the GSP programme to substantially realign its activities; in **Ethiopia**, the GSP responded to a mid-cycle government request for the setting up of a tourism and hospitality sector skills body; in **Iraq**, a successful work-based learning pilot prompted a federal government request to develop a national apprenticeship programme. Several informants to the HLE also note that this responsiveness has a shadow side, with ILO sometimes accommodating governments' traditional and familiar requests rather than proactively pushing a more forward-looking agenda on digital skills, AI, or just transition.

Interventions of ILO are also often anchored in country-specific frameworks (e.g. **Bangladesh's** National Skills Development Policy; **Kenya's** Vision 2030 and TVET Strategic Plan 2023–2027; **Moldova's** National Development Strategy "Moldova 2030"). The recurring finding is that **ILO did not impose an external agenda but rather helped structure and accelerate nationally-owned reform processes**, for example in **Panama** by embedding ILO support within a "*nationally owned modernisation process*".

BOX 4. MOLDOVA: SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AS A DRIVER OF EU ACCESSION READINESS

In Moldova, the ILO interventions were considered particularly relevant and useful to support Moldova's EU accession process. The Green Skills project directly contributes to Moldova's ability to report on Growth Plan indicators related to the green economy and to meet emerging EU obligations on green skills and energy efficiency. The skills anticipation methodology, the occupational and qualification standards developed for renewable energy occupations, and the microcredentials framework piloted under the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) project all provide foundations for Moldova's skills system to receive and absorb future EU-aligned investment more effectively. Constituents therefore praised the work of ILO particularly as supporting tool for aligning with Accession requirements and procedures.¹²

Reducing skills mismatches and strengthening workforce relevance to labour market needs, while supporting workers' capacities and aspirations, are important dimensions of skills policy; consulted employers' representatives particularly emphasized alignment with industry needs.

Compared to the governments, there are less examples of ILO responding directly to employers' requests. The clearest example is **Jordan**, where employers actively requested a work-based learning intervention and ILO designed the programme directly in response to that demand. The synthesis review also identified ILO's work on Recommendation 208 and the broader apprenticeship agenda as particularly relevant.¹³

Despite the relevance to employers' priorities, their involvement differs between countries and interventions. Various countries, such as **Ethiopia** and **Bangladesh**, have a long history of government-led TVET design and delivery, which has at times limited the involvement of employers and workers in competency standards, teacher training and curriculum development. **Moldova** presents a more mixed picture, with substantive employer participation through tripartite governance structures, occupational standards and work-based learning mechanisms. Furthermore, several development partners considered the operational reach and mainstreaming of ILO support on emerging skills needs to be uneven, particularly in relation to AI, just transition and foundational human and social skills, despite the ILO's substantial technical and knowledge work in these areas.

¹² Case study on ILO's work on Skills and Lifelong Learning in Moldova, based on desk research and stakeholder interviews.

¹³ Source: A synthesis review of the ILO's implementation of the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning (2020–2030): Evaluation period 2022–2026, HLE own evaluation, 2026

Interviews with ILO staff and constituents found that the topic of skills and lifelong learning is less prominent on the agenda of **workers' organizations**, as compared to employers and governments. This does not imply that the work of ILO on skills and lifelong learning is not of relevance for trade unions, but it is simply not their most pressing issue. At the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and ILO governing body level, skills features prominently on the workers' agenda, but respondents are candid that this reflects the priorities of advanced trade union systems, e.g. in the European Union (EU), where just transition is described as the main issue pulling skills onto the union agenda. In other regions, workers' rights and protection issues are often more immediate priorities, although skills interventions can also provide an entry point for integrating awareness of labour rights and protections.

For trade unions, the key skills-related concerns are expanding opportunities for upskilling and reskilling and ensuring that workers are not expected to shoulder the costs alone. Interviewed ILO staff emphasized that workers perceive skills development as most relevant when it supports retention in the workplace, decent work, income security, and voice in the workplace.

More broadly, the evidence suggests that workers' organizations rarely approach skills as a standalone technical agenda. Rather, they tend to view skills through the broader lenses of decent work, labour rights, wages, social protection and labour market security. This helps explain why skills often receives less strategic attention from workers' organizations than from employers or governments, despite its relevance to workers' labour market opportunities. Protection of workers in Apprenticeships and RPL is also highlighted as particularly relevant for workers' organisations in high-informality contexts, because it addresses formalisation of skills that informal workers already possess and their opportunity to access lifelong learning opportunities.

In **all of the evaluation case studies**, workers' organisations occupy formal governance roles but exercise less substantive influence than governments and employers. Interviewed ILO staff attribute this (partially) to a lack of trade union's awareness and capacities; to a lack of trade union staff, technical expertise and resources to engage substantively on skills topics; but also to the fact that trade unions usually have more pressing issues to focus on such as minimum wages and protection of workers' rights. The operational logic of TVET reform (both in policy and in curricula) also tend to favour government and employer counterparts as primary interlocutors.

ASSESSMENT OF CHANGES IN CONSTITUENTS' PRIORITIES DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

ILO staff, partners and constituents collectively noted that the past years have witnessed **significant global developments affecting skills needs and demands**. Digitization (COVID-19 driven), including Artificial Intelligence, and increased attention to green economies have affected the skills demand of the labour market across all sectors. Political instability, war, and other crises have also affected constituent priorities.

More than 70% of surveyed constituents perceived that ILO was flexible to incorporate changing needs and priorities in the portfolio, as well as in ongoing interventions.¹⁴ The synthesis review conducted by the HLE also concluded that ILO is flexible on short-term operational adaptations (e.g. adjusting modalities during COVID-19 or during shocks). For example, in **Lebanon**, the security situation required a shift to (re)construction, with ILO supporting an upskilling training programme in the construction sector. ILO responded to the energy crisis in **Moldova resulting from the war in Ukraine** by addressing a shortage of renewable energy specialists.

The **Colombia** country case study conducted by the ILO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC) in coordination with EVAL further illustrates the importance of distinguishing between the relevance of skills interventions and the employment outcomes they ultimately generate. Stakeholders consistently perceived training and employability support as highly relevant to the needs of victims of armed conflict and vulnerable populations. However, the study also

¹⁴ Survey launched by the evaluation team among constituents (N=35). "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your engagement with ILO on the topic of Skills and Lifelong Learning between 2022-2026? ILO's interventions have been flexible to adjust to my organisations' changing needs and priorities between 2022-2026."

found that labour market outcomes remained constrained by structural factors such as informality, limited labour demand and weak employment intermediation systems. This suggests that the relevance of skills interventions should not be assessed solely through employment outcomes, but also through their contribution to capabilities, educational progression and social inclusion.

BOX 5. RESPONDING TO EMERGING GREEN SKILLS IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia's 2024 policy decision to ban the importation of internal-combustion private cars makes the relevance of ILO's green skills work more acute than in almost any other country. The national context created an unusually clear and urgent demand signal: Electric Vehicle (EV) maintenance technicians, charging infrastructure installers, photovoltaic system technicians and related electrical and electronic occupations are needed at scale, and the formal training system has not yet caught up. ILO's work on green skills (the Global Skills Programme's 2023 green TVET assessment, green concepts embedded in sector skills body strategic plans and tourism curricula, the SCORE¹⁵ Climate programme reaching 36 manufacturing enterprises) provide a valuable starting point, although the demand for green skills interventions, particularly for the above occupations, now far exceeds the current scope of ILO's work.¹⁶

However, **adjustment to changes and constituent input mostly take place in the inception stage or in case of external crises**. The synthesis review of 95 skills project evaluations noted that while interventions are aligned with government priorities at design stage, those priorities then evolve through political change, institutional restructuring, economic shocks or crisis, and projects were not always able to adapt sufficiently in step. At the same time, while the ILO has developed substantial and increasingly forward-looking work on digital transformation, green and just transitions and changing labour demand, the institutionalization, scaling and systematic application of these approaches across the wider portfolio remain uneven.¹⁷

Amongst all key topics of the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning, interviewees across countries and organisations acknowledge in particular the increased importance of **skills anticipation mechanisms for ILO constituents**. Among survey respondents who were involved in skills anticipation interventions, 93% found this work either very or somewhat useful.¹⁸ At the same time, various constituents and partners, as well as the synthesis review, still point to the work of ILO as being "responsive to needs" rather than "anticipating needs". Employers' representatives across multiple countries identify the **lag between emerging demand signals and the training system's response as their central unmet need**. While ILO has developed important tools in this area, they remain insufficiently institutionalised to function as genuinely forward-looking intelligence systems rather than periodic exercises.



The VET system is slow to adjust. If a specific skill is demanded by the labour market today, it will take a few years for occupational standards to be updated, subsequent VET curricula to be updated, teachers to be trained, and equipment to be purchased. Then, at least three years pass until the first group of students have graduated.

— ILO constituent

¹⁵ ILO Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises

¹⁶ HLE case study on ILO's work on Skills and Lifelong Learning in Ethiopia, based on desk research and stakeholder interviews.

¹⁷ Synthesis review

¹⁸ Survey launched by the evaluation team among constituents (N=35). "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your engagement with ILO on the topic of Skills and Lifelong Learning between 2022-2026? How useful were the following skills and lifelong learning services and support provided by the ILO in meeting your organisation's specific needs? Developing systems to anticipate future skills needs (e.g. labour market forecasting, skills observatories, sector skills analysis)."

Lastly, ILO staff generally described the skills and lifelong learning portfolio as the result of ongoing negotiation among three diverging and sometimes contradicting sets of priorities to remain relevant. Three balancing acts are worth highlighting:

- First, the sharp increase in technology and the need for skills matching current and future labour market needs has led to requests for investment in modernised skills training programmes, but various stakeholders also provided a more nuanced argument: In most ILO partner countries, the skills delivery mechanism (curricula, quality of teachers and equipment, quality of books and other materials) is still lacking basic relevance and quality. Interviewed key partners of ILO generally inform that ILO's strikes a sufficient **balance between supporting innovation and addressing foundational challenges**. However, some stakeholders warned that **ILO should focus more on those foundational challenges before introducing "extra" layers that do not address the core weaknesses of the system.**

When you cannot put basic training materials on the table of students, but instead you're focusing on integrating the environment in curricula, that's not fair.

— Implementing partner

- Another area where ILO searched to strike a **balance is between initial skills training and lifelong learning**. Most interventions of ILO focus on initial skills training (predominantly through TVET providers) with significantly less focus on re- and upskilling and continuous professional development, central elements of lifelong learning. The strongest lifelong learning focus of the ILO portfolio is through RPL, but even this dimension is more often framed as an inclusion and access mechanism for those outside the formal system rather than as part of a continuous professional development architecture for the existing workforce. Considering the current and future skills mismatches in the workforce and the labour market, this is a core challenge insufficiently addressed in the current skills portfolio.

This raises a broader question regarding implementation of the Strategy itself. While lifelong learning is positioned as a central concept within the Skills and Lifelong Learning Portfolio, much of the evidence suggests that **operational practice remains considerably more focused on initial skills development and TVET reform than on continuous learning throughout working life**. As technological change, demographic transitions and labour market restructuring accelerate, this imbalance may become increasingly significant.

- The third balance of needs and priorities by ILO includes the **balance between constituent priorities and needs in line with ILO's normative mandate, and funding partners' interests**. Interviewees suggested that, as is the case for many UN organizations, funding availability increasingly influences the selection and scale of interventions. This can create tensions with longer-term normative and policy objectives that remain important to constituents and the ILO's mandate. At the same time, stakeholders acknowledged that donor-funded projects often provide valuable opportunities to advance constituent priorities and generate innovations that can later inform broader policy work.

The ILO normative framework and social dialogue in the design and implementation of ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning

NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK AND INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS

Across the multiple lines and levels of evidence gathered by the high-level evaluation, the evidence converges on a **substantive but uneven integration of international labour standards (ILS) in skills and lifelong learning programming**. 94% of surveyed constituents perceive that ILS are mainstreamed across ILO's skills and lifelong learning programmes, compared to 67% of surveyed ILO staff.

Recommendation 208 on Quality Apprenticeships emerges as the flagship instrument. Evidence from the HLE synthesis review, interviewed ILO staff and the HLE case studies confirm that R.208 has become a working reference in the ILO.

BOX 6. RECOMMENDATION NO. 208 AS A GLOBAL REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR APPRENTICESHIP REFORM

ILO staff describes the application of the Recommendation 208 across numerous countries spanning Mali, Tanzania, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Senegal, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Egypt, Malawi, Uganda, India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, Panama, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Bermuda and the Bahamas, with country offices reporting both pilot operationalisation and policy uptake.

Drawing on ILO staff interviews and case studies, R.208 is integrated into project design through several mechanisms. First, it structured or informed national policy and legislative reform, with, for example, Thailand's Dual Vocational Education Act revision, Indonesia's apprenticeship legislation, Bermuda's apprenticeship system, and the Bahamas' national quality apprenticeship policy all aligned with the recommendation. Second, R.208 anchors sector-specific pilots, including Ghana (automotive and apparel), Rwanda (software development), Ethiopia (PROSPECTS hotel and construction pilots) and India (hub-and-spoke for SMEs in manufacturing). Third, R.208 shapes the operational tooling that accompanies projects, with HQ developing a policy guide, country-readiness self-assessment checklists, an in-company trainer manual and a dedicated guide for trade unions.

However, the HLE synthesis review of completed evaluations, multiple ILO staff and several case studies converge equally clearly on a **recurrent gap between normative integration at design and policy-dialogue stage and operationalisation in implementation and enforcement**. The synthesis review identifies this directly, noting that standards mainstreaming is *"more robust in design and policy dialogue than in long-term implementation fidelity"* and that evaluations *"cannot always demonstrate how normative alignment changed implementation behaviours or enforcement over time."*

ILO staff make the same observations from inside delivery, namely for instance, that R.208 remains insufficiently known to unions in some regions; and that conceptually strong embedding of standards does not always translate into outcomes given structural inequalities and weak worker participation.

Furthermore, while R.208 is clearly visible as skills instrument and often reflected on, interviewed ILO staff almost never reflected on other normative instruments, despite their relevance for skills (e.g. Convention 142 on Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 and Convention 140 on Paid Educational Leave Convention, 1974). These older skills-specific conventions (C.140 and C.142) are essentially dormant in current programming, despite C.142 being the foundational human resources development instrument and C.140 being explicitly named in Component 4 of the Strategy.

Lastly, linked to **monitoring gaps**, the synthesis review found that the substance of normative content is often present but not always explicitly traced to specific instruments, which affects how confidently an evaluation can trace activities back to specific conventions, recommendations or other instruments. Constituents similarly describe normative principles in operation but with much less explicit reference to specific underlying instruments. **The absence of explicit instrument-level tracking limits the visibility of the normative contribution**, which is consistently identified as ILO's distinctive value. **Therefore, ILS mainstreaming in ILO skills and lifelong learning work is likely more consistently taking place than the documentary trail suggests.**

TRIPARTISM AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

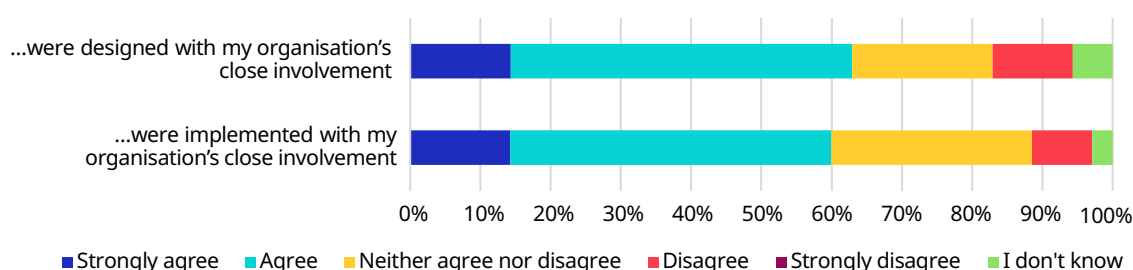
The broad picture across ILO interview respondents is that **tripartism is often genuinely embedded in ILO's skills and lifelong learning work as a structural feature, but its depth and consistency vary considerably** across regions, country contexts, constituent groups, and project cycle stages. The synthesis review also concludes that tripartite coordination takes place but is not consistent across the full project implementation cycle. Among the 35 surveyed constituents,

91% agreed or strongly agreed that the ILO mainstreams social dialogue across skills and lifelong learning programmes. In turn, 69% of surveyed ILO staff shared this opinion, while 16% neither agreed nor disagreed.¹⁹

In terms of **tripartism and social dialogue as key project feature**, it is recognised as a structural feature of ILO's skills portfolio across all five case studies, rather than a project-level add-on. The most consistent finding is that ILO's tripartite convening role is valued by all constituent groups precisely because it creates spaces where issues that are dismissed in bilateral exchanges with ministries get tabled and followed up. The strongest evidence of meaningful tripartism in the skills and lifelong learning environment comes from contexts where dedicated structural mechanisms have been created specifically for skills governance: sector skills bodies in **Ghana, Ethiopia and Kenya**; tripartite technical working groups in Bangladesh and the Better Regional Migration Management (BRMM) programme; CONACOM²⁰ and Sector Skills Councils in **Panama**; and the National Tripartite Commission in Moldova. Where these mechanisms exist, social dialogue appears to genuinely shape outputs such as occupational standards, curriculum content, skills anticipation exercises and apprenticeship frameworks are all described as products of real tripartite negotiation rather than government or ILO unilateral decisions.

However, **the share of interviewed constituents who felt involved in the design, implementation, and monitoring of ILO's interventions is rather low** (63% and 60% respectively – Figure 10). Some interviewed constituents in the HLE case study countries noted that their involvement is more a formality: They describe their participation as consultative for “already finalised documents” rather than substantive co-design. The synthesis review identified this weakness as well.

FIGURE 10. PERCEPTION OF CONSTITUENTS ON THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN ILO'S WORK (IN %). ILO'S INTERVENTIONS...



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among constituents (N=35). “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your engagement with ILO on the topic of Skills and Lifelong Learning between 2022-2026? ILO's interventions.....”.

A recurring evaluation finding is that tripartite coordination is genuinely consistent at the design stage, with the 95 evaluations widely documenting steering committees, technical working groups, validation workshops and policy dialogue platforms involving all constituents. **Engagement weakens as projects move into delivery**: social partners often shift from co-governance into implementer roles, particularly in delivery-heavy projects, and even where governance structures formally continue, engagement becomes episodic rather than continuous. Tripartite coordination is least consistently embedded at the monitoring stage.²¹

The lack of engagement was voiced more prominently among consulted trade union representatives than among employers or government representatives. Employers are generally more operationally involved, particularly where sector-level mechanisms exist, while workers' organisations tend to occupy formal governance roles without exercising equivalent substantive influence.

¹⁹ Survey launched by the evaluation team among constituents (N=35). “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the mainstreaming of ILO's crosscutting concerns in the skills and lifelong learning portfolio? ...Systematically addresses social dialogue across skills and lifelong learning programmes”

²⁰ Comisión Nacional de Competencias

²¹ Source: A synthesis review of the ILO's implementation of the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning (2020–2030): Evaluation period 2022–2026, HLE own evaluation, 2026

Several ILO respondents, as well as the synthesis review, equally note that formal tripartite inclusion does not automatically translate into effective workers' voice. In some regions, governments dominate skills governance and actively limit the space for tripartite engagement, making genuine social dialogue difficult regardless of ILO's intentions.

COHERENCE

This criterion focuses the assessment on the coherence of ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning at two levels: [internal coherence](#) across the Office (covering the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2022-2030 and the [Global Skills Programme](#) as its operational vehicle) and [external coherence](#) with other actors in the global skills environment (covering [ILO's distinctive contribution and visibility](#), [complementarity](#), and [duplication risks](#)).

KEY FINDING 4:

The Strategy provides a common framework for action on skills and lifelong learning, but its potential to drive coherent implementation across ILO's policy portfolios and regions is not yet fully realized. Coordination is strongest where supported by headquarters (HQ) guidance, common methodologies, regional technical expertise and structured programme mechanisms such as the GSP. Outside these arrangements, collaboration across HQ portfolios and systematic cross-country learning are less consistent, limiting knowledge sharing and synergies.



KEY FINDING 5:

The GSP has strengthened internal coherence by operationalizing the Strategy through pooled funding, country coordination and peer learning. While retaining a global dimension through innovation initiatives and implementation across regions, its recent operational focus has been concentrated mainly in Africa, reducing its visibility and influence across the wider portfolio.

KEY FINDING 6:

The ILO's work is externally recognized for its distinctive and comparative technical advantage alongside other development partners, reflecting its unique tripartite mandate, social dialogue and normative leadership. However, the crowded and fragmented skills landscape, with no clear lead agency, and some overlap across initiatives, highlights the need for the ILO to strengthen the evidence and communication of its distinct contribution to leverage strategic partnerships and mobilize resources.

Coherence of the skills and lifelong learning portfolio and the Global Skills Programme

COHERENCE WITHIN THE ILO SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING PORTFOLIO (EXCL. REFERENCE TO THE GLOBAL SKILLS PROGRAMME)

The evaluation examined coherence at three levels: the extent to which the Strategy functions as a common framework across the Office, the consistency of skills work across HQ and between departments, and the coherence of skills initiatives at country and cross-country level.

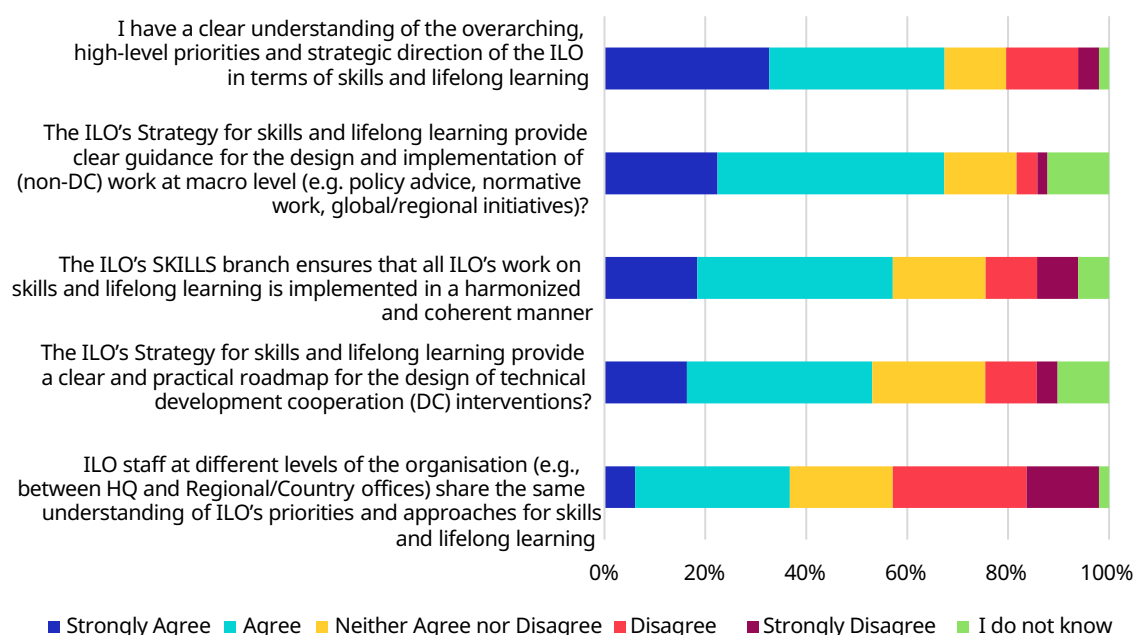
The ILO skills and lifelong learning portfolio is globally led by the SKILLS Branch (which transitioned to the Employment, Skills and Enterprises policy cluster in March 2026) and is guided by the Global Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2022-2030 and ILO's Programme and Budget frameworks. Technical support is provided by the SKILLS Branch, regional specialists, Decent Work Teams, with dedicated Teams in some cases (e.g. Africa Hub, CINTERFOR, ITCILO).

The evaluation found that the **Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning 2030 functions reasonably well as a common language for the ILO skills portfolio**. ILO staff at HQ, in regional offices and in country positions consistently describe the Strategy as the operational reference framework

for their work: skills specialists report that every new project formulation must respond to one of the five pillars, that the pillars are closely linked to programme and budget target indicators and that the Strategy is used as a routine “to-do list” for assessing national policies, structuring tripartite meetings and bringing authority to dialogue with governments. Several staff outside the SKILLS branch also reported their familiarity with the Strategy and how it informed their work. The synthesis review confirms this from the evaluation evidence, noting that the Strategy provides a coherent strategic framework that links country-level interventions to global expertise, partnerships and normative guidance, and that ILO interventions are generally well aligned with the five pillars at design stage.

However, ILO staff interviewees are equally clear that **this shared reference language does not translate into uniform coherence across the portfolio**. As shown in Figure 11, the majority of surveyed ILO staff is not in clear agreement that all levels of ILO share the same understanding of ILO's skills and lifelong learning priorities. The interviews show substantial variation in how staff use the Strategy operationally: HQ skills branch specialists describe it as their daily framework; some regional skills specialists describe themselves as aligned with the pillars only in retrospect, and non-skills staff are either not aware of the strategy or describe the Strategy as policy framing rather than as operational guidance.

FIGURE 11. PERCEPTION BY ILO STAFF ON INTERNAL COHERENCE OF THE SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING PORTFOLIO, IN (%)



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO staff (N=49). “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the direction of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning between 2022-2025?”.

The most significant coherence weakness identified by the evaluation sits at HQ level and between departments. Despite the fact that skills are integrated in a broad range of intervention areas (employment and labour migration most prominently and Global Accelerator), skills work coordination relies on the outcome coordination team, with cross-department coordination relying on personal relationships. The structural separation between skills, enterprise and employment work is described as a persistent obstacle to integrated delivery. As a result, many interviewees perceive persistent silos between SKILLS and other parts of the Office, pointing to the need for stronger two-way coordination between the SKILLS Branch, other departments and field-based skills specialists.

Several staff identify the departmental merger as a structural opportunity to consolidate the skills, enterprise and employment portfolios into a more coherent whole, but flag that without explicit processes, deadlines and supervisory accountability the merger could equally reproduce existing silos at a larger scale.

At country and cross-country levels, the evaluation found that skills initiatives build on each other where coordination is actively managed. The case studies provide positive evidence of this: in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and the PROSPECTS²² countries, ILO's multiple skills-related projects work in coordinated ways, sharing tools and aligning around common technical approaches. 63% of surveyed constituents agreed or strongly agreed that *"ILO's different projects in my country are well-coordinated (and not implemented in siloes)"*.

Cross-country coherence is more mixed. The synthesis review identified risks of fragmentation across the wider portfolio, noting that while several examples exist of coherence between projects within the same country, there is **limited evidence of projects exchanging experiences with other countries or geographies**. This hinders projects from learning from each other and from avoiding the same mistakes. **The exception is the GSP architecture**, where structured cross-country exchange between the six target countries does produce observable knowledge transfer (described in section below).

A specific harmonisation gap worth flagging is between CINTERFOR in Latin America and the rest of the ILO skills and lifelong learning work. Multiple staff describe CINTERFOR as a strong standalone operational vehicle for skills in the region but as insufficiently connected with Geneva-level skills coordination. The open survey responses include the direct statement that *"CINTERFOR's connection with the skills unit and employment department in Geneva is very weak and poorly coordinated."*

COHERENCE ENABLED BY THE GLOBAL SKILLS PROGRAMME

The Global Skills Programme was meant to function as core implementation modality, or operational arm, for the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy, and support the coherent and harmonious implementation of its portfolio. This section describes key findings on whether the Programme has fulfilled this harmonising function in practice.

The evidence across the ILO staff interviews and the synthesis review present a picture in which **the Global Skills Programme has succeeded in translating the Strategy into structured action** and provides several genuine mechanisms for portfolio harmonisation and better internal coherence. In this regard, nearly half of surveyed ILO staff perceive that *"the Global Skills Programme plays an important role in ensuring that all ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning is implemented in a harmonized and coherent manner"*.²³

The synthesis review credits the Programme with a **coherent strategic framework**, sustained technical leadership, pooled and outcome-oriented funding modalities, and coordination mechanisms that **link country-level interventions to global expertise and normative guidance**, contributions that compare favourably with stand-alone development cooperation.



The pooled funding architecture, the communication and branding visibility, and the dedicated regional technical capacity are the Programme's three main structural contributions to harmonisation, and the comprehensive country approach (combining policy advice, capacity-building, standards, apprenticeship and work-based learning in one engagement) is something that single-thread projects cannot replicate.

— ILO Staff

The GSP staff interviews provide consistent evidence **that the Programme has contributed to country-level coherence in its target countries**, primarily through the role of the GSP National Coordinator as the institutional anchor for skills coordination within the country and through the convening of multi-partner coordination platforms. Beyond in-country coherence, regular

²² Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities

²³ Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO staff (n=49). *"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the direction of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning between 2022-2025? The Global Skills Programme plays an important role in ensuring that all ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning is implemented in a harmonized and coherent manner"*

meetings of GSP National Coordinators **facilitate peer-learning and exchange of practices** across the six target countries.

ILO staff and the synthesis review equally clearly identify **limits** that prevent the Programme from acting as the harmonising spine for the ILO skills portfolio as a whole. The most immediate is geographic: while branded as “global”, the Programme operates in six countries all in Africa, with ILO staff in Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe and Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Arab States consistently reporting a lack of knowledge about the Programme. The GSP does provide funding to individual activities in other countries, but ILO staff perceives that simply as “support from HQ” and is not always aware that this funding was provided through the GSP to achieve stronger consolidation at national level.

The systematic diagnosis from ILO staff is that the Programme was originally conceived as a basket fund for all skills projects, but experienced periods of discontinuity in programme leadership during its early operational years and now functions more like a traditional development cooperation project with global ambitions than a genuine programmatic umbrella. Therefore, the conclusion is two-fold: **the GSP acts as a harmonising and convening force, but only in the target countries where it is involved. Its harmonising function is nearly invisible beyond HQ and the target countries.**

EXTERNAL COHERENCE

The position and visibility of ILO in the global skills and lifelong learning environment

ILO staff, constituents and stakeholders acknowledge that the environment of skills and lifelong learning globally is rather crowded with numerous actors developing interventions targeting skills, from the perspective of their own mandates. Within this environment, the evaluation examined three connected questions: what ILO uniquely contributes, how it positions itself relative to other actors in global debates, and the visibility of its work and results.

The unique added value of ILO in the skills and lifelong learning environment is largely recognized by development partners and constituents. The clearest area of added value across all evaluation evidence is that **tripartism and social dialogue constitute ILO's defining and irreplaceable contribution as a convener and facilitator** in the skills and lifelong learning space. ILO staff treat this as ILO's core comparative advantage and as the entry point for bringing government, employers and workers to the table. Development partners articulated this even more sharply. Almost every partner interviewed singled out tripartism, the rule-based standards-anchored approach, and the tripartite neutrality between government, unions and employers as ILO's most valuable characteristic. Case studies highlighted that ILO is uniquely positioned to convert long-standing policy intent into operational practice through structured tripartite dialogue. The evidence also points to the ILO's capacity to bring international experience and technical methodologies into longer-term, system-oriented reform processes, linking policy advice and technical support with institutional strengthening and national ownership.



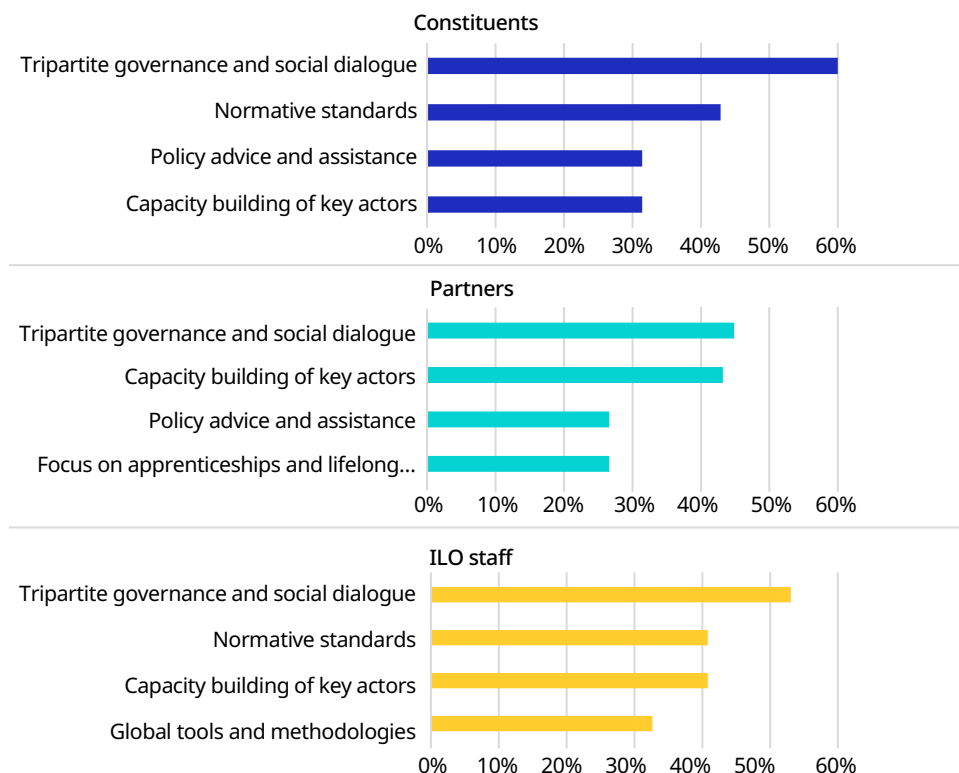
ILO is the rule-based, convention-anchored institution that provides tripartite neutrality between government, unions and employers. This is particularly valuable in contexts where the private-sector voice currently dominates, and the workers' voice is absent.

—Partner organisation

The second area of added value is ILO's **normative and standard-setting mandate**, most visibly through Recommendation 208 on quality apprenticeships. ILO staff describe standard adoption as the highest possible form of impact because it is lasting and reaches every country. Partners independently identify this as a distinctive ILO contribution and a reference point for their own apprenticeship work. The case studies show this contribution flowing through into adopted national instruments, including national qualifications frameworks, RPL strategies and sector skills body architectures.

The survey responses among ILO staff, partners, and constituents confirmed the trend of the interviews. Across all three groups, tripartism is viewed as key added value of ILO. The remaining answers differ somewhat among the respondents, but all answers are related to ILO's policy-, strategic- or national-level work (Figure 12). 76% of surveyed partners²⁴, and several interviewed partners, also referred to ILO's technical expertise as added value.

FIGURE 12. PERCEIVED UNIQUE ADDED VALUE OF ILO IN THE SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO staff (n=49), partners (n=59) and constituents (n=35). "In which areas or dimensions does the ILO add most value to the international skills and lifelong learning ecosystem as compared to other actors? [pick the three areas where ILO's work provides most added value]"

This distinctive contribution does not extend evenly across all areas where ILO works. Several partners noted that policy and strategy development without a distinctive tripartite or normative content is a crowded space and not where ILO adds most. **Partners explicitly described this field as overcrowded, requiring limited funds, giving visibility and offering an easy deliverable, with the consequence that many agencies produce similar outputs** (e.g. TVET digitalisation strategies). Similarly, where TVET work resembles the curriculum-and-pedagogy reform other agencies also deliver, partners describe it as something other organisations are equally well or even better placed to do and, in some regions, are doing.

A consequence of this crowded field is that **no organisation is perceived as "the" leading agency mandated to work on skills (so neither is ILO)**. Partners described the sector as too fragmented for any one leader and characterised the UN system as experiencing a perceived decrease in relevance against better-funded bilateral and national actors.

²⁴ Survey launched by the evaluation team among partners (n=59). "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the position of ILO vis-à-vis other international actors in the field of skills? The ILO offers specialized technical expertise in skills and lifelong learning that is not readily available through other international partners"

The ILO is leading in particular sub-areas, namely skills for employability and decent work, quality apprenticeships, skills for just transition, and tripartite-anchored skills work.

—Partner organisation

Despite the lack of formal leadership, ILO is consistently described, both by staff and by partners, as **present, contributing and constructive in the global discussions and fora** that matter, even where partners do not see it as the agenda-setter. The ability of ILO to be an actual agenda-setter on skills differs somewhat by sub-topic of global forums and meetings.

BOX 7. ILO SETTING CLEAR POLICY DIRECTION ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Partners and ILO staff perceive the clearest steering role of ILO, namely:

- ▶ **Standard-setting itself.** The adoption of Recommendation 208 on quality apprenticeships is described by staff as the highest possible form of impact and by partners as a reference point that has reshaped their own apprenticeship agendas. Partners noted that before R.208, their work was focused on internships and work-based learning broadly rather than apprenticeships specifically, and that R.208 enabled them to develop their own guiding principles and benchmarks. The inter-agency working group on TVET subsequently produced a joint leaflet establishing shared terminology on work-based learning, apprenticeship, dual training and traineeships, with R.208 acting as the anchoring framework. Partners described this as a “landmark achievement” because it eliminated the first hour of every cross-agency discussion.
- ▶ **Regional policy momentum, in particular at sub-regional level.** The ASEAN²⁵ Year of Skills, the Vientiane Declaration on skills mobility for migrant workers, the African Week of Skills and the SADC²⁶ TVET Strategy revision all carry visible ILO technical authorship, and partners working in these regions confirmed ILO's role as the technical agency behind them. The case for steering is strongest where ILO combines technical methodology, tripartite convening sustained country presence over time, and the ability to connect policy-level influence with operational application, and weakest where these elements are absent.

Beyond formal standard-setting and participation in global forums, the ILO has also used global knowledge platforms to disseminate technical approaches, convene constituents and partners, and sustain policy dialogue across regions. The SKILLSBRIDGE Master Classes provide an example of this global knowledge and convening function.

BOX 8. SKILLSBRIDGE MASTER CLASSES AS A GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE AND POLICY DIALOGUE PLATFORM

The SKILLSBRIDGE Master Classes illustrate how the ILO has used global knowledge platforms to support policy dialogue, constituent capacity development and dissemination of emerging practice under the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy. Information provided by SKILLS indicates that the series has delivered 14 global masterclasses, reaching participants from more than 140 countries and over 10,000 policymakers, government officials, employers' and workers' organizations, private sector representatives, TVET institutions, researchers and development partners. Topics covered include dual vocational education and training, digital transformation of skills systems, sector skills councils, micro-credentials, recognition of prior learning, AI-enabled skills systems, private sector engagement, future-ready skills policies and lifelong learning.

The series is relevant to several operational components of the Strategy, particularly research, knowledge management and dissemination, ILO leadership and partnerships, and constituent capacity development. It has provided a platform for South–South and North–South learning and has involved governments, employers' and workers' organizations, multilateral development banks, UN agencies, academia and the private sector. Its high-level participation, including ministries, national skills authorities, employers' and workers' representatives and international organizations, suggests that it has contributed to the visibility of the ILO's technical expertise and its convening role in skills policy.

The evidence therefore supports the contribution of the SKILLSBRIDGE Master Classes to global knowledge exchange, capacity development, policy dialogue, partnership-building and the visibility of the ILO's technical and convening role in skills and lifelong learning. The evaluation did not assess participant-level outcomes or the extent to which participation subsequently translated into policy or institutional change at country level, which would require longer-term follow-up. The initiative is therefore best understood as contributing to the enabling conditions for broader policy and system change, rather than as a stand-alone intervention expected to generate such outcomes.

25 Association of Southeast Asian Nations

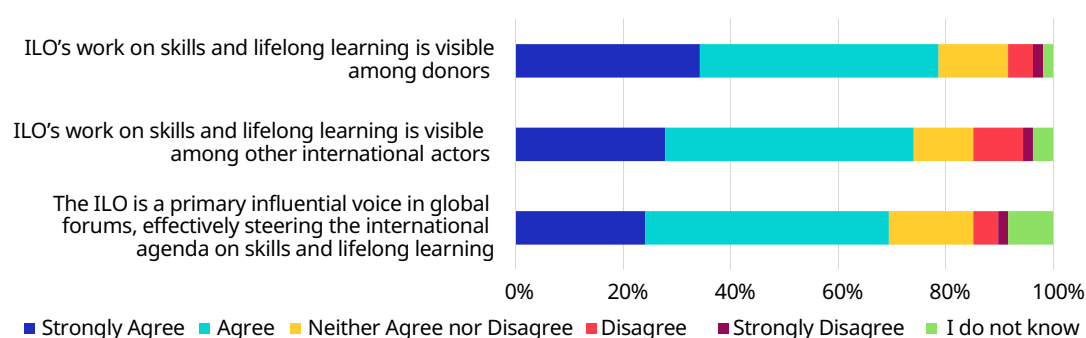
26 Southern African Development Community

A further recent development is the establishment of the Global Expert Committee on Skills Policy, which held its first meeting in April 2026. The Committee brings together experts, constituents, international and regional organizations, academia, development banks and development partners to provide strategic and technical advice on emerging skills policy challenges, including digitalisation, artificial intelligence, green transition, lifelong learning, skills governance, financing, work-based learning and skills recognition and mobility. Given its recent establishment, it is too early for the HLE to assess its effectiveness, but it represents a potentially important mechanism for strengthening forward-looking policy dialogue, partnerships and global knowledge development.

The Global Skills Forum provides another example of the ILO's global convening and partnership role. Following an inaugural Forum in Geneva in 2024, the 2025 Global Skills Forum was jointly organized by the ILO, the International Organisation of Employers and Malaysia's Human Resource Development Corporation (HRD Corp) in Kuala Lumpur, within the ASEAN Year of Skills. The Forum convened governments, employers' and workers' organizations, international organizations, development partners, training institutions and private-sector actors around the role of the private sector in skills development. Notably, the Forum was fully financed by HRD Corp, illustrating the potential of partnerships with national skills institutions to support global knowledge exchange and convening without relying exclusively on ILO or traditional donor financing.

Findings on the ILO leadership role in the global skills and lifelong learning agenda feed into a third question on the visibility of ILO's work and the consistency in attribution of its contributions (Figure 13). Evidence obtained by the HLE suggests that the ILO's work and results are visible unevenly across the portfolio, with clear visibility in some areas and limited visibility in others. **Visibility is real and substantial in named convening events, in standard adoption moments, in co-produced inter-agency products and in regions where ILO has sustained presence over time.** Visibility is partial where ILO products are taken up by other agencies and embedded in national systems without consistent attribution. **Visibility is weak where the work is cross-cutting, normative or long-horizon without being attached to a named instrument or event** (Figure 13).

FIGURE 13. VISIBILITY AND PROMINENCE OF ILO'S WORK ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO staff (n=49), partners (n=59). "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the position of ILO vis-à-vis other international actors in the field of skills?"

The underlying issue is that **the gap between activity and visibility recurs across specific thematic and institutional contexts, rather than being uniform across the portfolio.** Partners and ILO staff arrive at the same diagnosis from different angles: ILO does more than is seen, the results are real but not communicated, the attribution back to ILO is often lost, and the absence of systematic outcome measurement means that even where the work is delivered, ILO faces challenges to describe it in the language now expected.

COMPLEMENTARITY AND DUPLICATION WITH OTHER ACTORS

The distinctive contribution identified above (tripartism, standards and the policy and technical work that flows from them) provides the basis on which **ILO complements other actors** in the skills and lifelong learning environment. Alignment and coordination with UN and other partners are frequently present and generally viewed positively, particularly where ILO engages in **policy**

and system reform, skills governance, and employment-skills linkages within multi-partner programmes.

National-level coordination platforms supporting such alignment and division of work exist in many countries and function reasonably well where four conditions are met: regular cadence, government convening, clear thematic focus and a capable convening institution. The strongest examples in the ILO staff interviews are the **Tanzania** TVET Development Partner Group, the **Ghana** TVET development partner forum, the **Mali** monthly ministry-led platform, and the PROSPECTS country-level coordination structure in **Jordan, Ethiopia, Kenya** and the other PROSPECTS countries. These platforms are credited with materially reducing overlap. Their scope nevertheless differs: some are specifically focused on TVET system coordination, while others address skills and training within broader employment, inclusion or development agendas.

 **Coordination works well when roles are clearly defined early and responsibilities align with comparative advantages. Where this happens, ILO brings the standards, governance and social dialogue layer, and we bring research and methodology.**

—Partner organisation

Complementarity is described by the synthesis review of 95 evaluation reports as “*achievable and often realised when roles are clearly defined early, responsibilities align with comparative advantages, and joint planning supports coherent sequencing*”. Where these conditions hold, partners describe ILO's contribution as the standards, governance and social dialogue layer, while peer agencies bring financing, service delivery platforms or adjacent sectoral expertise. The synthesis review reaches the same conclusion at scale, noting that complementarity is strongest when responsibilities map onto comparative advantages and weakest in crowded thematic spaces where multiple agencies operate without clear division of labour.

BOX 9. PROSPECTS AS EXAMPLE OF MULTI-PARTNER COORDINATION

The clearest example of effective coordination at country level comes from the PROSPECTS partnership, a multi-country programme established in 2019 that brings together ILO, UNHCR²⁷, UNICEF²⁸, the World Bank and IFC in a structured division of labour around refugee, internally displaced and host-community skilling. The partnership operates across eight countries (Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Sudan and Uganda) under a multi-annual programme structure funded by the Netherlands, with each agency operating both a global PROSPECTS team and a country PROSPECTS team.

The HLE synthesis review of 95 relevant independent evaluations singles out the Jordan iteration as “*one of the clearest examples of structured UN coordination in the evaluations*”, with observed benefits including integrated pathways from training to employment and reduced duplication in refugee support. The defining features of the partnership are consistent across all eight countries: the division of labour is set early and written into joint planning documents; coordination is sustained through regular country-level meetings; and the model is adapted to each country context rather than imposed uniformly. The PROSPECTS structure has also produced cross-country learning effects that ILO staff describe as comparable to those of the GSP in Africa, with structured exchanges between the eight countries on RPL, work-based learning and digital skills creating a horizontal knowledge network within the partnership.

Where these conditions do not hold, both ILO staff and partners describe duplication and overlaps as present, recognised and persistent enough to constitute a structural feature of the skills environment rather than an occasional incident. Several partners flagged duplication risk in specific areas where ILO has expanded or where peer agencies are entering ILO's space. The African Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank are moving further into the jobs and skills space, and other UN agencies (UNDP²⁹, UNESCO³⁰, UNICEF) are increasingly active in skills, with consequent overlap and ambiguity between mandates.

27 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

28 United Nations Children's Fund

29 United Nations Development Programme

30 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ILO IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

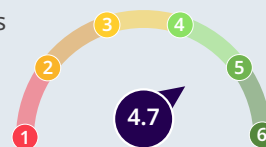
This criterion focuses the assessment on the effectiveness of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning in its efforts to implement the Strategy (2022 – 30) and Action Plan (2022 – 25). It examines the [extent to which the five interrelated components \(i.e., what the ILO intends to do and how\) are contributing thus far to intended outcomes](#) at country and regional levels, addresses persistent skills and lifelong learning [gaps](#), and generates [emerging \(un-intended\) results](#) across global, regional and country contexts.

The section also analyses the [responsiveness of ILO interventions to evolving global challenges](#), the integration of [cross-cutting principles](#) in implementation, and whether the [Global Skills Programme](#) added more value compared to stand-alone initiatives. This section also includes [key assessment findings relevant for future strategy implementation](#).

KEY FINDING 7:

Effectiveness across the Strategy's five pillars remained uneven. The ILO's strongest contribution was in upstream policy reform, institutional capacity development, qualifications systems, quality apprenticeships and RPL, strengthening the foundations for longer-term reform.

Progress was less consolidated in areas critical to sustaining and scaling reforms, particularly the institutionalization and routine use of skills anticipation systems, sustainable financing and implementation capacity. Advancing these areas requires longer timeframes, domestic investment and sustained national commitment.



KEY FINDING 8:

The GSP strengthened the effectiveness of the ILO's skills and lifelong learning portfolio by promoting policy coherence, institutional innovation and cross-country learning, notably in Africa. Its contribution demonstrates the value of a programmatic approach to implementing the Strategy. Sustaining these initial gains, however, will depend on continued national ownership, resources, and institutional capacity.

The effectiveness analysis is structured around the five pillars of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy, which constitute the principal framework for assessing implementation progress and results achieved during the evaluation period. In addition, the evaluation examines whether results materialized at **policy level**, through policy, governance and framework conditions; at **institutional level**, through stronger institutional capacities, coordination mechanisms and service delivery systems; and at **beneficiary level**, through benefits for learners, workers, enterprises and disadvantaged groups. This distinction is important because **the evidence points to stronger achievements at policy and institutional levels than at beneficiary level, where results depend more heavily on labour market absorption, institutional capacity and wider economic conditions**.

Contribution of ILO interventions to short- and medium-term outcomes under the Strategy and Action Plan

The effectiveness analysis assesses the extent to which ILO interventions contributed to the implementation priorities established under the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy 2030 and its accompanying Action Plan (2022–2025). While **the Strategy does not include a dedicated results framework with predefined outcomes and indicators**, the Action Plan provided a set of operational priorities and activities to support implementation of the five pillars. The evaluation therefore assessed the extent to which these priorities were reflected in interventions implemented during the evaluation period and contributed to intended short- and medium-term outcomes.

OVERVIEW OF ILO'S EFFECTIVENESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Overall, effectiveness (understood as the contribution of ILO's work to short- and medium-term outcomes) across the five pillars of the Strategy has been uneven. Analyses of P&B reports, CPOs and development cooperation data illustrate these uneven patterns of implementation and results. Since 2022, the largest share of skills-related deliverables and projects was concentrated in outputs linked to policy support, institutional strengthening, skills development, employment promotion and labour market governance. Comparatively fewer interventions focused on other system-level functions, such as skills anticipation, financing mechanisms and sustainable implementation frameworks. As a result, implementation tended to prioritise pillars associated with governance reform, institutional capacity and employability outcomes, which partly explains why these areas show stronger evidence of achievement. More structurally demanding areas, particularly labour market intelligence systems, financing arrangements and implementation capacity, showed less consolidated results, reflecting the longer timeframes, sustained national commitment and domestic investment required for institutionalization and scale.

FIGURE 14. OVERVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ILO ACROSS THE FIVE PILLARS OF THE STRATEGY ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING (ASSESSMENT PERIOD: 2022-2025)



Source: HLE own elaboration

Across all pillars, effectiveness has generally been strongest where interventions focused on strengthening governance arrangements, institutional capacities, qualifications and standards systems, labour market intelligence mechanisms and coordination structures. The evaluation found that skills and lifelong learning increasingly functioned as enabling instruments for broader ILO objectives, including migration governance, enterprise development, just transition, social protection, formalization and youth employment. However, while this broadened the strategic relevance of skills interventions, it also contributed to limited cumulative learning and the consolidation of integrated country-level skills portfolios.³¹

Overall, the strongest and most consistent results are found in **Pillar 1: policies, governance and financing for skills development**, where the ILO successfully supported national reforms, qualifications systems, competency-based approaches, occupational standards and institutional modernization across multiple countries and regions.

Important achievements are also visible in **Pillars 3 and 5: innovative and flexible learning pathways and quality apprenticeships and work-based learning**, particularly where interventions combined employer engagement, competency-based systems and strong institutional ownership. **Results in Pillar 4: inclusive skills programmes** are significant, especially for women, refugees, migrants, youth and informal workers, although many remain project-dependent and insufficiently institutionalized.

³¹ In practice, highly diverse project ecosystems exist, operating with different funding modalities, monitoring systems, implementation timelines and institutional counterparts. This limits coherence, cumulative learning and the consolidation of integrated country-level skills body of work.

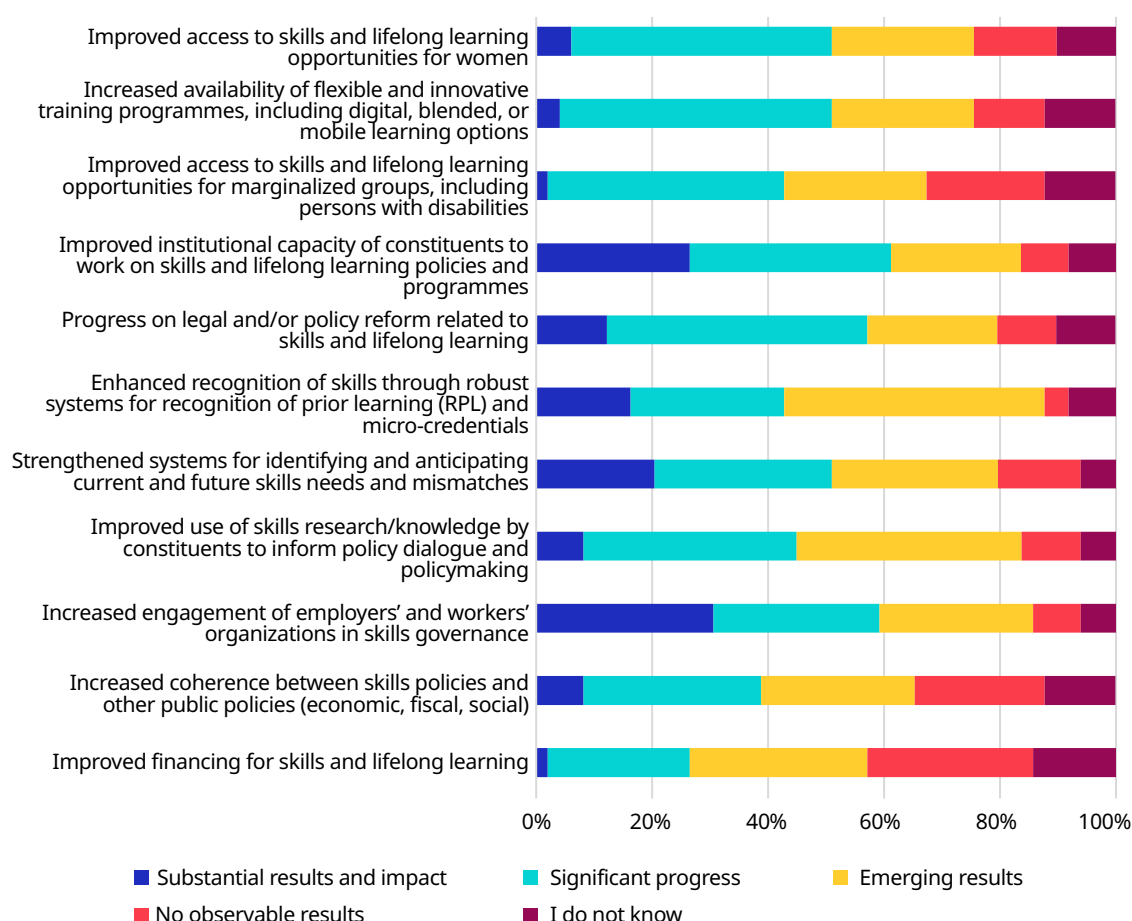
Pillar 2: skills needs intelligence shows significant progress in diagnostics, multistakeholder forecasting, institutional capacity-building and the use of skills evidence to inform policy and training. However, the institutionalization and routine use of permanent labour market intelligence and skills anticipation functions remain uneven across countries, particularly where sustained financing, institutional mandates and implementation capacity are still developing.

The evidence further suggests uneven progress across the **Strategy's operational components**: Policy advice, technical support, institutional strengthening, normative guidance and partnerships, generally produced the strongest and most visible results. By contrast, research dissemination, knowledge management and some innovation-related dimensions were less systematically institutionalized at country level.

PERSPECTIVES FROM ILO STAFF, CONSTITUENTS AND MAIN PARTNERS OF THE ILO

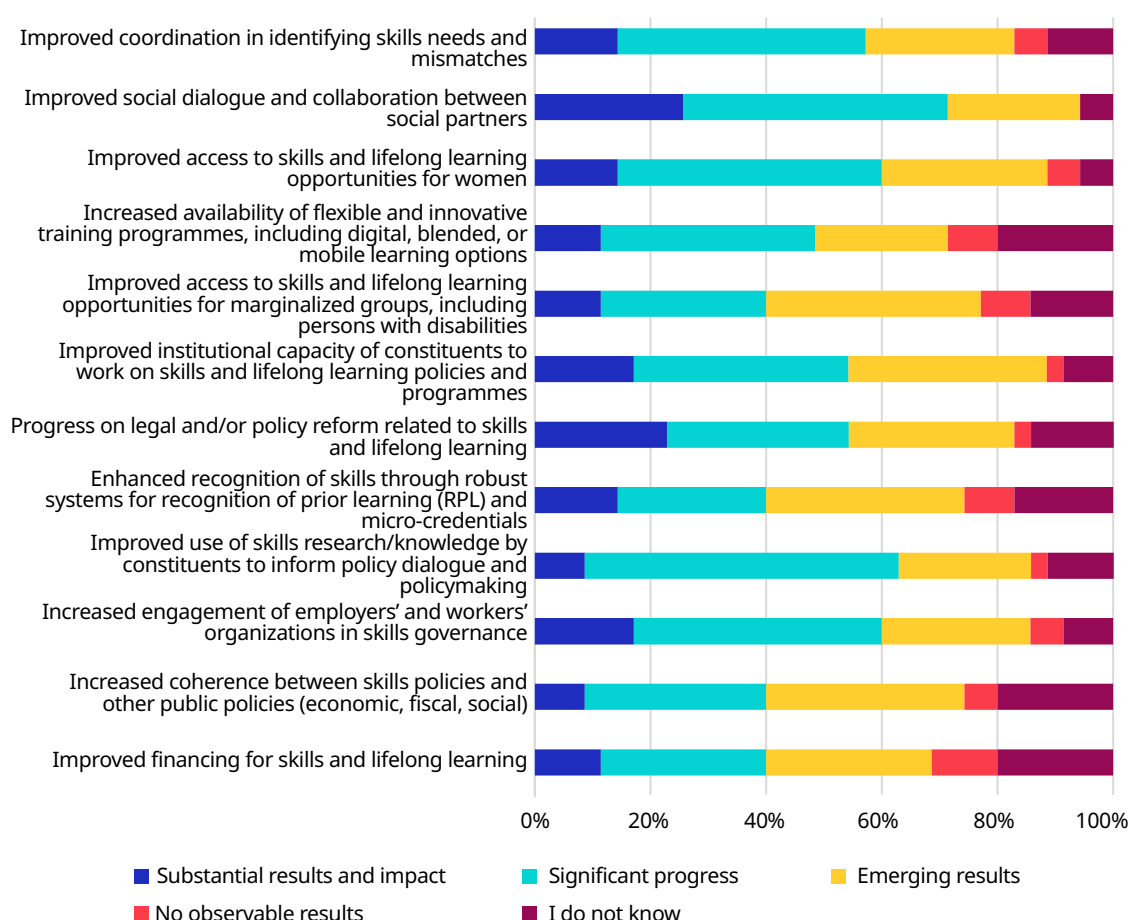
The evaluation survey responses from ILO staff broadly confirmed the pattern emerging from the wider evidence base (Figure 15 and 16 below). Perceived results were strongest in areas related to policy reform, institutional capacity, social dialogue and constituent engagement in skills governance, reflecting the ILO's effectiveness in strengthening the institutional capacities and governance foundations of skills systems. By contrast, results related to skills anticipation, RPL, flexible learning pathways, financing and the use of skills knowledge were generally positive, but remain partly concentrated in the "emerging results" category, suggesting a shared perception that several reforms have advanced but are not yet fully operationalised at system level. For the purposes of interpreting the survey, 'emerging results' refers to observable progress or initial results that have not yet reached sufficient maturity, institutionalization or scale to be considered significant or substantial. It should therefore not be interpreted as equivalent to 'no observable results' or necessarily as evidence of underperformance.

FIGURE 15. PERCEIVED PROGRESS BY ILO STAFF IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS OF ILO WORK ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING, BY MAIN RESULTS AREA (EXPRESSED IN PERCENTAGES)



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team (N= 49 ILO staff). Over the past biennia (2022-2025), to what extent have you seen the following results created by ILO as related to skills and lifelong learning?

FIGURE 16. PERCEIVED PROGRESS BY ILO CONSTITUENTS IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS OF ILO WORK ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING, BY MAIN RESULT AREA (EXPRESSED IN PERCENTAGES)



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team (N= 35 ILO Constituents). Over the past biennia (2022-2026), to what extent have you seen the following results created by ILO as related to skills and lifelong learning?

When consulted, main ILO partners' perceptions point to meaningful progress in strengthening skills systems, stakeholder engagement, and access to learning opportunities, while highlighting the need for continued efforts to deepen policy integration, institutional capacity, and structural reforms. The highest shares of respondents reporting substantial or significant progress were for enhanced recognition of skills through robust systems (72.8%), increased engagement of employers' and workers' organizations in skills governance (69.5%), and improved access to skills and lifelong learning opportunities (69.5%). Strong results were also reported for improved use of skills research and knowledge (55.9%) and strengthened systems for identifying skills needs (61.0%).

At the same time, many partners viewed progress as still emerging in areas requiring broader systemic change, such as coherence between skills policies and other public policies (35.6%), legal and policy reforms (30.5%), and skills needs identification systems (28.8%).

DETAILED OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION AND ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS BY PILLAR

A detailed analysis of the progress made in the achievement of results by pillar of the ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning is presented below.

PILLAR 1. IMPROVED POLICIES, GOVERNANCE AND FINANCING FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING**Strongest and most consistent results**

Main finding: The ILO's comparative advantage in this pillar lies primarily in governance reform, institutional design, normative guidance and tripartite coordination. However, the transition from technically credible reform processes toward durable implementation and system transformation remained uneven across countries. Translating policy influence and convening power into effective implementation support remains challenging in some contexts. While the ILO is widely recognized for its ability to bring stakeholders together and support policy reform processes, the operationalization of reforms often depends on factors beyond the Organization's direct control, including institutional capacity, financing and political commitment.



The ILO's strength is not really in delivering training directly. It is in helping countries build systems that continue functioning after projects end

—ILO staff

Overall, the evidence indicates substantial progress against several Action Plan priorities under Pillar 1. ILO's work under this pillar demonstrates the strongest and most consistent evidence of translation into country-level results (except for financing, see below). Across regions, **ILO interventions contributed to national policy reform, institutional modernization, competency-based approaches, qualifications systems, sector coordination and labour market governance.** This pattern is also reflected in reporting trends: since 2022, most skills-related deliverables and development cooperation activities were concentrated in policy support, employability, institutional strengthening and labour market governance.

The **strongest evidence of effectiveness is found where interventions reinforced broader system functions** rather than focusing narrowly on training delivery. In Bangladesh, ILO support contributed to the endorsement of the **Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework (BNQF)**, revision of the National Skills Development Policy and adoption of the TVET Implementation Plan 2025–2030, contributing to efforts to address fragmentation and strengthen coordination within parts of the skills system. In **Ethiopia**, interventions supported the revised national TVET strategy, the national RPL strategy, harmonization of occupational standards and development of sector skills bodies, representing one of the stronger examples of the ILO influencing the governance architecture of a national skills system. In **Panama**, support to INADEH³² modernization advanced competency-based reform, labour competency standards and Sector Skills Councils, while in **Kenya**, the transformation of RPL from a refugee-focused mechanism into a broader lifelong learning instrument linked to the Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF) represented an important governance achievement. In **Moldova**, interventions supported occupational standards, renewable energy qualifications, microcredentials and labour market coordination mechanisms linked to green transition and demographic pressures.

Similar patterns are visible beyond the five country case studies. In **Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Senegal**, interventions strengthened governance systems, sector coordination, competency-based reform and industry engagement, including in renewable energy and green TVET. In **Tunisia and Egypt**, programmes contributed to employability frameworks, institutional coordination and youth employment governance, although labour market absorption and scalability remained constrained by broader economic conditions and institutional fragmentation. In **Cambodia and the Philippines**, interventions were more strongly oriented toward enterprise upgrading, sector adaptation and labour market responsiveness than toward large-scale national reform processes.

Across the evidence base, **policy and governance achievements were generally stronger than further delivery achievements to implement these, due to constraints**, such as financing, weak institutional capacity, fragmented mandates, staffing shortages and dependence on external support. **Several evaluations explicitly caution that policy adoption should not be confused with operational institutionalization.**

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While governance reforms advanced in many contexts, **implementation was frequently constrained by underfunded institutions, weak provider capacity and limited sustainable financing arrangements.** In **Kenya**, under-utilization of training levy mechanisms constrained scale; in **Ethiopia**, sector skills bodies remained dependent on project support; and in **Panama**, broader institutional transformation relied on complex external financing and implementation arrangements. Similar concerns emerged in **Tunisia, Egypt** and **several African countries** where reforms remained vulnerable to donor dependency and political change.

BOX 10. WHY CONTEXT MATTERS: THE COLOMBIA EXPERIENCE ON INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND SKILLS SYSTEMS REFORM

The Colombia case study found that the effectiveness of skills interventions varied significantly according to pre-existing institutional capacity. In territories with stronger governance structures and coordination mechanisms, ILO-supported interventions reinforced and accelerated existing institutional processes. In territories with weaker institutional capacity, interventions often played a more substitutive role, helping fill service gaps but facing greater challenges in generating sustainable systemic change. The study concluded that technical cooperation on skills and lifelong learning is most effective when it builds on existing institutional foundations and that different levels of system maturity require differentiated implementation approaches.

PILLAR 2. SKILLS NEEDS INTELLIGENCE

Weakest and least consolidated results

Main finding: Main finding: The ILO has become an important international actor in labour market diagnostics and skills anticipation. Across countries, skills anticipation interventions have gone beyond the production of diagnostics by strengthening institutional capacities and multistakeholder coordination and by informing policy formulation, occupational standards, curricula, training provision and sector planning. In some contexts, these approaches have also progressed towards institutionalization within national systems. However, the routine and sustained operation of permanent anticipation functions remains uneven across countries and continues to depend, in some contexts, on project support, adequate financing and sustained institutional capacity..

 **Everybody is producing studies. The real challenge is whether institutions are actually able to use them for planning and budgeting.**

— ILO staff

The ILO has implemented many of the Action Plan priorities associated with Pillar 2, including labour market assessments, sector studies, forecasting exercises, green and digital skills diagnostics, and support to labour market information systems. Progress has been strongest in generating evidence and analytical tools, while the institutionalization of permanent anticipation systems remains more uneven.

Results in skills needs intelligence remain uneven and less consolidated than in other pillars. The evidence base also suggests that skills anticipation and labour market intelligence occupied a **comparatively less central operational position within the broader skills programming** than governance reform, employability and institutional strengthening activities.

Across countries, interventions improved the relevance of training provision through employer consultations, occupational standards, forecasting exercises and labour market diagnostics. In **Moldova**, interventions supported Labour Market and Occupational Barometers and employer forecasting exercises that stakeholders considered increasingly embedded within the practices of the National Employment Agency. In **Panama**, sector characterization studies, occupational profiles and employer consultations informed competency standards and curricula, while the Skills for Productivity, Environment and Economic Diversification (SPEED) foresight study on green skills provided additional evidence for emerging skills needs in renewable energy and waste management. In **Ethiopia**, support included labour market assessments, Employment and Labour Market Information System (ELMIS) development and forecasting exercises linked to migration, textiles, agro-processing and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), although anticipation systems remained fragmented and reactive. In **Kenya** and **Bangladesh**, labour market intelligence informed local economic development, migration-related programming and competency-based reform, but institutional coordination and forecasting capacity remained uneven.

Beyond the evaluation country case studies, labour market intelligence work increasingly focused on green transition and technological change. In **Ghana** and across the **Southern Africa region**, methodologies such as SPEED and STED supported skills analysis in renewable energy, mining, agriculture and emerging green industries. In **Cambodia, Thailand** and the **Philippines**, green and digital skills diagnostics informed adaptation of TVET systems to technological and environmental transformation. In **Tunisia** and **Colombia**, labour market analysis supported youth employment, entrepreneurship and inclusion-related interventions, although the transition from diagnostics to large-scale employment outcomes remained uneven.

Across regions, employer engagement emerged as a decisive factor. Where employers participated actively in diagnostics, standards development and curriculum reform, labour market intelligence was more likely to influence training provision and sector planning. Where engagement remained weak or largely consultative, diagnostics often remained disconnected from implementation processes.

This is particularly relevant for STED, which should not be understood only as a diagnostic methodology. Its added value lies also in bringing governments, employers' and workers' organizations together around sector prioritization, skills needs, productivity and economic diversification. Where this multistakeholder process is connected to planning, financing and provider decisions, STED can function as a lever for governance and implementation rather than simply as a source of analytical evidence.

PILLAR 3. INNOVATIVE AND FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS

Strong results

Main finding: The high-level evaluation identified important progress in innovative and flexible learning pathways, particularly through competency-based approaches, initiating RPL mechanisms and modular training models. However, many innovations remain unevenly institutionalized and concentrated in pilot environments.



Recognition of prior learning is probably one of the few tools that really connects lifelong learning with the realities of informal workers.

— ILO staff

Progress under Pillar 3 broadly reflects the priorities set out in the Action Plan, notably support for digital, blended and flexible learning approaches, recognition of prior learning, micro-credentials, green skills development, curriculum modernization and the strengthening of quality assurance arrangements. Results are particularly visible in the modernization of training provision, although scale and sustainability vary across contexts.

The high-level evaluation evidenced how **competency-based approaches and RPL increasingly function as mechanisms connecting inclusion, labour mobility, lifelong learning and labour market relevance.** Across countries, these approaches are associated with greater flexibility and access to up and reskilling for workers trained outside formal systems and improved responsiveness of TVET systems to changing labour market conditions.

The above was found across the HLE case studies. In **Kenya**, RPL evolved from a refugee-focused intervention into a broader lifelong learning mechanism relevant to informal workers, migrants and workers trained outside formal institutions. In **Ethiopia**, RPL was operationalized through assessment tools, competency certification pilots and integration into national reform processes. In **Moldova**, the Green Skills project supported new occupations, qualification standards and microcredentials linked to labour market demand and green transition. In **Panama**, competency-based reform within INADEH produced 38 competency-based programmes and extensive trainer capacity-building. In **Bangladesh**, the Skills 21 and ProGRESS projects supported competency-based green TVET curricula integrating labour market relevance and sustainability.

Comparable innovations appear in other countries too. For instance, in **Zimbabwe**, competency-based green curricula were integrated into national TVET provision. In **Senegal**, greening TVET combined curriculum reform, teacher training and institutional transformation. In **Cambodia**,

Thailand and the **Philippines**, digitalization and greening of TVET systems were supported through institutional capacity-building and coaching.

In **Jordan** and **Lebanon**, flexible delivery modalities adapted skills provision to displacement and crisis contexts; in **Lebanon**, RPL was initially piloted in a refugee context and is now being scaled up. In **Tunisia**, employability and entrepreneurship programmes experimented with more flexible transition pathways for youth and social economy actors. In **South Africa**, apprenticeship and artisan reforms incorporated competency-based and workplace-oriented pathways. In **India**, innovative approaches linked green construction, renewable energy and enterprise-based skills development.

However, system take up and operationalisation for **scalability remains a major challenge**. Many innovative approaches remain concentrated in pilot institutions or donor-supported. While technical innovation is generally strong, strategies for consolidation, impact assessments and refinement of approaches for operationalisation, scaling, financing and integration into national systems are less consistently developed. This creates a risk that innovation advances faster than the capacity of institutions to operationalize new approaches at scale.

PILLAR 4. INCLUSIVE SKILLS PROGRAMMES

Significant results

Main finding: Across countries, the ILO contributed significantly to integrating gender and diversity inclusion objectives into skills policies, pilot interventions, RPL systems and labour market programmes targeting women, youth, refugees, migrants, people with disabilities and informal workers. Results were generally strongest where inclusion mechanisms were linked to broader policy and institutional reforms rather than remaining limited to project-level targeting approaches. The evaluation evidence pointed at inclusion requiring not only access to training, but also stronger linkages with labour markets, certification systems and institutional reforms.

The evidence indicates significant progress on several Action Plan commitments under Pillar 4, including targeted support for women, youth, refugees, migrants and other vulnerable groups, as well as the promotion of inclusive training pathways, recognition systems and labour market transition support. However, reaching scale and addressing structural barriers to inclusion remain ongoing challenges in many contexts.

Inclusion is consistently present across the portfolio, also as a transversal topic, although results are uneven and often more visible at project level than at system level. Inclusion outcomes are generally stronger where training is combined with employment services, entrepreneurship support, labour market integration and certification pathways. In **Kenya**, the PROSPECTS project linked refugee inclusion with national systems through RPL and policy dialogue, while the Public-Private Development Partnership (PPDP) supported inclusion of women and youth through local economic development approaches. ILO support also contributed to the development by TVETA of a standard on gender and disability inclusion for TVET institutions. In **Ethiopia**, the Better Regional Migration Management (BRMM) project and PROSPECTS supported training centres in migration-affected and refugee-hosting areas and trained large numbers of potential and returning migrants.

In **Moldova**, inclusion was linked to local employment partnerships, refugee support, employment services and green transition. In **Bangladesh**, interventions strongly emphasized women's economic participation and gender-responsive TVET, including the development and wider dissemination through national TVET institutions of guidance and awareness materials addressing violence and harassment. In **Panama**, the intervention contributed to increasing women's participation in non-traditional occupations such as electricity, plumbing, solar panel work and heavy equipment operation, although gender mainstreaming remained only partially systematized within the project design.

Broader evidence since 2022 reinforces these patterns. In **Jordan** and **Lebanon**, interventions supported refugees and host communities through resilience and livelihoods programmes. In **Colombia**, skills and employability programmes targeted victims of armed conflict and vulnerable

populations. In **Tunisia**, interventions focused on NEET³³ youth and marginalized regions. In **Cambodia**, training interventions linked skills with formalization and occupational safety in informal sectors. In **Southern Africa**, renewable energy and green skills initiatives included efforts to expand the participation of women and NEET youth in technical occupations, although the scale and sustainability of these results varied across interventions.

The **Colombia** country case study conducted also illustrates how skills interventions can serve as entry points for broader institutional coordination. Support to victims of armed conflict was linked not only to training provision but also to employment services, qualifications systems and labour market integration mechanisms. This experience suggests that effectiveness is often enhanced when training interventions are connected to wider institutional ecosystems rather than delivered as stand-alone activities, reinforcing the evaluation's broader finding that system-oriented approaches tend to generate stronger and more sustainable results than isolated training interventions. Additional evidence from the **Colombia** country case study suggests that inclusion outcomes were strongest where training interventions formed part of broader support pathways. Programmes targeting victims of armed conflict combined technical training with psychosocial support, educational progression opportunities and local institutional coordination. The study found particularly strong evidence of educational mobility and continued participation in learning pathways, especially among women, while labour market outcomes proved more uneven and dependent on wider structural conditions.

In **Egypt**, employability and entrepreneurship programmes targeted youth exclusion and transition to work, though labour market absorption remained weak. In **Philippines**, interventions connected vulnerable youth and workers to digital and green transition opportunities. In **India**, inclusion increasingly intersected with green jobs and informal economy transitions.

Despite important achievements, inclusion results remain **localized and project-dependent**. Evaluations also suggest that inclusion objectives are not always matched by sufficient operational adaptation. In some cases, beneficiary targeting mechanisms proved insufficient to reach the most vulnerable groups consistently, while employment outcomes for women and marginalized populations remained uneven despite strong participation rates. Evidence from **Bangladesh** and other contexts suggests that numerical inclusion targets do not necessarily translate into equitable labour market outcomes when structural barriers remain unaddressed.



If you only train vulnerable groups but the labour market itself does not change, the inclusion effect remains temporary.

— Global partner

BOX 11. INCLUSION IS STRONGEST WHEN IT MODIFIES SYSTEM ACCESS

The most effective inclusion results are not simply those that train vulnerable groups, but those that are embedded in standards, qualifications systems, labour market institutions and governance arrangements. For instance, Kenya's RPL system expanded recognition opportunities for refugees and informal workers; Ethiopia's RPL pilots addressed under-recognition of informally acquired skills; Bangladesh integrated gender concerns into TVET reform; Moldova linked green transition with inclusive employment services and gender equality measures in TVET institutions, including sensitisation activities and efforts to increase women's participation in traditionally male-dominated occupations; and Panama promoted women's participation in non-traditional occupations.

33 Not in Education, Employment, or Training

PILLAR 5. QUALITY APPRENTICESHIPS AND WORK-BASED LEARNING

Strong results

Main finding: Since 2022, the ILO has made important progress in increasing member's capacities to understand concepts, importance of tripartite policy dialogue, and to assume their roles in apprenticeships and work-based learning, resulting from support to policy frameworks, competency-based approaches and the operationalization of Recommendation No. 208 on Quality Apprenticeships. Results were strongest where employers and workers actively participated in standards development, curriculum design and governance mechanisms. However, areas of financing and development of apprenticeship mechanism remain uneven, since apprenticeships are still driven by the government and financing, quality assurance and enterprise participation still often dependent on project-based support.



Recommendation 208 gave us a much clearer understanding of what quality apprenticeships actually mean in practice.

—Global partner

The high-level evaluation identified progress made in apprenticeships and work-based learning, particularly in the development of policy frameworks, competency-based models, employer engagement mechanisms and the operationalization of Recommendation No. 208 on quality apprenticeships. Results under this pillar are also closely aligned with the Action Plan, particularly through support to apprenticeship legislation and policy reforms, capacity development for training providers and enterprises, strengthened public-private partnerships, and efforts to expand quality work-based learning opportunities.

Evidence suggests that progress has been strongest in policy and system development, while large-scale implementation remains at different stages across countries. Furthermore, **the evaluation identified work under this pillar as one of the areas where the ILO's tripartite mandate and normative role provide particularly strong comparative advantage.** Results are strongest where employers participate actively in standards development, curriculum design, workplace training and governance mechanisms.

Across several countries, the Recommendation helped strengthen policy dialogue and provided a clearer normative reference for issues such as governance, certification, workplace learning, inclusion and quality assurance. In this context, support to work-based learning can also represent a progressive step towards the fuller implementation of Recommendation No. 208, as countries gradually strengthen employer engagement, governance, quality assurance and the institutional conditions required for quality apprenticeship systems. However, operationalization remains uneven across countries and sectors. In **Panama**, dual training and work-based learning were integrated into the INADEH reform process and linked to Recommendation No. 208. Employers participated in occupational standards, curriculum validation and training placements. In **Kenya**, PPDP linked vocational training centres with employers through internships, mentorship and workplace attachments. In **Ethiopia**, sector skills bodies and occupational standards strengthened links between TVET systems and labour market needs. In **Bangladesh**, ProGRESS and related interventions supported enterprise-linked skills development and women's participation in competency-based training, contributing to stronger links between training provision and labour market demand. In **Moldova**, renewable energy qualifications and employer engagement strengthened the practical orientation of green skills provision.

Furthermore, in **South Africa**, apprenticeship and artisan reforms became increasingly embedded within national institutional arrangements. In **Tunisia**, apprenticeship and employability programmes supported school-to-work transitions. In **Ghana**, renewable energy strategies linked industry demand with training provision. Across **Southern Africa**, renewable energy and green skills initiatives supported industry-linked training approaches and regional dialogue on skills for the energy transition.

In **India**, work-based learning increasingly connected with green construction and renewable energy. In **Senegal**, greening TVET reforms emphasized employer engagement and practical learning environments. In **Cambodia** and the **Philippines**, enterprise-based learning and workplace adaptation became increasingly important in response to technological transition and changing labour demand.



Everybody talks about apprenticeships. The difficult part is creating systems where enterprises actually have incentives to participate.

—Employers' representative

However, across the programming landscape, apprenticeship and work-based learning systems remain more advanced conceptually than operationally in many countries notably due to continued challenges: employer participation is uneven across countries and sectors, financing models are often weak, and apprenticeship systems are not always sufficiently regulated or quality-assured. In many contexts, work-based learning continues to depend heavily on project facilitation rather than on institutionalized incentives, sector-level arrangements, sustainable co-financing models and governance structures.

BOX 12. OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY AT POLICY-, INSTITUTIONAL- AND BENEFICIARY-LEVEL OF WORK

Findings from the high-level evaluation pointed at the **ILO's strength in enabling and structuring reform processes at policy and institutional levels, while the translation of these reforms into large-scale outcomes at beneficiary level remains highly context-dependent.**

At policy level, the strongest results are visible in policy reform, governance frameworks, qualifications systems, apprenticeship regulation, green skills strategies and institutional modernization. Across countries, the ILO contributed credibly to shaping national reform agendas, strengthening tripartite dialogue and introducing competency-based and demand-responsive approaches. These are areas where the Organization's normative role, technical expertise and convening power are most evident.

At institutional and coordination level, interventions were often effective in strengthening institutional coordination, employer engagement, sector dialogue, curriculum reform, labour market relevance and operational capacities within training institutions, ministries, qualifications bodies and sector structures. However, this level also reveals some of the main implementation bottlenecks identified throughout the evaluation, including fragmented mandates, staffing constraints, uneven labour market intelligence systems, dependence on project financing and weak institutional absorption capacity.

At beneficiary level, interventions generated important direct benefits for trainees, workers, migrants, refugees, women, informal workers and enterprises through training, certification, RPL, entrepreneurship support, apprenticeships and work-based learning. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that micro-level gains were not always matched by durable system transformation or large-scale labour market outcomes, particularly in contexts affected by weak labour demand, informality and limited economic absorption capacity.

What the portfolio assessment suggests for future strategy implementation

An aggregated portfolio-level analysis suggests that the variations observed across pillars are not only the result of implementation constraints but reflects broader strategic choices in how the skills interventions evolved during the evaluation period. Across both biennia, considerably greater operational emphasis was placed on governance reform, employability, institutional strengthening and policy support than on financing systems, labour market intelligence and the sustained operationalization and scaling of reforms.

This strategic concentration contributed to strong performance in areas related to policy frameworks, standards, institutional modernization and pilot innovation, while progress was comparatively weaker in areas requiring sustained system operation, financing continuity and the institutional and operational conditions needed to implement reforms at scale. In the area of skills financing, this assessment should also be viewed against a relatively limited starting point: during the evaluation period, the ILO began to develop research, guidance and internal capacity on financing approaches, providing an emerging foundation for more systematic work in this area. Overall, **the portfolio of work and results demonstrates a strong catalytic and enabling contribution to skills systems development, although the degree of operationalization varies considerably across countries and intervention areas.** At the same time, institutional reform is often cumulative and sequential, with policy development and institutional strengthening providing the foundations for later operationalization and scale.

From a strategic perspective, the evidence suggests a need for **greater attention in the remainder of the Strategy implementation period to:**

- ▶ pathways for translating reforms and pilot initiatives into sustained implementation and institutional practice;
- ▶ implementation and scaling strategies;
- ▶ systematic measurement and documentation of results, including progress towards institutionalization, sustainability and scale
- ▶ integrated labour market intelligence systems;
- ▶ stronger coordination and strategic alignment across the wide range of skills-related projects and interventions.

The findings do not suggest that governance-oriented work should be reduced, as this remains one of the ILO's clearest comparative advantages. Rather, they suggest that **stronger balancing across pillars may be needed if technical reforms are expected to translate into more durable systemic transformation** (please refer to the Section on the Orientation towards Impact and Sustainability for more details)

OVERVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY ACROSS REGIONS

The analysis of evidence by the high-level evaluation pointed at regional differences in both the focus and effectiveness of ILO interventions on skills and lifelong learning. While the overall strategic orientation of ILO's work remained broadly aligned with the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy, implementation **priorities, institutional challenges and pathways of change varied considerably across regions according to labour market conditions, levels of institutional maturity, demographic pressures, economic transformation dynamics and crisis contexts.** Overall, this illustrates the capacity of the ILO to adapt skills and lifelong learning interventions to differentiated labour market and institutional contexts. At the same time, the evidence also suggested that effectiveness of strategy implementation relies heavily on the maturity of national institutions, implementation capacity, labour market absorption and the extent to which reforms became embedded within sustainable financing and governance systems.

FIGURE 17. KEY FOCUS AREAS OF THE ILO'S WORK ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING BY REGION

Source: HLE own elaboration

Note: The figure highlights prominent and differentiating regional patterns identified through the evaluation and is not intended as an exhaustive representation of all areas of ILO skills and lifelong learning work in each region.

As illustrated in Figure 17, in **Africa**, interventions focused strongly on foundational system-building challenges, including fragmented TVET governance, weak institutional coordination, underdeveloped labour market information systems, informality and limited employer participation. As a result, programmes frequently emphasized governance reform, competency-based systems, RPL, apprenticeships and work-based learning, sector coordination mechanisms and institutional modernization. The region also shows some of the clearest examples of efforts to connect skills systems with green transition agendas, particularly through renewable energy, agriculture, mining and green hydrogen-related skills analysis. However, many reforms remained constrained or are delayed by limited institutional capacity, staffing shortages, dependence on external financing and uneven implementation sustainability.

In the **Arab States** region, priorities varied considerably across subregions. In Mashreq countries, interventions were strongly shaped by youth unemployment, displacement, migration pressures and labour market exclusion, while work in Gulf countries increasingly addressed national occupational standards, skills recognition and more inclusive skills systems, including access for persons with disabilities. Skills interventions frequently combined employability, entrepreneurship, refugee inclusion and resilience-oriented approaches. Adaptive programming was particularly visible in crisis-affected settings such as Jordan and Lebanon, where interventions linked livelihoods, protection and host-community inclusion. However, labour market absorption remained a major constraint, and several interventions struggled to translate strong technical outputs into durable employment outcomes in contexts affected by weak job creation, regional disparities and economic instability.

In **Latin America** and the **Caribbean** region, interventions focused more strongly on modernization of public training institutions, competency-based reform, productive transformation and emerging agendas linked to green transition and care economies. Panama provides one of the clearest examples of institution-oriented modernization through the INADEH reform process, while regional mechanisms such as CINTERFOR supported peer learning and dissemination of competency-based approaches. Compared with several African contexts, interventions in Latin America generally operated within more consolidated institutional environments, although implementation and coordination challenges remained important.

In **Europe** and **Central Asia**, demographic decline, outward migration and workforce adaptation increasingly shaped lifelong learning priorities. Interventions focused more strongly on adult learning, reskilling, green transition and labour market retention. Moldova illustrates this pattern

clearly, with skills interventions increasingly linked to renewable energy, workforce adaptation and demographic pressures. In these contexts, the challenge was often less about initial access to training systems than about maintaining workforce participation and adapting existing skills systems to changing labour market realities.

In **Asia** and the **Pacific region**, interventions were more closely connected to industrial upgrading, export-oriented sectors, enterprise competitiveness, digitalization and technological adaptation. Skills interventions frequently emphasized enterprise engagement, sector responsiveness digitalisation and emerging AI applications in learning and skills systems, and adaptation to changing production systems. In countries such as Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines, green and digital skills agendas increasingly influenced TVET modernization efforts, while apprenticeship and workplace-oriented models were linked more directly to industry demand and technological transition.

THE ILO'S NORMATIVE FUNCTION AND LEADERSHIP ROLE IN CONVENING POLICY DIALOGUE AND ENABLING RESULTS

The ILO's normative actions and global leadership functions supported country-level outcomes in several important ways. Fundamentally, Recommendation No. 208 strengthened the normative and operational basis for apprenticeship reforms, work-based learning and dual training. Its influence is visible, for instance, in **Panama, Kenya and South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Tonga and Fiji** where apprenticeship discussions increasingly incorporated issues of quality, governance, certification, inclusion and labour protection.

More broadly, the evaluation found that the ILO's normative function contributed to results not only through formal standards, but also by providing **internationally recognized reference frameworks that helped legitimize and structure national reform processes**. Across several countries, governments and social partners used ILO guidance on apprenticeships, qualifications, competency-based approaches, social dialogue and inclusion as a basis for policy development, institutional reform and stakeholder coordination. The normative framework was particularly important in areas where reforms required consensus-building among multiple actors, helping create a common language around quality, labour market relevance, recognition of skills and lifelong learning. This normative role reinforced the credibility of ILO support and often enabled reforms to move beyond project activities towards broader policy and institutional change.

Portfolio reporting patterns also suggest an important distinction between global and country-level functions. Global-level deliverables were more strongly concentrated around dedicated skills outputs and normative frameworks, while country-level interventions were more frequently integrated into broader employment, migration, enterprise and transition agendas. This reinforces the ILO's role as both a normative actor globally and a more operationally adaptive actor at country level.

At the same time, the high-level evaluation evidence suggests that the concrete implementation **effects of normative guidance are not always systematically tracked or measured over time**. While evaluations frequently identify normative alignment and policy influence, fewer provide robust evidence on how normative frameworks ultimately changed implementation practices, enforcement mechanisms or institutional behaviour.

Global leadership also facilitated peer learning and transfer of approaches. For instance, **Ethiopia's** sector skills body design was informed by exchanges with **India, Ghana and South Africa**, while ITCILO and GSP-related exchanges supported transfer of experience on RPL, apprenticeships and skills anticipation. In several contexts, the GSP also contributed to greater operational flexibility and coherence by allowing partially pooled or coordinated funding arrangements, facilitating cross-country learning and reducing fragmentation between related interventions. This was particularly relevant in contexts where multiple projects, donors and institutional actors operated simultaneously within broader national reform agendas. However, the extent to which this translated into long-term institutional coherence and sustained national coordination varied across countries.

Beyond HQ tools and regional platforms, the ITC-ILO has also played an enabling role in translating ILO technical expertise into capacity development, peer learning and applied training for constituents and practitioners across regions.

BOX 13. ITC-ILO AS A GLOBAL LEARNING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PLATFORM FOR SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

The ITC-ILO has contributed to the implementation of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy by providing a global platform for capacity development, peer learning and dissemination of ILO methodologies. Across the evidence base, its role is most visible in supporting training and learning services for constituents, ILO staff, TVET institutions and project partners on areas such as skills anticipation, sectoral approaches to skills development, RPL, quality apprenticeships, digital TVET, management of vocational training centres and inclusion in skills systems.

Project-level evidence illustrates this contribution. In Lebanon, ITC-ILO supported the Skills Academy Lebanon and complementary training on labour market information, skills anticipation, entrepreneurship and sectoral approaches to skills development. In Kenya, under PROSPECTS, ITC-ILO courses supported TVET practitioners, senior government officials, social partners and trainers, including work with KSTVET to contextualize training to national needs. In ASEAN/Cambodia, ITC-ILO contributed to blended RPL and digital transformation tools, while in Southern Africa it supported the development of e-learning and knowledge-sharing capacities linked to renewable energy skills.

This evidence suggests that ITC-ILO functions as an important enabling mechanism for scaling technical knowledge and strengthening capacities across countries. At the same time, as with other global learning platforms, the evaluation found limited systematic evidence on how participation in training translates into sustained institutional change or downstream labour market outcomes. Its contribution is therefore best understood as catalytic and capacity-building oriented, complementing SKILLS, field offices and GSP.

Global tools and methodologies, including STED, SPEED, Greening TVET and RPL guidance, enabled the ILO to provide countries with practical implementation frameworks rather than only policy advice. This is especially visible in green transition work across **Moldova, Ghana, Panama, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Namibia** and **Southern Africa**.

BOX 14. ILO/CINTERFOR AS A REGIONAL PLATFORM FOR TECHNICAL COOPERATION, INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE CO-CREATION

Across Latin America and the Caribbean, ILO/CINTERFOR functions as a specialized regional platform and institutional network for vocational training, skills development and lifelong learning. Its contribution extends beyond regional coordination and knowledge dissemination. Through its network-based model, CINTERFOR supports technical cooperation among national vocational training institutions, facilitates the development and adaptation of methodologies and technical tools, strengthens institutional capacities and supports their application within national systems.

This model combines the production and circulation of regional knowledge and tools with implementation through participating national institutions. Evidence from Panama and regional consultations highlights CINTERFOR's contribution to competency-based training, occupational standards, instructor development and certification systems, while also connecting national reform processes with regional agendas on green skills, the care economy and skills mobility. The wider evaluation evidence also points to efficiencies generated through methodologies, standards, curricula and certification tools that can be developed collaboratively and subsequently adapted across countries.

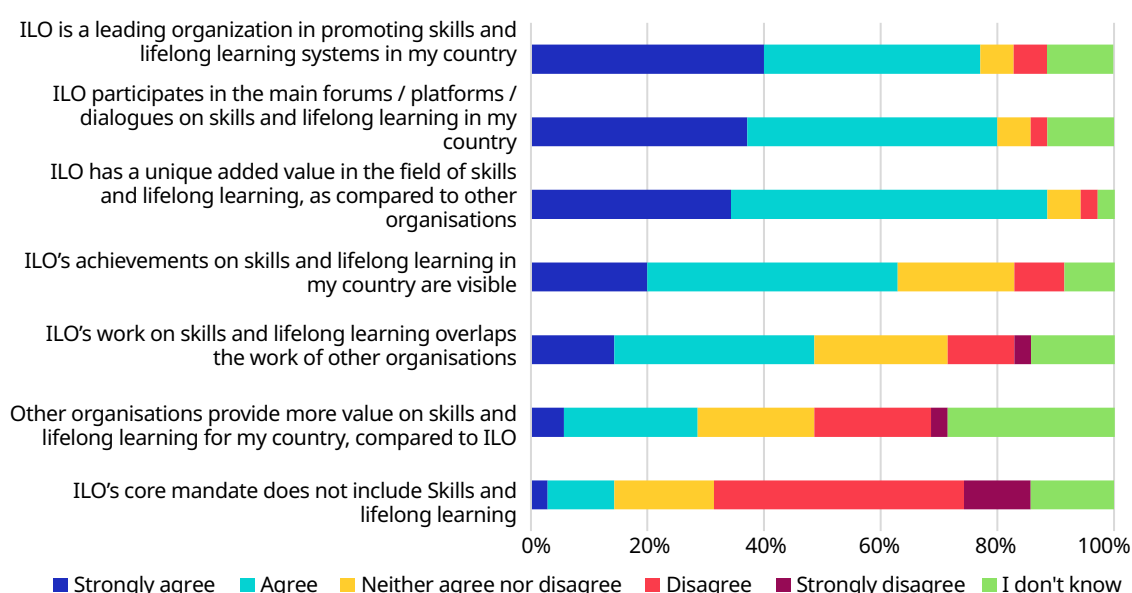
CINTERFOR therefore provides a mechanism through which regional exchange can be translated into institutional capacities, shared methodologies and implementation pathways at country level. Its contribution is both catalytic and operational, although national uptake and institutionalization vary according to institutional mandates, capacities, financing and political continuity. The network model is particularly valuable in supporting South-South learning, institutional continuity and the adaptation of approaches beyond individual project cycles.

The ILO's work on skills for green jobs and just transition helped position skills within emerging agendas such as climate policy, green industrial transformation and sustainable development. Across programmes, green transition increasingly functions not as a separate niche area, but as a driver reshaping skills governance, labour market intelligence, curricula and institutional reform. However, transmission from global to country level remains uneven. ILS including relevant Conventions and Recommendations and their respective global tools are most effective where embedded into funded national interventions with strong institutional ownership. In other contexts, they remain at the level of tools, pilots or knowledge products without sustained operational uptake.

Survey findings from constituents and partners indicate that the ILO generally enjoys strong credibility and convening power in the skills and lifelong learning field. However, interviews and country-level evidence suggest that visibility and influence vary considerably across contexts depending on the scale of ILO engagement, the prominence of other development partners and the extent to which governments and stakeholders can distinguish the ILO's technical contribution from broader donor-supported reforms.

Responses from surveyed constituents broadly reinforce the evaluation's assessment that the ILO is perceived by them as a credible and influential actor in the field of skills and lifelong learning, particularly in relation to governance, social dialogue, institutional reform and system-oriented approaches (Figure 18).

FIGURE 18. ILO CONSTITUENT'S PERCEPTION OF THE ILO'S LEADERSHIP AND COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE IN THE GLOBAL SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING AGENDA



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team (N= 35 constituents). To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about ILO's portfolio on skills and lifelong learning as compared to other international actors

As shown in Figure 18, **more than 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the ILO has a unique added value in skills and lifelong learning compared to other organizations, while 77.1% considered the ILO to be a leading organization in promoting national skills and lifelong learning systems.**

Similarly, 80% of surveyed constituents agreed that the ILO participates actively in the main national forums, platforms and policy dialogues on skills. These findings strongly reinforce broader evaluation evidence showing that the ILO's comparative advantage lies primarily in its convening capacity, tripartite mandate, normative role and ability to connect system-oriented reform with practical implementation and service delivery, using operational experience to inform and strengthen broader institutional change.

The results are particularly consistent with findings from Pillar 1 and the broader governance-related dimensions of the Strategy. Across country case studies and the wider portfolio, the ILO was repeatedly perceived as especially effective in areas such as policy reform, institutional coordination, sector dialogue, apprenticeship governance, qualifications systems and labour market relevance. The survey findings therefore reinforce the conclusion that the ILO's strongest contribution lies in shaping the architecture and governance of skills systems.

Figure 18 also highlights an important nuance regarding **complementarity and overlap with other international actors**. Nearly half of respondents agreed that ILO's work overlaps to some extent with that of other organizations. However, this does not appear to undermine perceptions of the

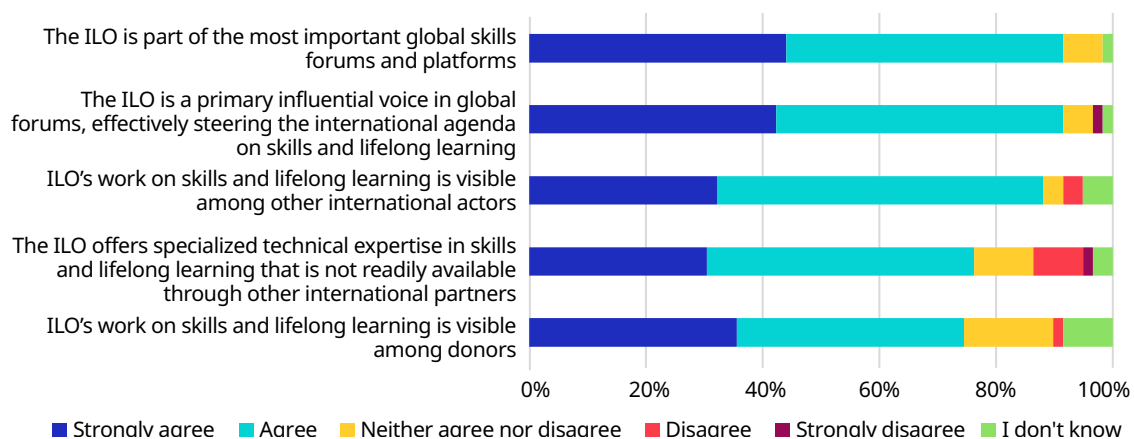
ILO's relevance or distinctiveness. Instead, the findings suggest that overlap is often perceived within broader collaborative ecosystems involving UNESCO, the World Bank, GIZ, regional development banks and bilateral donors, particularly in areas such as TVET reform, green skills and employability. The evaluation evidence suggests that **the ILO's comparative advantage within this landscape lies in the combination of technical expertise and convening power**. Beyond providing technical support, the ILO is uniquely positioned **to bring together governments, employers' and workers' organizations around skills reforms, support coordination across the skills ecosystem, and help translate policies and strategies into more operational and implementable frameworks**.

Importantly, the survey strongly rejects the idea that skills and lifelong learning fall outside the ILO's core mandate. A majority of respondents explicitly disagreed with this statement, reinforcing the longstanding constitutional and normative basis for skills development and lifelong learning within the ILO's decent work mandate. However, the priority attached to skills varies across constituent groups, with workers' organizations in particular often approaching skills through broader concerns related to rights, wages, social protection and employment security.

At the same time, Figure 18 also points to some **perceived limitation regarding visibility and differentiation of ILO's work**. While overall perceptions are highly positive, a visible share of respondents remained neutral or uncertain regarding the visibility of ILO achievements and the relative value of its interventions compared to other organizations. This reinforces broader evaluation findings suggesting that the ILO's technical influence is often stronger than the visibility of its results, particularly in complex multi-partner environments where institutional contributions may become less visible than direct delivery outputs.

Perspectives from **ILO partners** regarding the ILO's visibility, technical leadership and influence in the field of skills and lifelong learning are highly positive and suggest that partners view the ILO as a recognized and influential actor in the global skills agenda (Figure 19). The strongest ratings relate to the ILO's participation in major global skills forums and platforms (91.6 per cent agree or strongly agree) and its role as an influential voice shaping international discussions on skills and lifelong learning (91.6 per cent agree or strongly agree). Similarly, 88.1 per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that the ILO is visible among other international actors, indicating strong external recognition. Perceptions are slightly more mixed regarding the ILO's specialized technical expertise and visibility among donors, although these dimensions also receive predominantly positive assessments, with 76.3 per cent and 74.6 per cent of respondents respectively expressing agreement or strong agreement. Notably, disagreement remains very limited across all dimensions (between 0 and 10.2 per cent), while the proportion of respondents indicating "I don't know" is also low, suggesting that most partners feel sufficiently informed to assess the ILO's role.

FIGURE 19. GLOBAL PARTNERS PERCEPTIONS OF THE ILO VISIBILITY, TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND INFLUENCE IN SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO partners. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the position of ILO vis-à-vis other international actors in the field of skills? ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning is visible among other international actors

FACTORS LIMITING EFFECTIVENESS AND OUTCOMES

Evidence across interventions suggests that progress in one area of the skills system was often constrained by weaknesses in other, interconnected functions. **In several countries, policy reforms, competency-based approaches and qualifications frameworks advanced more rapidly than the institutional and financial arrangements required for their implementation.** For example, in **Ethiopia**, important progress was achieved in TVET reform, RPL and sector skills bodies, but several structures remained dependent on external technical and financial support. In **Kenya**, the expansion of RPL was constrained by limited assessment capacity and uneven awareness (among informal workers). In **Bangladesh**, reforms linked to qualifications frameworks and competency-based training continued to face implementation challenges associated with system fragmentation, limited institutional coordination and uneven stakeholder engagement. Similar patterns emerged in other countries, where labour market intelligence systems, employer participation, sustainable financing arrangements and implementation capacity often developed more slowly than policy and regulatory reforms. These interdependencies help explain why technically sound reforms did not always translate into fully operational and sustainable skills systems.

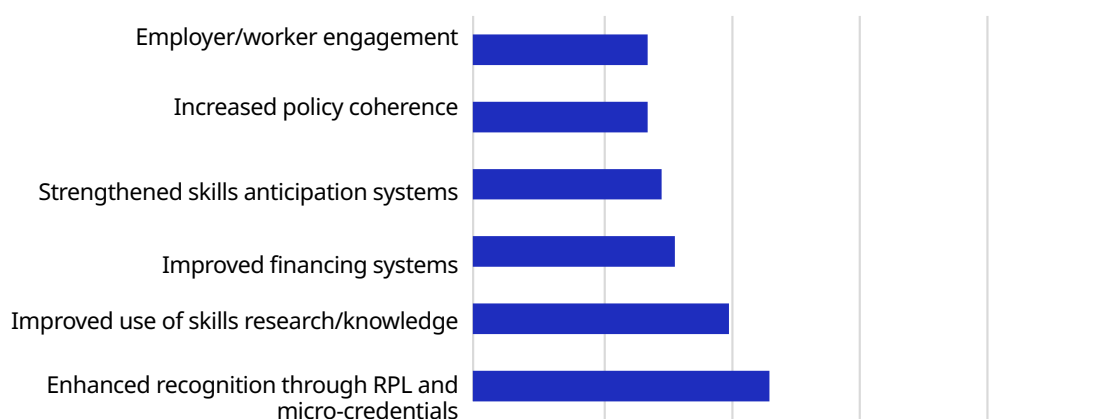
Overall, the findings indicate that **the ILO has been effective in initiating reforms and strengthening enabling conditions, but that many results have yet to achieve full operationalization and broad institutional uptake.** Across countries, the transition from policy design and piloting to sustained implementation was often constrained by limited institutional capacity, staffing shortages, fragmented mandates, dependence on external financing and short project cycles. In several contexts, reforms required longer implementation horizons and more sustained engagement than those provided through individual projects or funding windows. These factors help explain why progress in policy frameworks, standards and governance arrangements often advanced faster than the institutional capacities, financing mechanisms and coordination systems needed to sustain implementation over time.

In some contexts, the breadth of reform ambitions exceeded the implementation timeframes, staffing capacities and financing available. This was particularly evident in **Bangladesh**, where successive TVET reforms sought to address governance, qualifications, quality assurance and labour market relevance simultaneously within a highly fragmented skills ecosystem. Similar challenges emerged in **Ethiopia** and **Panama**, where ambitious reform agendas involving RPL systems, sector skills bodies, competency-based approaches and institutional modernization advanced more rapidly than the capacities and resources available to support their full operationalization. These factors contributed to uneven implementation and slower institutional consolidation. The synthesis review identified recurrent implementation delays linked to administrative and procurement procedures, funding flows, and coordination complexity across multiple stakeholders. Similar challenges were observed in multi-actor interventions such as the Panama case study, where complex implementation arrangements contributed to slower decision-making and delivery.

Survey responses from ILO staff suggest that several result areas remain works in progress, with reforms perceived as still evolving and consolidating within national systems rather than being fully embedded. This is particularly the case for RPL and micro-credential systems, skills anticipation mechanisms and financing arrangements, which typically require sustained institutional and political commitment over extended periods of time (Figure 20). The area most frequently assessed as showing emerging results was recognition systems for RPL and micro-credentials (44.9%), followed by the use of skills research and knowledge (38.8%). Financing systems (30.6%) and

skills anticipation systems (28.6%) were also frequently assessed as showing emerging results. Lower but still notable shares of respondents reported emerging results in policy coherence and employer/worker engagement (both 26.5%).

FIGURE 20. AREAS WHERE SURVEYED ILO STAFF MOST OFTEN REPORTED "EMERGING RESULTS" (IN %)



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO staff (N=49). "Over the past biennia (2022-2025), to what extent have you seen the following results created by ILO as related to skills and lifelong learning?"

The ILO's work on addressing skills and lifelong learning gaps

Across countries and regions, the evaluation identified a relatively **consistent set of skills and lifelong learning challenges that the ILO sought to address through its interventions**. These included:

- ▶ fragmented governance arrangements,
- ▶ weak institutional coordination,
- ▶ insufficient labour market intelligence,
- ▶ uneven training quality,
- ▶ outdated curricula,
- ▶ weak links between training systems and labour market demand, and
- ▶ limited opportunities for lifelong learning, reskilling and recognition of prior learning.

In many contexts, these challenges were further compounded by underfunded skills systems, limited implementation capacity and weak financing arrangements. While the evidence indicates that ILO interventions contributed to addressing several of these constraints, particularly in the areas of governance, qualifications reform, social dialogue and labour market relevance, progress remained uneven across countries and dimensions, with some systemic gaps proving more resistant to change than others.

The evidence also points to important **structural constraints extending beyond skills systems themselves**. High levels of informality, weak labour demand, demographic pressures, migration, regional inequalities, wider institutional and governance conditions, and the quality of social dialogue can all affect how skills systems function and the extent to which skills development translates into productive and decent employment outcomes. Across several evaluations and interviews, stakeholders emphasized that skills mismatches are driven not only by deficiencies in training provision, but also by broader labour market and economic conditions that constrain transitions into quality employment.

Within this context, **the ILO contributed most consistently to addressing gaps located within the institutional architecture of skills systems**. Through policy advice, technical support, social dialogue and institutional strengthening, interventions helped modernize governance frameworks, improve labour market relevance, strengthen social inclusion, and enhance coordination between

training institutions, employers and public authorities. While many interventions also sought to improve employability and labour market outcomes, the strongest and most consistently documented results were observed in areas such as governance reform, qualifications systems, competency-based approaches, recognition of prior learning, employer engagement and institutional coordination mechanisms.

The HLE country case studies illustrate these dynamics clearly. In **Bangladesh**, reforms linked to the Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework, competency-based approaches and TVET policy modernization contributed to strengthening elements of the policy and institutional framework for skills development and improving alignment across parts of the formal skills system. However, fragmentation, coordination challenges and uneven implementation remained significant constraints. Persistent weaknesses in provider quality, instructor capacity, stakeholder engagement and implementation consistency continued to limit the extent to which reforms translated into improved training outcomes and reduced skills mismatch.

We (the ILO) became much better at designing frameworks and systems. The harder part was making sure institutions actually had the capacity and resources to implement them consistently.

— ILO staff

In **Ethiopia**, interventions addressed important coordination, recognition and labour market linkage gaps through the revised TVET strategy, RPL systems, labour market intelligence and sector skills bodies. The case illustrates both the potential and fragility of system-oriented reform: governance structures advanced considerably, but several functions remained dependent on external financing and technical support.

In **Kenya**, interventions addressed several interrelated gaps simultaneously, including weak implementation of competency-based approaches, fragmented labour market integration for refugees and migrants, and limited recognition of skills acquired outside formal systems. The expansion of RPL from a refugee-focused mechanism toward a broader lifelong learning instrument linked to the Kenya National Qualifications Framework represented an important step toward addressing exclusion of informal workers and migrants from certification systems. At the same time, operationalization remained uneven and is still limited in scale relative to the size of the informal economy.

In **Panama**, the modernization of INADEH through competency-based reform, labour competency standards and stronger employer engagement improved institutional responsiveness to changing labour market demand. However, the case also illustrates that technical modernization alone is insufficient to address wider institutional challenges. While important progress was achieved in curricula, competency standards and sector engagement, stakeholders continued to identify weaknesses in labour market information systems, graduate tracking, management information systems and the institutional capacities required to sustain reforms over time.

In **Moldova**, interventions increasingly focused on workforce adaptation, green transition and adult up and reskilling in a context shaped by demographic decline, outward migration and labour market contraction. While labour market coordination and green skills initiatives advanced, the case also illustrates the structural limits of skills interventions in contexts affected by persistent workforce outflows and weak domestic labour absorption.

Beyond the country case studies, similar patterns emerge across the wider evidence base. In **Tunisia** and **Egypt**, interventions contributed to employability programmes and institutional mechanisms designed to strengthen school-to-work transitions and links between training systems and labour market demand as well as enhanced entrepreneurship support and institutional coordination, particularly for youth. However, evaluations repeatedly highlighted that strong technical outputs and institutional partnerships with the private sector did not automatically generate large-scale employment outcomes, since **Egypt's** labour market is characterized by weak job creation, regional disparities resulting in persistent graduate unemployment. Similar tensions

are visible in **South Africa**, where relatively advanced apprenticeship and governance systems coexist with continued inequalities in labour market access and transition opportunities.

Across several other countries such as **Ghana, Namibia, Zambia and Senegal**, interventions strengthened labour market diagnostics, forecasting exercises and green skills anticipation, particularly through methodologies such as STED and SPEED. However, evidence suggests that permanent institutional systems capable of continuously translating labour market intelligence into coordinated cross ministerial planning, financing and training decisions remain underdeveloped in many contexts. As a result, training systems cannot take effectively respond to these recommendations.

This issue emerged repeatedly in interviews and evaluations. Stakeholders often emphasized that the challenge is no longer the absence of studies, but the limited institutional capacity to operationalize labour market intelligence within budgeting, planning and training systems.

Policy reform is usually the easier part. Sustaining implementation after the project ends is where the real difficulties begin.

— ILO staff

The evidence also suggests that the ILO made important contributions to addressing inclusion gaps, particularly for women, youth, migrants, refugees, informal workers and vulnerable populations. Across several countries, interventions expanded access to training, certification and labour market integration through RPL systems, entrepreneurship support, gender-responsive TVET approaches and targeted employment services. Particularly important contributions emerged where vulnerable groups integrated into national institutional policies and systems rather than being a target group in timebound project-based arrangements.

However, inclusion outcomes were generally stronger in terms of participation than in terms of durable labour market outcomes. Several evaluations caution that training vulnerable groups does not automatically produce sustainable inclusion if labour market outcomes themselves remain exclusionary. LO interventions sought to address several barriers to inclusion, but structural constraints such as informality, discrimination, weak job creation and unequal access to economic opportunities could not generally be addressed through skills interventions alone..

These cases illustrate a broader evaluative finding: improvements within skills systems lead to increased employability but do not automatically translate into more equitable labour market outcomes. Therefore, wider structural economic constraints faced by disadvantaged groups and women remain unresolved (Figure 21).

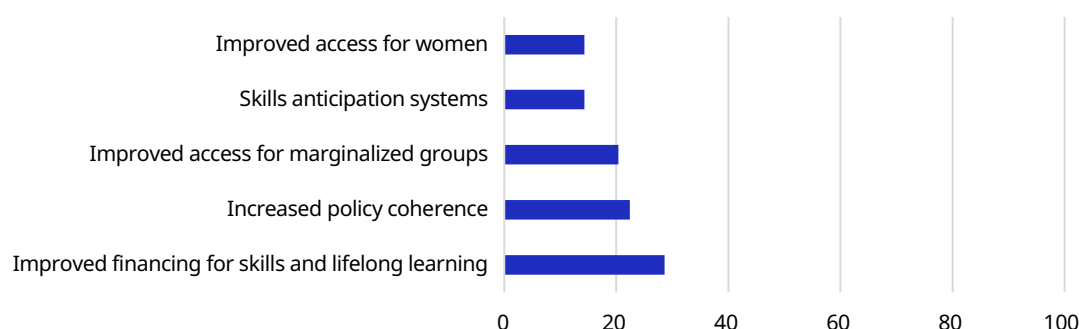
FIGURE 21. FROM ILO INTERVENTIONS TO LABOUR MARKET TRANSFORMATIONS: PROGRESS SINCE 2022



Source: HLE own elaboration

Furthermore, consistent patterns emerged amongst surveyed staff members, pointing at **several areas where effectiveness has been perceived as comparatively weaker or less consolidated** (Figure 22). The weakest area concerns financing for skills and lifelong learning, where 28.6% of respondents reported “no observable results.” This strongly reinforces broader evaluation findings showing that, while the ILO has contributed significantly to policy reform, governance and institutional strengthening, progress in establishing sustainable financing mechanisms has remained limited.

FIGURE 22. AREAS WHERE SURVEYED ILO STAFF PERCEIVED LIMITED EFFECTIVENESS



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO staff (N=49). “Over the past biennia (2022-2025), to what extent have you seen the following results created by ILO as related to skills and lifelong learning?” The chart shows the % of ILO staff who chose “no observable results”.

Policy coherence also emerged as a relatively weak area, with 22.4% of respondents perceiving no observable results. This suggests that translating skills reforms into integrated cross-sectoral policy frameworks linking employment, education, industrial development and just transition agendas remain uneven across countries. Similarly, 20.4% of respondents perceived limited results regarding access for marginalized groups, reinforcing broader findings that inclusion has often been stronger at project level than as a fully institutionalized system feature.

Lower but still notable proportions of respondents also identified weak results in skills anticipation systems and women's inclusion (both 14.3%). These findings align with broader evidence showing that labour market intelligence systems and inclusion dimensions have advanced, but often remain unevenly institutionalized and insufficiently consolidated across national systems.

Unintended results

The ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning generated important unintended results, both positive and negative. These were most visible where interventions created effects beyond planned outputs, including wider institutional influence, policy diffusion, stronger employer engagement, new coordination spaces and accelerated uptake of tools or delivery models.

Negative or risk-bearing unintended results were also observed. These include project-bound innovations that were not consistently scaled, coordination costs in crowded institutional environments, dependency on external expertise, inclusion targeting that did not always reach the most vulnerable groups, and expectations for reform that exceeded national implementation capacity.

POSITIVE UNINTENDED RESULTS

Across global, regional and country-level evidence, ILO work on skills and lifelong learning produced a range of positive unintended or emergent effects. These effects were not always explicitly anticipated in the relevant intervention designs or results frameworks, even where they were broadly consistent with the Strategy's overall objectives, but they are significant because they show how ILO support influenced institutions, stakeholders and policy agendas beyond planned deliverables.

Wider uptake of tools, methodologies and reform approaches by national institutions.

A first positive unintended result concerns the wider uptake of tools, methodologies and reform approaches by national institutions. For example, in the **Philippines**, skills anticipation work under the Integrated Systems for Better Employment Outcomes (InSIGHT-2) project went beyond the production of sectoral analysis and contributed to strengthening the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority's (TESDA) institutional methods, including the updating of the national skills needs anticipation manual and training of more than 200 staff in forecasting tools. This represents an important spillover because a technical intervention contributed to the institutionalization of a national approach to skills intelligence.

Similar effects are visible in **Cambodia** and **Indonesia**. In Cambodia, entrepreneurship and life-skills approaches, including Community-Based Enterprise Development (C-BED), were integrated into training and local development initiatives. In Indonesia, project-supported public training centres adapted parts of their delivery to blended and distance modalities, with digital curricula and e-learning platforms piloted. These cases show how interventions initially designed around specific technical needs or crisis responses generated broader innovation in delivery systems.

The acceleration of digital and blended learning

A second positive unintended result relates to the acceleration of digital and blended learning. COVID-19 and related disruptions forced many interventions to adjust delivery modalities, revise workplans and move training or advisory services online. For instance, in **Bangladesh**, digitalization momentum initiated through the Instructional Materials Development Centre, and accelerated during COVID-19, contributed to a more durable shift in digital content development within the national technical education system. Across the wider evidence base, **Bangladesh, the Philippines, West Africa, Indonesia** and **Brazil** appear as examples where digital curricula, online guidance systems or blended modalities expanded more rapidly than originally expected.

Stronger policy diffusion and system-level influence in apprenticeships and work-based learning

A third unintended result concerns stronger policy diffusion and system-level influence in apprenticeships and work-based learning. In **South Africa**, apprenticeship and artisan development work contributed to a national strategy and governance mechanisms. In **Tunisia**, apprenticeship work supported a Strategic Note and regional apprenticeship networks. In the **Bahamas**, apprenticeship policy discussions advanced through tripartite processes linked to youth employment recovery efforts following COVID-19 and Hurricane Dorian. In **China**, enterprise-based apprenticeship approaches expanded significantly through government-supported systems and large-scale implementation mechanisms. These examples suggest that work-based learning interventions can generate effects beyond pilots when absorbed into national policy and regulatory systems.

Increased visibility and social recognition of TVET

A fourth positive unintended result relates to increased visibility and institutional recognition of TVET. For example, in **Bangladesh**, the TVET awareness campaign piloted by Skills 21 generated a stronger-than-expected government response: the Government allocated approximately USD 200,000, from its own revenue budget for a national TVET awareness week in 2024. This represented an unprompted domestic financial contribution to a system-change initiative and shows how awareness-raising can produce institutional and financing effects beyond original project expectations.

In **Panama**, the INADEH reform process generated positive effects beyond formal deliverables. Evidence indicates that the intervention strengthened INADEH's institutional credibility and visibility, reinforced employer engagement, and helped introduce a more systemic reform mindset within the institution. Concepts such as competency-based training, dual systems and elements of Recommendation No. 208 began to influence wider policy discussions and legal reform processes. Through links with CINTERFOR, the intervention also helped connect Panama with regional discussions on green skills, care economy and skills mobility.

Wider cross-institutional dialogue and coordination

A fifth positive unintended result concerns wider cross-institutional dialogue and coordination. In several countries, ILO interventions created or strengthened spaces where ministries, training institutions, employers, workers' organizations, local authorities and development partners interacted around skills reform. This was visible in **Panama** through Sector Skills Councils and CONACOM; in **Kenya** through dialogue around RPL, local economic development and work-based learning; in **Moldova** through Local Employment Partnerships; and in Colombia through interventions linked to income generation, public employment services and support to victims of armed conflict. These effects are important because coordination is often both a precondition and a result of skills system strengthening.

Contributions to wider employment, enterprise, migration and community development agendas

A sixth positive unintended result concerns spillovers into wider employment, enterprise, migration and community development agendas. For example, in **Ethiopia**, entrepreneurship training for returnees generated multiplier effects, with returnees forming migrant associations and transmitting knowledge to potential migrants. Other organizations reportedly requested similar training for their own beneficiaries. In the same country, employers who initially resisted care-at-work interventions became advocates for the model, factory managers requested ILO-supported induction training approaches, and a UN-system stakeholder replicated the Jigjiga Innovation Hub model³⁴ in other regions using separate funding.

In **Bangladesh**, the Initiatives for Skills and Employment in Cox's Bazar (ISEC) Project generated additional institutional effects by helping build a skills ecosystem in an area with limited formal skills infrastructure for host communities in a humanitarian setting. Competency-based standards developed with ILO technical leadership started to be applied by implementing agencies in the humanitarian skills space, while more than 30 training material packages were developed for occupations not previously covered by the national system. These outcomes go beyond narrow training delivery and suggest influence over the wider humanitarian-development skills nexus.

Also in **Bangladesh**, the Talent Partnership also illustrates the intersection between skills development and labour migration, supporting the upskilling of migrant workers for European labour markets while promoting safer migration pathways, stronger labour migration governance and fair recruitment practices.

³⁴ The "Jigjiga Innovation Hub model" refers to an innovation and entrepreneurship support approach implemented in Jigjiga, in Ethiopia's Somali Region, within the framework of ILO-supported migration/youth employment interventions.

Positioning national responses within broader agendas

A seventh unintended or emergent result is that skills interventions increasingly helped position national responses within broader agendas such as recovery, resilience, green transition and digital transformation. Evaluations show that crises and labour market shocks sometimes accelerated reforms that might have taken longer in more stable conditions. Examples include apprenticeship renewal in **South Africa**, **Tunisia** and the **Bahamas**; digital skills pilots in Indonesia, the **Philippines** and **Brazil**; and policy reforms during recovery phases in **Zimbabwe** and **Colombia**.

NEGATIVE OR RISK-BEARING UNINTENDED RESULTS AND IMPLEMENTATION RISKS

The evidence also points to several unintended negative effects and implementation risks. The unintended results identified across the evidence base are important because they show how ILO skills and lifelong learning work often generates influence beyond planned outputs. While these do not necessarily reflect weaknesses in project design, they highlight challenges that may affect sustainability, coordination, scalability and long-term institutionalization. Without these, positive spillovers may remain opportunistic and negative unintended effects may weaken the coherence and durability of otherwise technically strong interventions.

Innovation often remained project-bound and at pilot level

A first risk is that innovation often remained project-bound. Across evaluated interventions, innovations included skills anticipation tools, blended learning, digital curricula, RPL systems, entrepreneurship models, sector coordination platforms and work-based learning arrangements. However, documentation, dissemination and mainstreaming were uneven and often insufficient to support wider institutional uptake. Staff turnover in government, weak incentives for adoption, limited financing and unclear institutional mandates frequently reduced the likelihood that promising approaches would be scaled or sustained. In some contexts, innovations also faced challenges where broader institutional, regulatory, market or socio-cultural conditions were not fully conducive to their adoption and expansion beyond the project level.

Coordination costs

A second risk concerns coordination costs in complex institutional environments. **Panama** provides a clear example. The multi-actor delivery arrangement involving CAF³⁵, MEF³⁶, UNOPS³⁷, ILO and INADEH was intended to ensure complementarity but introduced heavy procedures, fragmented responsibilities and slower decision-making. This reduced implementation speed and created a risk that technical progress in curriculum and competency-based reform would move faster than broader institutional strengthening in management systems, data systems, instructor development and graduate tracking.

Similar risks were observed in **Egypt**, where youth employment and entrepreneurship interventions generated useful tools and partnerships but were affected by institutional fragmentation, weak inter-ministerial coordination and limited scalability. In **Tunisia**, youth employability and entrepreneurship work operated in a context where weak labour demand, graduate unemployment and regional disparities limited the translation of skills interventions into durable labour market outcomes. These cases show that technical interventions can raise expectations but remain constrained by the wider institutional and economic environment.

Absorption capacity

A third risk is that successful pilots or tools can generate demand for wider system change faster than institutions are able to support, finance and implement it. This is visible in **Kenya**, where RPL and work-based learning models generated demand for wider system change, but financing, awareness, assessment capacity, quality and institutional readiness remained uneven. It is also visible in countries where apprenticeship models advanced conceptually but remained constrained by weak employer incentives, limited regulatory capacity or dependence on external facilitation.

35 Banco de Desarrollo de América Latina y el Caribe

36 Ministry of Economy and Finances

37 United Nations Office for Project Services

Targets

A fourth unintended negative effect concerns inclusion targeting. In **Bangladesh**, Skills 21 short Competency-Based Training and Assessment (CBT&A) courses originally targeting low-educated women, persons with disabilities and returning migrants were in practice often taken up by higher-educated unemployed graduates. ProGRESS achieved comparatively strong employment outcomes among beneficiaries, including women: according to project MIS data, the overall employment rate reached 72%, while the female employment rate reached 59%

The ISEC project in Bangladesh also showed that numerical inclusion targets can be insufficient. A 40 per cent female participation target in entrepreneurship training did not automatically translate into equitable market access because mobility restrictions, cultural barriers and unequal access to resources continued to affect women's ability to benefit from training. This is a broader lesson for the skills agenda: participation targets do not necessarily produce substantive inclusion unless barriers beyond training access are addressed.

Equal opportunities

A fifth risk concerns unequal access to digital and blended delivery. While digitalization created opportunities for continuity and wider reach, its effectiveness and accessibility were sometimes constrained by contextual factors such as limited connectivity, digital literacy and institutional readiness, particularly among disadvantaged groups.

Dependency on external expertise and financing

A sixth unintended risk concerns dependency on external expertise and financing. Skills anticipation work in the Philippines, skills anticipation and green skills reforms in several **African countries**, apprenticeship reforms in several countries, and green skills diagnostics all show potential for system uptake and institutionalization. However, the wider evidence repeatedly notes that reforms remain vulnerable when domestic financing, institutional mandates and implementation capacity are short term and project based and insufficient. This creates a risk that technical tools are adopted formally but not maintained as living systems once external support declines.

Incentive distortions

A seventh implementation risk concerns incentive distortions arising from different financing modalities used by other actors operating in the same reform space. In Bangladesh, large loan-funded projects implemented by other development actors, which offered student stipends and teacher allowances reportedly created comparison effects, making system-strengthening interventions without similar incentives harder to sustain. Teachers and beneficiaries could gravitate toward better-funded activities, reducing the attractiveness of less incentivized but institutionally important reform work. This illustrates how externally financed interventions can unintentionally affect stakeholder behaviour and institutional positioning.

In **Ethiopia**, implementation-related unintended effects were also identified. Changes in ILO financial systems and competitive tendering modalities were reported to have caused delays and reduced the depth of disability-inclusion work. Returnee reintegration faced barriers linked to literacy, lack of seed capital and weak post-training follow-up. In one case, trainee stipends exceeded trainer payments, creating an incentive misalignment, while trainers did not receive enough preparation to work with emotionally vulnerable cohorts.

Finally, in refugee and displacement settings, including **Jordan**, **Lebanon** and **Turkey**, skills interventions helped sustain livelihoods and improve access to work, but they also operated within labour markets where legal, political and economic constraints limited durable employment pathways. This created a risk that training raised aspirations without fully overcoming structural barriers to labour market access.

Responsiveness of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning to global and context-specific emerging challenges

Overall, ILO work on skills and lifelong learning has been responsive to emerging challenges, especially where interventions could adapt delivery modalities, mobilize partnerships and use crises or transitions as entry points for institutional reform. The strongest evidence of responsiveness relates to COVID-19 adaptation, digital and blended learning, forced displacement, migration, green skills and youth employment.

The ILO has developed substantial forward-looking analytical and policy work on emerging challenges, including through scenario-based work on green and digital transitions and workforce transformation. However, the evaluation found that the translation of these broader prospective approaches into systematic skills and lifelong learning programming remains uneven across the portfolio. In practice, interventions have often been more visible in adapting to emerging challenges and changing labour market conditions than in consistently embedding anticipatory approaches into programme design and implementation. The strategic implication is that the ILO should build on its adaptive strengths but move further toward anticipatory programming. This would require stronger strategic and foresight capacity, more systematic use of labour market intelligence, clearer scaling strategies, better documentation of innovation, stronger integration of green and digital transitions into national systems, and more explicit financing and institutionalization pathways from the outset. It would also require stronger programme-level planning, alignment and results monitoring mechanisms to ensure that interventions contribute to coherent system-level objectives and that progress can be tracked beyond immediate outputs.

RESPONSE TO CRISES, FRAGILITY AND DISPLACEMENT

COVID-19 was the most visible shock affecting skills and lifelong learning interventions during the evaluation period. Across regions, evaluations show that the ILO responded by shifting training and advisory services to remote or hybrid formats, revising workplans and targets, supporting continuity of delivery and working with UN and national partners to sustain implementation. This indicates strong short-term operational responsiveness.

The most frequently cited examples include **Bangladesh**, **the Philippines** and **West Africa**, where interventions moved rapidly toward blended or online training and guidance systems. In **Bangladesh**, digitalisation linked to the Instructional Materials Development Centre and accelerated by COVID-19 contributed to a more durable shift in digital content development within the national technical education system. In Indonesia, public training centres adapted parts of their delivery to blended and distance modalities, including digital curricula and e-learning platforms.

Fragility and displacement also shaped implementation. In **Kenya**, PROSPECTS used forced displacement as an entry point for broader system reform rather than creating a separate skills track for refugees. Support to RPL and policy dialogue helped connect refugee and host-community inclusion with national systems. This is a strong example of adaptive programming because a humanitarian-development challenge was used to strengthen a wider national mechanism relevant to refugees, informal workers and other groups outside formal certification pathways.

In **Jordan**, **Lebanon** and other displacement-affected settings, skills interventions were adapted to refugee and host-community needs, often linking employability, livelihoods, protection and resilience. The evidence suggests that these interventions were highly relevant to crisis contexts, but also constrained by legal, political and labour market barriers that limited durable employment pathways. This again confirms a broader pattern: the ILO adapted programming to crisis contexts, but skills interventions could not fully overcome structural labour market or legal constraints affecting access to decent work.

DIGITALISATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

The ILO's response to digitalisation is visible across several lines of work: digital skills development, e-learning platforms, online training and guidance systems, digital curricula, ICT-enabled labour market information systems and blended delivery modalities. Evaluations identify **Indonesia**, the **Philippines**, **Brazil** and **Bangladesh** as examples where digital tools and delivery systems expanded during the evaluation period.

This country-level work has been complemented by global guidance, knowledge products and capacity-development initiatives on the digital transformation of skills systems, including through global knowledge platforms such as SKILLSBRIDGE.

In **Kenya**, the response to digitalisation appears more substantive than simple digital literacy. Under PROSPECTS, digital skills training moved toward labour-market-oriented areas such as software development, data analytics, web and mobile development and software testing. The approach was based on explicit demand from the technology ecosystem, including startups and business process outsourcing companies, and used partnerships with other actors to provide infrastructure in refugee camps and host communities. This is a good example of adaptive, demand-driven programming: digital training was not only a delivery modality but also a labour market pathway.

In the **Philippines**, skills anticipation work with TESDA helped strengthen institutional methods and forecasting tools, while regional work on digital and green skills in ASEAN focused on construction-sector skills, including Building Information Modelling (BIM)-related digital skills and green practices. This shows a more forward-looking use of digitalisation, linking skills standards, training programmes and labour market demand.

Colombia provides another example of digital transformation being addressed through both training delivery and institutional capacity development. Through SENATEC, implemented with MinTIC and SENA, the ILO supported a large-scale national digital skills initiative combining blended learning and digital learning resources with curriculum modernization. The project developed five new ICT-related curricula and virtualized five existing programmes, while 1,000 SENA instructors were trained and certified in digital skills in collaboration with ILO/CINTERFOR and SENAI.

Digitalisation remains unevenly embedded across skills systems. The appropriate mix of face-to-face, digital and blended delivery necessarily depends on context, including connectivity, digital literacy, infrastructure and institutional readiness. These contextual conditions can limit the feasibility of fully digital approaches, particularly for disadvantaged groups, while reinforcing the importance of flexible and context-specific blended solutions. Digital tools expanded during the evaluation period, but their sustainable integration into institutional systems remains uneven.

GREEN TRANSITION AND JUST TRANSITION

The green transition has become one of the most important emerging areas of ILO work on skills and lifelong learning. The ILO has developed a substantial global knowledge base and operational offer around skills for green jobs and just transition, including research on skills for a greener future, Workforce 2030, SPEED, STED, greening TVET tools, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) guidance and sectoral work on renewable energy, green hydrogen, coal transition, critical minerals and nature-based solutions.

At country level, the response is increasingly visible. In **Panama**, the SPEED foresight study on green skills in renewable energy and waste management informed occupational standards and training reform. In Ghana, SPEED supported renewable energy sector planning. In Namibia and Zambia, STED informed skills analysis in energy, green hydrogen, mining, agriculture and biomass-related sectors. In Southern Africa, regional assessments supported renewable energy and energy efficiency training.

Moldova provides a particularly strong example of green transition being linked to qualifications, occupational standards, microcredentials and workforce adaptation. The Green Skills project supported new renewable energy occupations and training pathways, while also highlighting the

importance of lifelong learning and adult reskilling in contexts affected by demographic decline and labour market transition.

Under the Global Accelerator, skills interventions in **Senegal** and the **Philippines** increasingly linked green and digital job creation with TVET governance, social protection, enterprise support and industry-academy partnerships. This is particularly important because it moves skills beyond technical training and positions them within wider just transition and structural transformation agendas.

However, the evidence also supports a cautious assessment. Green skills and just transition have expanded rapidly as strategic priorities and methodological areas, but they are not yet systematically mainstreamed across the full range of interventions. The synthesis evidence describes green transition as an emerging but uneven area, with limited systematic integration into skills systems in many evaluated interventions.

BOX 15. GREEN TRANSITION: STRONG STRATEGIC POSITIONING, UNEVEN OPERATIONAL MAINSTREAMING

ILO work on skills for green jobs has become one of the clearest examples of responsiveness to emerging global challenges. The Organization has developed global research, practical tools, sectoral guidance, NDC-related support and country-level applications in areas such as renewable energy, green hydrogen, energy efficiency, waste management, construction, tourism and agriculture.

The evidence suggests that this work is strategically relevant and increasingly visible. However, it remains unevenly institutionalised across countries. In many cases, green skills are still concentrated in specific projects, sectors or diagnostic exercises rather than embedded across national skills systems, financing models and routine planning processes.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, MIGRATION AND CHANGING LABOUR MARKETS

ILO interventions have also responded to demographic change, migration and evolving labour market structures. In **Moldova**, demographic decline, emigration and labour market contraction have shifted the relevance of skills work toward workforce retention, adult reskilling, green transition and adaptation to changing labour demand. This illustrates a different type of skills challenge: not only preparing new labour market entrants, but also helping existing workers adapt, remain employable and stay connected to domestic labour markets.

In **Kenya**, demographic pressure and youth unemployment are central to the design of skills interventions. PPDP, PROSPECTS and ACCEL³⁸ respond to youth transitions in different ways, including through vocational training, enterprise support, prevention of child labour, digital skills, inclusion of refugees and host communities, and links to local economic development.

Migration-related responsiveness is also visible in **Ethiopia** and **Kenya**, where skills recognition, pre-departure or reintegration support, RPL and labour migration governance became important entry points. These examples show that migration is no longer treated only as a protection or mobility issue, but increasingly as a skills recognition, employability and lifelong learning issue.

More broadly, evaluations show that interventions responded to informality, youth underemployment, weak enterprise absorption and sectoral shifts through entrepreneurship support, work-based learning, apprenticeships and sector-focused training. However, these responses were not always sufficient to address the structural causes of weak labour absorption. As already mentioned in this report, in contexts such as **Tunisia** and **Egypt**, skills and employability interventions remained constrained by broader labour demand weaknesses, regional inequalities and limited economic transformation.

ADAPTIVE PROGRAMMING

There is clear evidence of adaptive programming across the implementation landscape. The strongest evidence relates to COVID-19, crisis response, digital delivery, refugee inclusion and green transition. Interventions revised workplans, changed delivery modalities, used remote and hybrid formats, introduced digital curricula, strengthened partnerships and adjusted priorities to maintain relevance under difficult conditions.

38 Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour

However, the evidence is stronger for operational adaptation than for systematic adaptive management. Many interventions adjusted activities, delivery modalities or partnerships in response to COVID-19, displacement, digitalization or green transition needs. There is less consistent evidence that monitoring data and learning systems were systematically used to revise programme strategies over time.

Adaptive programming was particularly strong where interventions could use emerging challenges as entry points for broader system reform. **Kenya's** use of refugee inclusion to advance RPL is one example. **Bangladesh's** TVET awareness and digital content work shows how disruption and visibility-building can create domestic institutional responses. ILO support to TESDA in the **Philippines** illustrates how a technical intervention can strengthen national skills anticipation capacity. **Panama's** INADEH reform shows how institutional modernization can begin to integrate emerging issues such as green skills, dual training and care-related qualifications.

However, adaptive programming has been less consistent at system level. Many innovations remained localized or project-bound, with limited evidence of scaling strategies, financing models or long-term institutional ownership. Evaluations repeatedly point to moderate scalability: promising models exist, but scaling is constrained by financing, institutional capacity and uneven employer engagement.

A further limitation concerns the institutionalization and systematic capture of learning. The evidence suggests that the ILO generated numerous adaptive responses to emerging challenges, including digitalization, green transition and crisis contexts. However, the evaluation found limited mechanisms at Strategy level for systematically documenting, aggregating and analysing lessons across interventions. As discussed in Part 2, the absence of a dedicated monitoring framework for the Strategy, together with fragmented reporting and knowledge management arrangements, reduced the visibility of implementation experiences and made it more difficult to consolidate learning across countries and programmes.

How cross-cutting principles improve effectiveness

Overall, **cross-cutting principles are broadly present across ILO work on skills and lifelong learning and are among the areas where the Organization's normative identity is most visible.** Tripartism, social dialogue, gender equality, inclusion and just transition are not treated as entirely separate themes, but are frequently integrated into governance mechanisms, policy dialogue, standards-setting, labour market relevance work and institutional reform processes.

The evidence also points to an important distinction between formal mainstreaming and operational depth. Principles are widely referenced and increasingly visible in programme design, yet the **consistency and transformative quality of implementation vary considerably across contexts and interventions.**

TRIPARTISM AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Tripartism and social dialogue are among the clearest areas of alignment between the implementation of skills interventions and the ILO's normative mandate. Across evaluations, interviews and country case studies, social partners were frequently involved in governance arrangements, curriculum development, occupational standards, apprenticeships, sector skills councils, labour market dialogue and validation processes.

Employer engagement appears particularly strong and operationally embedded across much of the evidence base. In **Panama**, employers participated actively in Sector Skills Councils, competency standards and curriculum discussions linked to the INADEH reform process. In **Kenya**, employers contributed to curriculum alignment, work-based learning, entrepreneurship support and local economic development initiatives under PPDP and other interventions. In **Bangladesh**, employer engagement was important in competency-based training, industrial skills councils and labour market relevance efforts. Similar patterns are visible in **Moldova, Ethiopia** and **South Africa**, where employer organizations participated in governance structures, standards-setting or apprenticeship-related mechanisms.

The evidence suggests that **employer participation is strongest where interventions are directly linked to labour market relevance, productivity, apprenticeships or sector transformation**. In several countries, employers were not only consulted but became active co-designers of standards, curricula, occupational profiles and work-based learning systems. This reflects one of **the ILO's clearest comparative advantages in skills work: the ability to connect training systems with labour market actors through tripartite and sectoral dialogue mechanisms**.

While many interventions successfully engaged social partners and government institutions in consultation and policy dialogue processes, evidence suggests that sustained implementation often depended on longer-term investments in institutional capacities, resources and organizational systems, which were not always available within project timeframes.

This points to a broader effectiveness issue. Consultation alone is not sufficient to ensure sustained tripartite ownership. **More durable results require the capacities of governments, employers' and workers' organizations to be strengthened so that they can assume concrete roles in governance, implementation, monitoring and financing of skills systems**. The evidence suggests that such capacity development was present in several interventions, but not always resourced or pursued systematically.

This pattern is visible across several contexts. In **Kenya** and **Panama**, employers played a particularly visible role in curriculum relevance and work-based learning discussions, while worker participation appeared more limited. In **Bangladesh**, the involvement of both employers' and workers' organizations in skills governance remained comparatively limited and was largely consultative in nature, with trade unions tending to engage more frequently on labour rights, migration and social protection issues than on technical TVET governance. Similar tendencies emerged in interviews with global partners and ACTRAV stakeholders, where skills was recognized as important but not always perceived as a primary organizational priority compared with broader labour market governance or protection issues.

At the same time, there are important exceptions. **In just transition-related work, social dialogue involving workers' organizations becomes substantially more central**. Evaluations linked to green transition, NDC processes and sector restructuring repeatedly emphasize that workers' organizations play an essential role in negotiating transition pathways, employment implications and reskilling needs. In **South Africa**, **Tunisia** and broader just transition discussions, worker participation was more visible where skills was connected explicitly to industrial transition, employment security or climate-related restructuring.

The quality of tripartite participation also varied considerably. In stronger cases, social dialogue influenced priorities, standards, curricula or governance decisions. In weaker cases, tripartite participation remained more procedural, linked to consultation requirements rather than continuous co-governance. Several evaluations also note that social dialogue structures sometimes depended heavily on project facilitation and did not always become self-sustaining institutional mechanisms.

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Gender equality is widely integrated across interventions, but implementation depth varies considerably. Most evaluated interventions included gender targets, outreach measures, participation quotas or references to women's inclusion. However, stronger examples moved beyond participation targets toward institutional, occupational or systemic change.

Panama provides one of the clearest examples of a more operational gender approach. The intervention supported women's participation in non-traditional occupations including electricity, heavy equipment operation, plumbing and solar panel-related work. Gender was also integrated into institutional modernization processes, including perception surveys, curriculum discussions and the PTMI Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Plan. Importantly, the intervention did not focus only on increasing female participation rates, but also on challenging occupational segregation within the training system itself.

Bangladesh also demonstrates both progress and limitations. Skills 21 made significant progress in mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion within TVET institutions, including through institutional policies and action plans, training materials, GESI focal points and measures to improve access for women and persons with disabilities. Other interventions, including PROGRESS and ISEC, also incorporated explicit targets and measures to strengthen women's participation and economic empowerment. Women's participation was substantial, including in ProGRESS, where project MIS data report a female participation rate of 58.34%. However, evaluations repeatedly note that increased participation did not automatically translate into equal labour market outcomes, as women continued to face mobility restrictions, cultural barriers, unequal access to resources and weaker labour market insertion. .

In **Kenya**, gender equality was often linked to youth employment, local economic development and refugee inclusion. Beyond participation-focused interventions, ILO support also contributed to the development of the TVETA Gender and Inclusion Standard, providing an institutional framework for mainstreaming gender equality and inclusion within the TVET system. Several interventions also targeted young women through entrepreneurship support, vocational training and digital skills initiatives. However, interviews and evaluations suggest that women continued to face structural barriers linked to care responsibilities, informality, access to finance and labour market segmentation.

Gender mainstreaming was generally strongest where interventions:

- ▶ addressed institutional barriers rather than only participation targets;
- ▶ engaged non-traditional occupations;
- ▶ combined training with labour market integration;
- ▶ or linked skills with broader economic empowerment strategies.

By contrast, gender integration was weaker where inclusion was treated primarily as numerical targeting without addressing structural constraints affecting women's employment outcomes.

DISABILITY INCLUSION, NON-DISCRIMINATION AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

Disability inclusion, and support to vulnerable populations became increasingly visible across the evaluation period, particularly in migration, fragility, local economic development and humanitarian-development contexts.

REFUGEES, FORCIBLY DISPLACED POPULATIONS AND HOST COMMUNITIES

Refugees and forcibly displaced populations constitute a distinct inclusion category, as access to skills development and labour market integration is frequently shaped by specific legal and normative frameworks, including restrictions on the right to work in some contexts.

In **Kenya**, refugee inclusion under PROSPECTS was integrated into national systems rather than treated as a parallel humanitarian track. RPL became an important mechanism for refugees and host communities lacking formal certification, while digital skills initiatives and entrepreneurship support targeted both refugees and local populations. This reflects a relatively advanced inclusion approach because it linked vulnerable groups to national institutional systems.

In **Ethiopia**, return migrants, women and vulnerable youth were integrated into entrepreneurship and reintegration programmes. Interviews also identified efforts to adapt methodologies for emotionally vulnerable cohorts and disability inclusion. However, stakeholders noted implementation constraints including literacy barriers, limited follow-up support and funding delays affecting the depth of inclusion work.

Bangladesh provides important lessons regarding the limits of inclusion targeting. Projects often included quotas for women, persons with disabilities, migrants or vulnerable groups. However, evaluations found that higher-educated unemployed graduates sometimes displaced intended vulnerable beneficiaries in short training programmes, while women's labour market outcomes lagged behind participation rates. This demonstrates that inclusion targets alone are insufficient without stronger operational mechanisms to ensure equitable access and outcomes.

Across the wider evidence base, interventions increasingly addressed:

- ▶ informal workers;
- ▶ migrants;
- ▶ displaced populations;
- ▶ women in non-traditional sectors;
- ▶ youth not in employment, education or training;
- ▶ and workers affected by economic transition.

However, the operational depth of inclusion varied considerably. Stronger interventions adapted methodologies, linked beneficiaries to institutional systems and addressed labour market barriers. Weaker interventions relied primarily on participation targets without sufficiently addressing structural exclusion factors.

JUST AND GREEN TRANSITIONS

Just transition principles became substantially more visible during the evaluation period, particularly through green skills, renewable energy, NDC-related work, sector transition analysis and climate-related employment discussions.

The ILO increasingly linked skills interventions to broader just transition agendas. In **Panama, Moldova, Ghana, Namibia** and **Southern Africa**, green skills work supported occupational standards, renewable energy training, foresight studies and sector analysis. In **Moldova**, green transition work connected qualifications reform, microcredentials and workforce adaptation to changing labour demand. In **Namibia** and **Zambia**, STED and green sector analysis informed skills planning in renewable energy, mining and biomass-related sectors.

At global and regional levels, the ILO developed substantial guidance on skills for green jobs, just transition and climate-related workforce adaptation. Increasingly, interventions linked skills with:

- ▶ decarbonization;
- ▶ industrial transition;
- ▶ renewable energy;
- ▶ energy efficiency;
- ▶ circular economy approaches;
- ▶ and green enterprise development.

Importantly, just transition approaches also strengthened the role of social dialogue. In several evaluations and interviews, workers' organizations became more actively engaged when skills was connected explicitly to industrial restructuring, employment security or transition risks. This suggests that just transition can function as an important bridge between skills policy and broader labour and social dialogue agendas.

However, operational mainstreaming remains uneven. Green and just transition principles are highly visible in strategic documents, pilot initiatives and methodological work, but less consistently embedded across national skills systems, financing mechanisms and large-scale implementation. In many contexts, green skills remain concentrated in specific projects, diagnostics or sector pilots rather than fully integrated into routine TVET planning and institutional systems.

BOX 16. FROM "GREEN PROJECTS" TOWARD SYSTEMIC TRANSITION

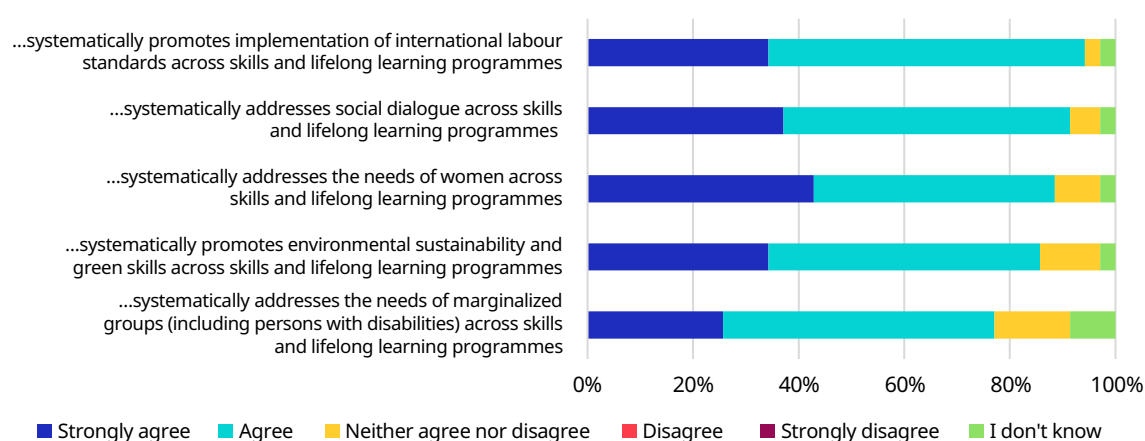
The evidence suggests that ILO work on green skills is gradually moving from isolated environmental projects toward broader workforce transition approaches. Stronger examples connect skills development with industrial policy, enterprise transformation, social dialogue, local economic development and workforce adaptation.

However, the transition remains incomplete. In many countries, green skills still operate primarily through pilot projects, sector studies or externally funded initiatives rather than as embedded components of national skills systems and financing arrangements.

Perspectives from ILO staff and constituents

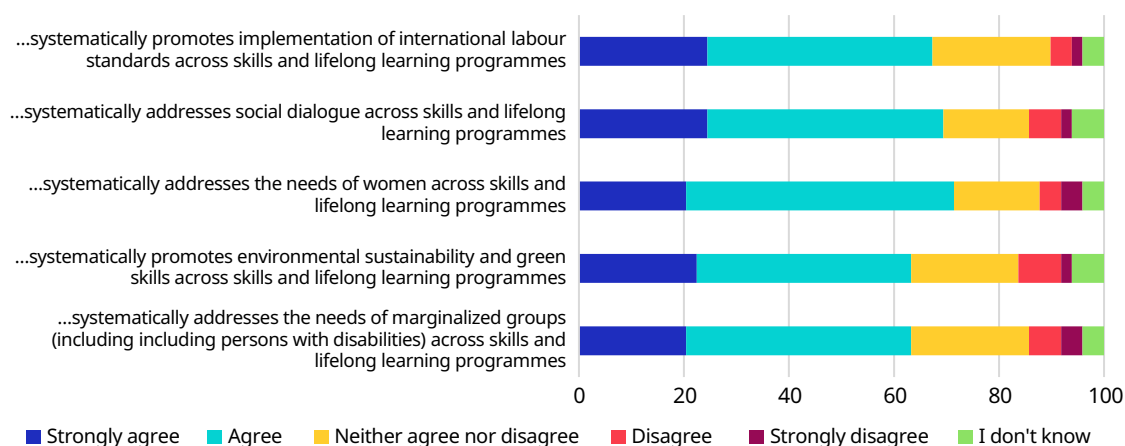
Responses amongst surveyed staff and constituents broadly confirmed the evaluation's assessment that cross-cutting issues have been increasingly integrated across the ILO's skills and lifelong learning interventions (Figure 23 and 24). Perceptions are particularly positive regarding gender mainstreaming, social dialogue, international labour standards and the integration of green transition dimensions. This reinforces broader evaluation findings showing that the ILO's comparative advantage lies especially in standards-informed approaches, tripartite governance and the integration of skills within wider just transition and inclusion agendas. At the same time, perceptions regarding the inclusion of marginalized groups and persons with disabilities were comparatively weaker and generated higher levels of uncertainty, suggesting that inclusion has been less consistently operationalized across interventions.

FIGURE 23. ILO CONSTITUENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE INTEGRATION OF CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES IN ILO'S WORK ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team (N= 35 constituents). To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the mainstreaming of ILO's crosscutting concerns in the skills and lifelong learning portfolio?

FIGURE 24. ILO STAFF PERCEPTION OF THE INTEGRATION OF CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES IN ILO'S WORK ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING



The Global Skills Programme contribution to the Strategy implementation

The evidence suggests that the GSP has generated meaningful added value compared with fragmented stand-alone development cooperation initiatives, although this added value remains context-dependent. Its principal contribution lies in providing a more coherent strategic umbrella, sustained technical leadership, access to global expertise and a platform through which country-level interventions can be linked more explicitly to the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy, normative guidance and broader reform processes. Evaluations and interviews generally point to the GSP as a mechanism that strengthens ILO's internal and external coherence, continuity and technical credibility, particularly in countries where national institutions are actively engaged and where the programme is connected to ILO specific wider reform initiatives or larger development cooperation interventions.

At the same time, the GSP should not be understood as the main delivery vehicle for ILO skills work. In several contexts, it functions more as an enabling financing and technical mechanism than as a strongly branded or highly visible stand-alone programme. Interview evidence characterized the GSP as a mechanism that allows the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy to be operationalized and scaled, but not necessarily as a programme that is clearly identifiable to all country-level stakeholders. Its added value is therefore strongest where it operates as an enabling or "system layer" across larger interventions, helping shape technical direction, strengthen coherence and support institutionalization, rather than through direct implementation volume alone.

Table 17 below is illustrative rather than exhaustive, as it highlights selected examples of GSP-supported interventions reported during the evaluation period, demonstrating that the programme has contributed across all five pillars of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy.

TABLE 17. ILLUSTRATIVE OUTREACH OF THE GSP ACROSS THE FIVE PILLARS OF THE SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGY

STRATEGY PILLAR	EXAMPLES OF GSP-SUPPORTED INTERVENTIONS	ILLUSTRATIVE COUNTRIES
Pillar 1. Policies, governance and financing	TVET policy reform, qualifications frameworks, Sector Skills Bodies, School Advisory Boards, RPL systems	Ethiopia, Malawi, Ghana, Lebanon, Tanzania
Pillar 2. Skills needs intelligence	STED implementation, sector assessments, labour market information systems, forecasting tools, skills anticipation surveys	Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Senegal, Tanzania, Lebanon
Pillar 3. Innovative and flexible learning pathways	Micro-credentials, lifelong learning approaches, competency-based training, flexible learning systems	Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania, Ghana
Pillar 4. Inclusive skills programmes and digitalisation	Digital learning resources, trainer capacity development, blended learning, support to TVET digitalisation	Senegal, Lebanon, Ghana, South Africa
Pillar 5. Apprenticeships and work-based learning	Work-based learning strategies, apprenticeship-related reforms, employer engagement mechanisms, School Advisory Boards	Lebanon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Tanzania

This aforementioned distinction is important. The GSP's value lies less in the scale of its own resources than in its capacity to shape direction, consolidate tools and expertise, provide flexibility, strengthen system-oriented approaches and support replication or institutionalization through other funding streams and national systems. Evidence from countries such as Ethiopia suggests that the programme contributed to accelerating reforms in areas including policy development, RPL, sector skills bodies, apprenticeship governance, skills anticipation and green TVET, particularly where it helped align larger interventions around shared reform objectives. However, acceleration depended heavily on national ownership, institutional capacity, political commitment and the availability of complementary financing.

The programme also appears to have fostered **innovation** through both technical approaches and implementation modalities. At country level, **Ethiopia** provides one of the clearest examples, where the GSP supported an integrated reform model combining TVET governance, RPL, sector skills bodies, green TVET and labour migration interventions, while aligning larger programmes such as BRMM, PROSPECTS and ProAgro around common technical approaches.

The programme also facilitated the transfer of methodologies and experiences across countries, including exchanges on RPL, apprenticeship systems, sector skills bodies, skills anticipation and green skills. Beyond country-level innovations, the GSP supported innovation challenge calls, innovation labs, knowledge-sharing platforms and communities of practice designed to identify, test and disseminate new approaches to skills development. Cross-country learning, exposure visits, peer exchanges and South-South cooperation further enabled countries to adapt and replicate approaches that had proven successful elsewhere. Finally, the programme's pooled and flexible funding arrangements allowed experimentation with governance mechanisms, coordination platforms and technical tools that would have been more difficult to support through stand-alone projects operating under rigid funding.

Has the GSP contributed to accelerating results?

The evaluation recognizes that the Global Skills Programme operates through different modalities across countries, ranging from more intensive support arrangements to lighter-touch technical assistance and knowledge-sharing interventions. However, the evidence available to the evaluation did not allow for a systematic comparison of the effectiveness of these different delivery models. As a result, findings presented in this section refer to the overall contribution of the GSP rather than to the relative performance of specific implementation modalities.

There is evidence that the GSP has accelerated results in several countries, particularly where it brought together policy advice, technical assistance, capacity development and partnership facilitation under a shared strategic framework. Compared with isolated projects, GSP-supported initiatives benefited from access to global and regional expertise, continuity of engagement and the ability to connect country-level interventions with broader ILO methodologies and standards.

Evidence of accelerated reform processes is visible in countries such as **Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Senegal, Tanzania and Lebanon**, where coordinated support helped advance reforms in skills governance, national strategies, apprenticeship frameworks, sector approaches and skills anticipation more rapidly than would likely have occurred through disconnected technical assistance. Evaluations indicate that the GSP contributed to faster development and validation of policy instruments and governance mechanisms, particularly where national counterparts were ready to absorb support.

Ethiopia provides one of the clearest examples. The GSP operated as a small-budget technical umbrella rather than a large stand-alone project, contributing strategic direction and technical integration across larger interventions such as BRMM, PROSPECTS and ProAgro. Stakeholders described it as helping set the direction for the country office's skills work, with other projects taking technical cues from it. Instruments associated with this support included the TVET strategy, RPL strategy and implementation manual, sector skills body templates, green TVET framing and core-skills methodologies.

This illustrates the **GSP's value added: it can accelerate results not because it has large resources, but because it helps align and technically steer larger streams of work.** In Ethiopia, the programme contributed to the replication of sector skills body models, the scaling of domestic-work training through government TVET centres and the extension of childcare occupational standards into national TVET institutions.

However, acceleration is not automatic. Where political commitment, institutional capacity or coordination are weak, the GSP's capacity to accelerate reforms is reduced. The evidence suggests that the programme works best when there is a clear national reform window, an engaged government counterpart, social partner participation and complementary funding. Without these conditions, GSP support risks resembling conventional short-term technical assistance.

Has the GSP contributed to fostering innovation?

The GSP has fostered innovation in several ways. First, it has promoted **more integrated intervention models** that combine policy reform, institutional strengthening, skills intelligence, inclusion mechanisms and partnership development. This systems-oriented approach is more ambitious than traditional training-focused projects and is consistent with the ILO's comparative advantage in governance and institutional reform.

Second, the programme has **facilitated cross-country learning and transfer of methodologies**. Evidence points to the transfer of approaches in skills anticipation, apprenticeship governance, RPL and sector skills bodies. In Ethiopia, for example, the design of sector skills bodies was informed by international exchanges and comparative experience. More broadly, country teams have been able to draw on shared tools, technical guidance and peer experience developed under the programme framework.

Third, the GSP has supported **experimentation with flexible delivery and governance models**. These include sector-based partnerships, multi-actor coordination platforms, blended learning approaches, skills anticipation tools and green TVET methodologies. In Ethiopia, pooled funding flexibility allowed the tourism sector skills body to be added to the GSP workplan mid-cycle in response to direct government demand, an adjustment that stakeholders considered difficult under more rigid funding arrangements. The same case also highlights low-cost monitoring and follow-up innovations, such as the Service Tracker tool with QR-code-enabled registration and WhatsApp/Telegram communities of practice.

A more explicit innovation mechanism was the use of Innovation Challenge Calls to identify, test and support potentially replicable solutions. These were applied both globally, including through challenge calls supported by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), and at country level. In India, for example, the Skills Innovation Challenge supported the piloting of innovative digital and apprenticeship-related approaches, providing a structured mechanism for experimentation before potential replication and scaling.

The programme's contribution to innovation is also visible in green skills and just transition work. GSP-supported initiatives have helped integrate green TVET framing, sector skills approaches and skills anticipation into national reform discussions. However, as noted elsewhere in the effectiveness analysis, green and digital innovation remain unevenly institutionalized across countries, and not all innovative tools become sustained national systems.

A cautious conclusion is therefore needed. The GSP has fostered innovation, particularly in the design of system-oriented approaches and the transfer of tools across countries. However, the distinctiveness of this innovation varies. In some contexts, GSP-supported activities are clearly different from stand-alone initiatives because they provide a strategic umbrella and promote integrated reform. In others, the programme's added value is less visible and activities resemble conventional technical assistance.

Has the GSP enabled scale?

Evidence regarding scale is similarly mixed. The GSP has enabled scaling where tools, standards or models became embedded within national institutions or were taken forward through larger projects and national systems. Its influence is therefore often indirect and catalytic rather than financial or operational. However, the programme has not consistently enabled scale on its own. Modest resources, short funding cycles, limited visibility and continued dependence on broader development cooperation financing or domestic institutional capacity have constrained the extent to which promising approaches could be expanded systematically across countries and sectors.

In **Ethiopia**, the evidence is especially instructive. Stakeholders described GSP-supported instruments as now owned by government actors or tripartite structures. The domestic-work training model expanded to more than 200 government TVET centres using BRMM-provided materials, moving well beyond the four centres originally equipped. Sector skills body templates were replicated in tourism and are expected to extend to ICT; the childcare occupational standard is expected to expand into TVET institutions nationwide; and the agro-processing sector skills body model attracted interest from other development partners.

This suggests that the GSP can enable scale when **three conditions** are present: technical tools are embedded in national institutions; larger projects or national programmes provide implementation capacity; and government or partners take ownership of replication. Where these conditions are absent, scaling remains limited.

Across the wider evidence base, scaling pathways are strongest where GSP support contributed to national policies, regulatory frameworks or permanent coordination mechanisms. Examples include apprenticeship reforms in **South Africa**, skills governance reforms in **Ghana** and **Tanzania**, and skills anticipation systems in **Ethiopia** and **Malawi**. In these cases, the programme supported models that were not limited to individual pilots but became connected to institutional arrangements.

However, scale remains one of the programme's principal limitations. As reflected in evaluations of the GSP too, its effectiveness depends heavily on national ownership, institutional capacity, complementary funding and specific human resources allocated for programming, knowledge management and monitoring, which would strengthen the ability of ILO country teams to use the programme as an integrating mechanism to achieve country level outcomes more effectively. Where those conditions are present, the GSP can function as a strategic accelerator for system reform. Where they are weak, its contribution is closer to conventional technical assistance and its distinctiveness compared with stand-alone initiatives becomes less clear. The GSP can therefore help design models for piloting and support implementation or replication, but it cannot by itself overcome national financing gaps or weak institutional absorption capacity.

With limited programming, monitoring and human resource capacity, the main limitation is that the GSP's added value remains unevenly visible and unevenly realized.

COMPARISON WITH STAND-ALONE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION INITIATIVES

Compared with stand-alone initiatives, the GSP appears to add value in four main ways.

1. It provides a **strategic and operational umbrella** aligned with the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy. This helps avoid purely fragmented and ad hoc technical assistance and allows interventions to be framed around broader system reform objectives, including governance, continuous learning pathways, demand driven apprenticeships, sector approaches, green skills and skills anticipation.
2. It offers **technical continuity and access to specialised expertise**. Stakeholders valued the ability to connect country-level work with knowledge sharing events and online exchanges, global and regional specialists, tools and their international experience in specific thematic areas. This is particularly relevant in areas requiring specialized knowledge, such as RPL systems, financing of TVET, gender and social inclusion, sector skills bodies, skills anticipation and quality apprenticeships.
3. It enables **flexibility**. The **Ethiopia** example, having been supported through outcome-based programming and a significant technical cooperation portfolio shows that pooled funding and a relatively flexible workplan allowed the programme to respond to government demand by adding the tourism sector skills body mid-cycle. This kind of adjustment is harder in tightly earmarked stand-alone projects.

4. It supports **institutionalization through linkage with larger initiatives**. The GSP is most effective when it acts as the technical and strategic layer that shapes larger development cooperation interventions. This is visible, for example, in **Ethiopia**, where the programme influenced BRMM, PROSPECTS and other skills-related work.

However, the comparison with stand-alone initiatives is not uniformly favourable. The GSP's visibility is sometimes limited, especially where stakeholders perceive activities primarily through larger country projects rather than through the programme itself. Its results logic is also not always explicit, and its contribution can be difficult to distinguish from the wider body of ILO skills work. In fragmented contexts, the programme may add technical value without clearly functioning as a unifying framework.

EFFICIENCY

This criterion focuses the assessment on the efficiency of ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning along two operational dimensions: [resource efficiency](#), including alignment of financial and human resources with strategic priorities and the mechanisms through which the portfolio maximises impact (cost-sharing, pooled funding, tool replication and catalytic use of regular budget resources); [internal coordination](#) across ILO units and levels (e.g between country, regional and HQ) and the efficiency of cross-unit collaboration mechanisms. Timeliness and risk management are examined within both dimensions as cross-cutting features of efficient delivery. Findings on the [extent the Global Skills Programme enabled efficiency gains](#) during the Strategy implementation period are also presented in this section.

KEY FINDING 9:

Funding remained below the level envisaged to implement the Strategy and was unevenly distributed across Strategy pillars and regions. Nevertheless, the portfolio used available resources efficiently through catalytic approaches, including training of trainers, south-south collaboration, cost-sharing, and scalable delivery models that extended the reach of limited funding.



KEY FINDING 10:

Although extra-budgetary development cooperation (XBDC) funds accounted for 97.5 per cent of total funding through 2022 – 25, regular budget resources (RBSA and RBTC) financed more than half of all reported deliverables by number. This underscores the strategic role of regular budget resources in sustaining broad-based Strategy implementation, particularly in areas receiving limited XBDC.

KEY FINDING 11:

The ILO's technical support model, combining expertise from HQ, regional offices and Decent Work Teams, enabled an efficient delivery of high-quality technical support. However, scarce technical capacity has become a structural constraint to implement the Strategy, reducing the Office's ability to deploy expertise strategically, provide sustained technical support, and scale successful approaches across countries. The GSP demonstrates that dedicated coordination and specialist capacity strengthen efficiency gains, although these functions have yet to be institutionalized across the wider skills and lifelong learning portfolio.

Resource efficiency

ADEQUACY OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The skills and lifelong learning portfolio is funded by the ILO's RB through RBTC and RBSA. It is also funded by donors through XBDC.

As presented in [Part 2](#), across the 2022–23 and 2024–25 biennia, the ILO invested a cumulative **USD 436.1 million** in skills and lifelong learning-related interventions³⁹, of which USD 366.1 million was expended, representing an overall **implementation rate of approximately 84 per cent**. Resources dedicated specifically to **Outcome 5 in 2022 – 23 and Output 3.2 (2024 – 25)** amounted to **USD 197.0 million** in allocations and USD 172.2 million in expenditures over the period. As the Action Plan for the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy estimated a total cost of **US\$225 million in XBDC** for the implementation of Outputs towards the Strategy's objectives, the estimated allocation below this level supports the perception that the Strategy lacks sufficient resource allocation (from the donor community).⁴⁰

The financial and human resource evidence points to a portfolio that achieves a great deal with less than it requires. On both dimensions the quality of work is high, and the use of resources is efficient and often catalytic, but the volume of funding and staffing sits below what the Strategy's ambition and the level of constituent demand imply. This is largely outside the control of ILO, as **the organisation managed to maintain and even increase the share of resources allocated to skills while facing a shrinking overall RB.**

In absolute terms, the RB allocation to this area declined slightly across the three P&B cycles, from USD 45.1 million in 2022–23 to USD 42.2 million in 2024–25 and USD 39.1 million in 2026–27 (Table 18).⁴¹ **Its share of the ILO's total RB** moved in the opposite direction: it comprised 5% in both 2022–23 and 2024–25 before rising to 6% in 2026–27. In 2022–23, Outcome 5 on skills and lifelong learning ranked seventh of the eight P&B outcomes. In 2024–25 and 2026–27, it became the largest-funded output within Outcome 3, drawing 37% of that outcome's resources in both biennia. These trends point to a **growing strategic prioritisation of skills and lifelong learning, even as the absolute resources allocated to it gradually declined (due to an overall decline of the RB value).**

TABLE 18. ALLOCATION OF RB FUNDING TO SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

	2022 – 23 (OUTCOME 5)	2024 – 25 (OUTPUT 3.2)	2026 – 27 (OUTPUT 3.2)
RB Allocation	USD 45,100,000	USD 42,200,000	USD 39,100,000
Share of ILO total RB	5%	5%	6%
Position among P&B outcomes	7th largest budget out of 8 outcomes	Largest allocation within outcome 3 (37% of the total allocation to outputs under this outcome), and the highest compared to all P&B outputs	Largest allocation within outcome 3 (37% of the total allocation to outputs under this outcome), and the highest compared to all P&B outputs

RBSA and RBTC play a relatively small role in the overall financial picture of the skills portfolio (3% in 2022–23 and 2% in 2024–25), but play a substantially larger role in terms of how many deliverables are funded by RB: Despite the value of only 3%, RBSA and RBTC funded 63% of all deliverables in 2022–23, and they funded 55% of all deliverables in 2024–25.

The implication is that **RBSA and RBTC support a high volume of small-scale, but potentially catalytic activities** that do not generate large dollar figures but that facilitate ILO presence, technical support, and responsiveness across countries. Some examples are provided in Box 17.

³⁹ This cumulative figures reflects funding allocation and expenditure associated to core Skills and Lifelong learning outcomes and outputs (Outcome 5 and Output 3.2), as well as other P&B outputs where the HLE identified relevant activities while conducting the analysis of CPOs.

⁴⁰ Details on funding volumes are presented in [Part 2](#).

⁴¹ Source: ILO's Programme and Budget documents from 2022 – 27, and Programme Implementation Reports (2022 – 25)

BOX 17. EFFICIENT USE OF RBSA AND RBTC

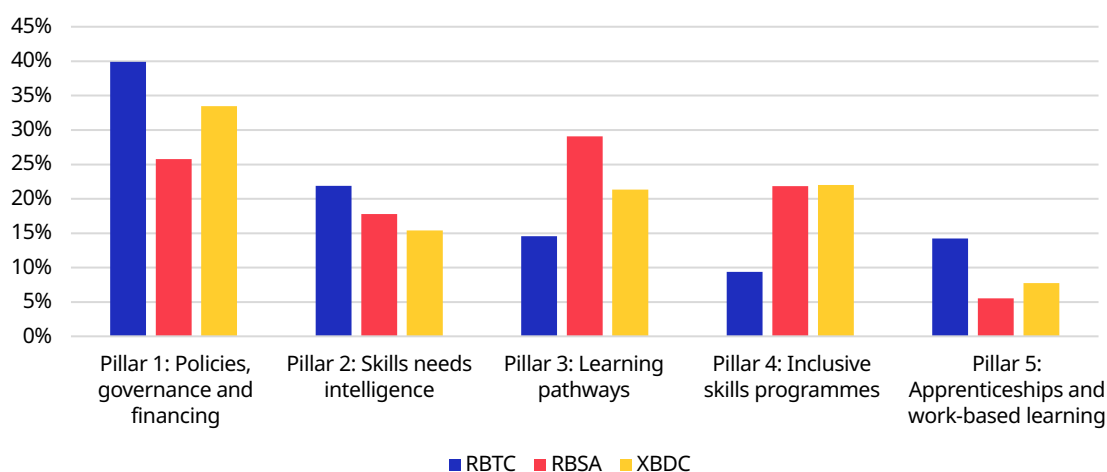
Although RBSA and RBTC together account for only 2-3% of total skills and lifelong learning funding value, several ILO staff describe these regular-budget resources as critical for catalytic and strategic work that would otherwise not be possible. The clearest example comes from the **Arab States**, where one respondent described using RBSA as seed funding during the Syrian refugee response: starting from zero donor money, RBSA financed an initial RPL model for Syrian refugees, the results were used to approach donors, and ten donor contributions were subsequently mobilised, tripling the regional portfolio over the respondent's tenure. The same respondent noted that RBSA is "more flexible than DC funds for adapting to political instability" and is currently being used to support a strategic study on skills and social justice.

In **Asia-Pacific**, RBTC and RBSA have been used strategically by the regional skills team to support specific regional policy moments, including the ASEAN Year of Skills 2025 under Malaysian chairmanship, the upcoming Philippine ASEAN chairmanship in 2026, and convening of the regional skills coordination meeting for CTAs and NPCs. The funds support work that bilateral donors would not directly finance but that enables ILO to position itself at the centre of regional policy dialogue.

At **HQ level**, RBSA and RBTC have supported the development and dissemination of cross-cutting global knowledge products and methodologies, including a feasibility study for an international reference classification of occupations by skills and qualification requirements (with additional G20 funding), the Skills Bridge Master Class series reaching 10,000+ policy makers from 140 countries, and the policy and guidance work on skills for just transition and NDC integration that has supported the rise in national climate plans including skills measures from approximately 50% to 80% between submission rounds.

Furthermore, RBSA and RBTC is, to some extent, used strategically to create a balance in interventions across the five pillars. As depicted in Figure 25, XBDC funding is focused largely on pillars 1 (38%) and 4 (24%). RBTC and RBSA are somewhat more balanced across the pillars and fill particular gaps in XBDC funding for pillars 2 and 5.

FIGURE 25. DISTRIBUTION (IN%) OF EACH OF THE THREE FUNDING TYPES ACROSS THE PILLARS OF WORK OF THE STRATEGY ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING (P&B 22-23 AND 24-25 COMBINED)



Source: HLE analysis of CPO related information, extracted from the ILO Outcome-based work planning dashboard. The chart shows the % of each funding source allocated to each pillar.

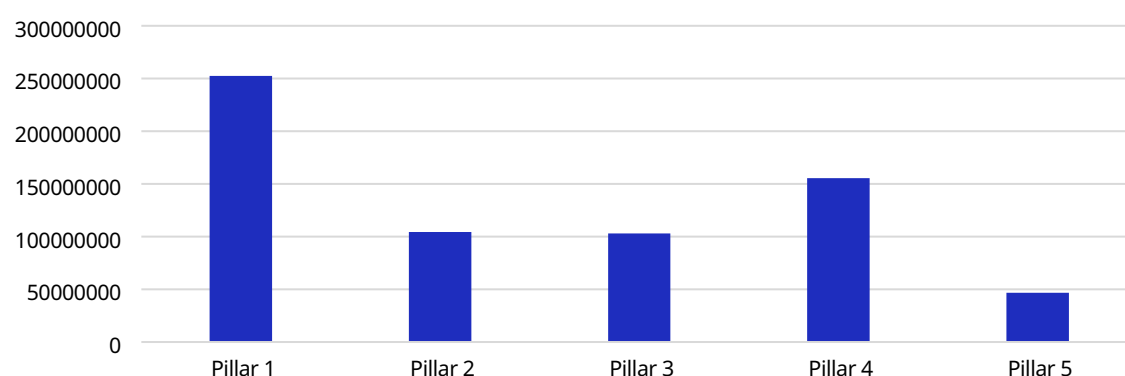
While the ILO commits a meaningful share of its Regular Budget to the area, the overwhelming majority of the portfolio is funded by XBDC, which represents **97-98% of total skills and lifelong learning funding** in both biennia.⁴² This reliance on extra-budgetary funding has allowed the ILO to expand its work well beyond what the Regular Budget alone could sustain, reflecting growing donor interest in specific thematic areas of skills and lifelong learning work, particularly green skills, digital skills, AI-related skills and skills portability in the context of labour migration, alongside continued strong demand from member states for ILO's normative and policy work.

⁴² Source: Financial information internally available in the ILO. It should be noted that the finding refers to XBDC, RBSA and RBTC, and does not include RB resource allocation and expenditure figures.

At the same time, the **allocation of resources and financial efficiency face various challenges** as well. Firstly, the growing funding is arriving more often through earmarked donor channels rather than through flexible pooled or unearmarked **funding or regular budget allocations**. **Staff warn that the funding environment is reshaping what counts as a priority**, with donor preferences increasingly shaping the allocation of resources. This concern is compounded by a donor environment that several staff describe as shrinking, and by donors increasingly addressing their own priorities through development cooperation. This trend risks narrowing the scope for the ILO to act fully in line with its own strategic priorities.

Secondly, the **distribution of resources across regions and pillars is uneven**, with resources concentrated in Africa, and in the policy and governance pillar, while other regions and topics (lifelong learning, skills needs intelligence, apprenticeships) receive less.

FIGURE 26. TOTAL RESOURCES (USD) ALLOCATED BY PILLAR (EXCL. RB RESOURCES)*, 2022 - 2025



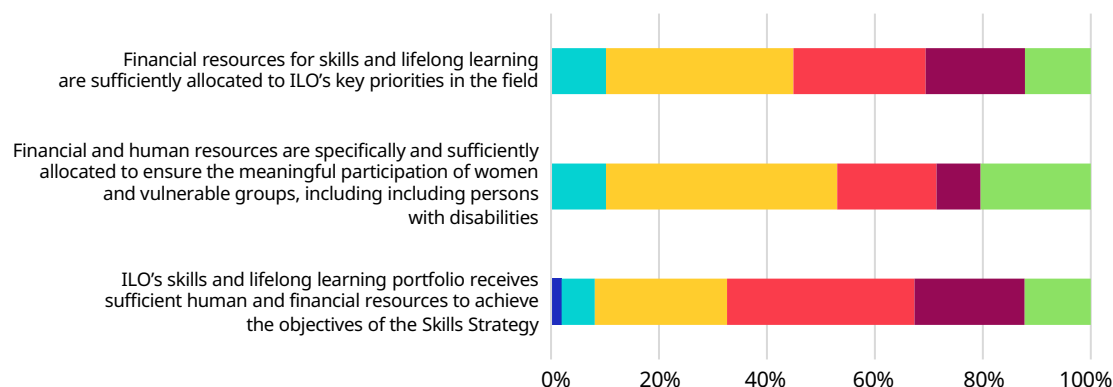
***Note:** This includes double counting. If a deliverable contributes to two or more pillars, the total amount for that deliverable is included for each pillar. This chart is therefore illustrative to show the division of resources across pillars, rather than presenting the total volume of resources for skills and lifelong learning overall.

Thirdly, despite the growing budget and large allocation of ILO budget to the skills portfolio, the **volume of resources is below the volume of constituent demand and ambition of the strategy**, with the consequence that resources are spread thinly across multiple priorities rather than concentrated where the strategic case would be strongest. Among the surveyed constituents, 54% agreed or strongly agreed that ILO's budgets for skills and lifelong learning projects are reasonable considering the projects' objectives, which is only slightly more than half of the respondents.⁴³

Surveyed ILO staff also indicated limited confidence in the adequacy of resources for skills and lifelong learning (Figure 27). Across all three statements on resource sufficiency, the largest share of respondents expressed uncertainty or mixed perceptions. Negative views outweighed positive ones, particularly regarding whether the skills and lifelong learning portfolio has sufficient human and financial resources to achieve the objectives of the Skills Strategy. Perceptions were somewhat more favorable for resources supporting the participation of women and vulnerable groups, although a notable proportion of respondents remained uncertain.

⁴³ Survey launched by the evaluation team among constituents (n=35). "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the efficiency of ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning? ILO's budgets for skills and lifelong learning projects are reasonable considering the projects' objectives".

FIGURE 27. PERCEPTIONS OF ILO STAFF ON FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING (IN%)



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO staff (n=49). "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements on the efficiency of ILO's portfolio on skills and lifelong learning?"

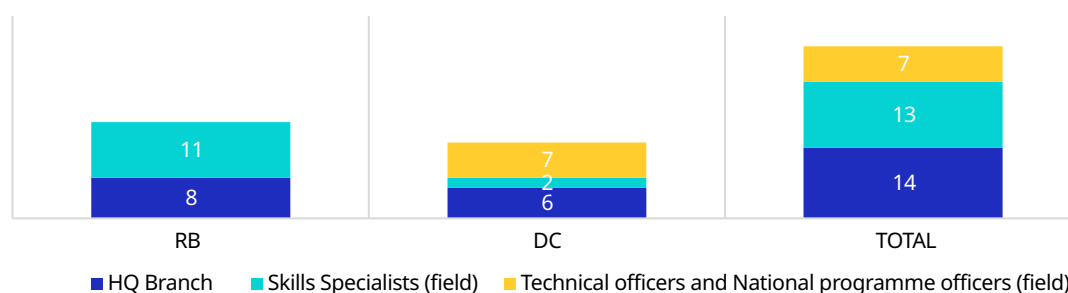
In this regard, several interviewed ILO staff also describe a **gap between the formal status of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy and its operational backing**. One regional respondent described skills as *"currently invisibilised"* inside ILO, and several others observed that ILO communications under-promote the skills and lifelong learning agenda relative to the organisation's older thematic priorities. The underlying view is not that skills and lifelong learning are unimportant, but that institutional support and communications do not match the priority status the Strategy implies.

ADEQUACY OF HUMAN RESOURCES

In addition to financial resources, the ILO skills portfolio is influenced by its staffing and time allocation. The evidence shows a portfolio in which **ILO staff are widely recognised as technically strong but insufficient in number**. Interviews with HQ-level staff particularly indicate that the volume of regular staff (not project-based) at HQ is low considering the scope of the strategy and volume of backstopping work needed across the world, to cover for gaps in regional specialist positions.

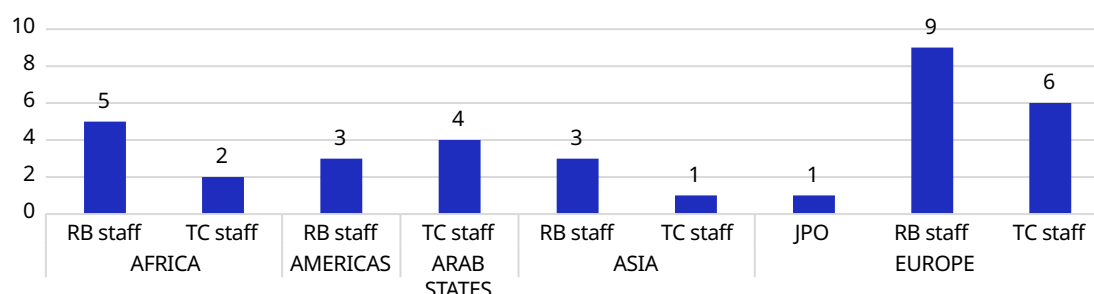
As shown in figures 28 and 29, staff is funded from either the RB or through XBDC funding. The workforce is composed predominantly of HQ Branch staff and Skills Specialists (including in the field), with Technical Officers making up a smaller proportion. Skills specialists are mainly funded by RB, while Technical Officers rely on DC-funding, indicating distinct staffing profiles that align with their respective operational functions. Overall, **RB staff outnumber DC-funded staff in most regions**, indicating a stronger RB presence globally.

FIGURE 28. OVERVIEW OF HUMAN RESOURCES FOR SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING (BY JANUARY 2026) ⁴⁴



Source: ILO's Human Resources Development Department in January 2026

⁴⁴ Data provided to the HLE by ILO's Human Resources Development Department in January 2026

FIGURE 29. STAFF FUNDING SOURCES BY REGION (AS OF JANUARY 2026) ⁴⁵

From a comparative perspective, the volume of staff is limited considering the scope of work needed to implement the Strategy. The HQ Skills Branch is described as a team of relatively small size compared to constituent demand from dozens of countries. Gaps in staff capacity in the regions were observed too, with the regional skills specialist position sat vacant for over two years in the Arab States, Latin America and the Caribbean had no dedicated full-time regional skills specialist position in the Regional Office, although dedicated multidisciplinary skills capacity is available in the region through ILO/CINTERFOR, and Europe and Central Asia operating with limited capacity across a portfolio of 29 projects. Staff working in these regions describe themselves as in largely demand-driven manner than able to plan strategically, with the same individuals stretched across resource mobilisation, technical work, project backstopping and constituent engagement simultaneously. Thinly staffed regions also lack national or regional ‘takers’ to carry HQ products forward. In this regard, the GSP was praised because it has the strongest skills architecture.

National project coordinators of the GSP consistently described **regional skills specialists as the linchpin of the technical quality of country-level work**: accessible, technically credible and engaged through monthly one-to-one meetings, joint mission planning and hands-on review of country workplans. For instance, the GSP arrangement, in which the regional skills specialist in Abidjan backstops the six GSP countries⁴⁶ with a dedicated regional coordinator, is described by country coordinators as the structural mechanism that enables technical consistency across the six countries. The Ethiopia case study confirms the pattern, noting that the same regional skills specialist backstops all three current skills-related projects in the country and acts as a guarantor of consistent technical approach.

The analysis of **self-reported staff time** in the 2024 – 25⁴⁷ period indicated that, overall, the SKILLS branch is the dominant contributor to Output 3.2, accounting for approximately 33% of total staff time allocation. This is substantially higher than any other organizational unit and reflects the **central coordinating and technical role of SKILLS branch** in advancing the ILO’s skills and lifelong learning agenda.

The data also suggest a **balanced model of delivery in which global technical leadership is combined with extensive regional implementation**. In this regard, while global activities account for 40.9% of total staff time allocated to 3.2, the majority (59.1% of total staff time allocation) is channelled through regional and country structures, reflecting the nature of skills systems work, which requires both global knowledge and standards as well as sustained support to national institutions and stakeholders. Notable contributors in terms of largest staff time allocation include DWT Bangkok (8.5%), DWT/CO New Delhi (6.0%), DWT/CO Budapest (5.3%), and DWT/CO Cairo (5.1%).

⁴⁵ Data provided to the HLE by ILO’s Human Resources Development Department on January 2026

⁴⁶ The number of countries has evolved during the GSP lifespan. At the time the HLE was conducted, the GSP was active in 6 countries.

⁴⁷ Source: ILO RBM resource tracking dashboard (internal to ILO)

Among the regions, the **African Region (22.8%)** and Asia and the **Pacific Region (21.8%)** are identified with the largest shares of staff time allocation. **Europe and Central Asia (6.7%), Latin America and the Caribbean (5.8%),** and **Arab States (1.9%)** regions receive comparatively smaller shares. This aligns with the share of funding for the skills portfolio by region.

Among the surveyed constituents, 94% perceive that **ILO's skills and lifelong learning interventions are led by highly qualified staff members**.⁴⁸ Partners describe ILO's normative and methodological expertise on apprenticeships, recognition of prior learning, skills governance and social dialogue as the natural reference point in these areas. Constituents in the case study countries describe ILO specialists as deeply knowledgeable, responsive and trustworthy.

RESOURCE UTILISATION

On the **efficiency of resource utilisation specifically, the evidence is more positive** than on adequacy. The synthesis review of 95 relevant ILO evaluation reports finds financial management generally compliant and transparent, with cost structures reasonable for policy and system-level work. The review notes cost-efficiency is strongest where ILO leverages existing delivery mechanisms, while heavy reliance on external consultants raises transaction costs and lowers institutional returns. Staff describe the same pattern, noting that the value of a technical agency lies in specialist staff time rather than contracted consultants, and that HQ backstopping leverages much larger project budgets.

Several mechanisms also allow **small budgets to be used efficiently and at scale**, including methodologies shared across countries (e.g. by CINTERFOR, whose regional network develops competency standards, curricula and certification tools once and adapts them across multiple member states), high-reach low-cost products (the Skills Bridge Master Classes, reaching over 4,000 policy makers from 140 countries), regional delivery that avoids country-by-country financing (SIFA, SADC), and pooled funding, which staff most consistently associate with efficient use because it permits in-year reallocation to the highest-impact activities and sustains specialist contracts through lean periods. While CINTERFOR's institutional configuration reflects a specific regional and historical context and cannot be replicated mechanically, several of its operating principles, including network-based cooperation, co-development and adaptation of methodologies, shared regional tools, peer learning and preservation of institutional knowledge, may be adaptable to other regional contexts.

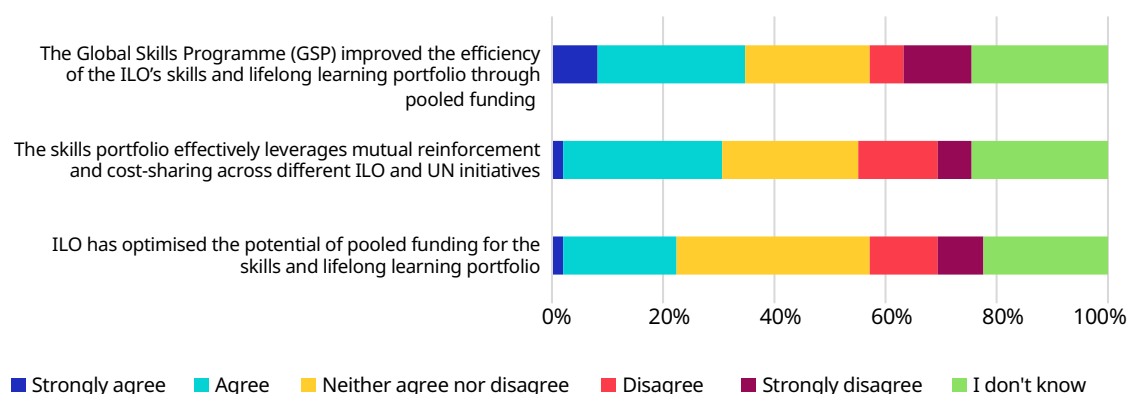
The main **limits lie in the size of the funding envelopes and in how efficiency is measured**, rather than in how resources are spent. For instance, staff describe GSP country budgets of roughly USD 400,000-500,000, and in some cases EUR 250,000-400,000, as enough to act as a catalyst but too small to scale or deepened system reform. Value for money is assessed almost entirely qualitatively, and on an output-basis with the synthesis review noting that quantitative return-on-investment evidence is rare and that opportunities for stronger domestic and private sector co-financing are sometimes missed.

Some processes also carry avoidable inefficiency, including delays awaiting formal allocation channels (likely linked to low staffing), resource-intensive global services such as the help desk and consultant roster that were ultimately discontinued, and inter-agency competition for scarce funding that erodes the synergies cost-sharing is meant to produce. Though, the decentralisation of GSP management to Abidjan is credited by staff with improving operational efficiency.

LEVERAGE, COST-SHARING AND CATALYTIC EFFECTS

The evidence on efficient use of funding shows a portfolio that achieves **substantial leverage through cost-sharing and catalytic project design**, but where these efficiency gains are realised inconsistently and depend heavily on individual initiative rather than systematic mechanisms. The survey among ILO staff similarly shows diverging opinions on whether ILO has sufficiently leveraged and optimised efficient funding mechanisms (Figure 30).

⁴⁸ Survey launched by the evaluation team among constituents (n=35). "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the efficiency of ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning? ILO's skills and lifelong learning interventions are led by highly qualified staff members"

FIGURE 30. PERCEPTION OF ILO STAFF ON THE USE OF EFFICIENT FUNDING MECHANISMS (%)

Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO staff (n=49). "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements on the efficiency of ILO's portfolio on skills and lifelong learning?"

Responses suggest moderate confidence in the value of pooled funding and collaborative approaches for the skills and lifelong learning portfolio, although uncertainty remains high, likely because not many staff have direct exposure to pooled-funding mechanisms beyond the GSP. The most positive assessment relates to the GSP, with around one-third of ILO survey respondents agreeing that it has improved portfolio efficiency through pooled funding. Similar proportions viewed the portfolio as effectively leveraging mutual reinforcement and cost-sharing across ILO and UN initiatives. Perceptions were less favorable regarding whether the ILO has fully optimized the potential of pooled funding, where neutral and negative responses were more prominent.

The high-level evaluation identified **three major levers for improving efficiency** in the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning, thereby allowing ILO to achieve more with less resources, or enhance the impact without increasing the spending. First is **cost-sharing and joint delivery with other agencies**. The most commonly provided example of efficiency and cost reduction come from structured multi-agency programmes where the cost arrangements are embedded in the funding architecture from the outset. The clearest example is the PROSPECTS partnership, where each of the five participating UN agencies funds its own thematic component and where concrete cost-sharing arrangements have emerged from the structure.

A second pattern of cost-sharing operates between ILO and bilateral development partners where **complementary mandates enable joint delivery**, including a systematic arrangement with one major bilateral partner across sector skills body work, labour market information frameworks and a substantial EU-funded follow-on project, in which the bilateral partner provides resources and ILO provides technical methodology.

A third pattern, less frequent but consistently positive, is **cost-sharing with host governments**. ILO staff in one **African** country described a formalised model in which the government provides its own budget for skills and lifelong learning work where it can, and ILO provides technical support; the country has institutionalised an apprenticeship programme and an RPL system that is integrated into national policy and institutional mechanism without continued ILO financial support.

A second efficiency lever runs through the **catalytic design of projects**, ensuring trickle-down and multiplier effects of project activities to beneficiaries beyond the initial project scope. For example, roughly 100 instructors were initially trained on the in-company trainer competency-based training manual directly by ILO in **Thailand**. Then, those instructors then trained more than 1,000 further instructors nationwide, and the cascade now reaches around 600,000 students. The same train-the-trainer logic underpins the **Philippines** core work skills framework, where master trainers operationalise the framework across the national TVET system, and the Job Search Club methodology, which has been institutionalised in the **Jordan** Ministry of Youth and is being scaled by the Iraq government across Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia.

The synthesis review also pointed at some interventions commonly “*functioning as seeds for scale-up, enabling the adoption of policies and frameworks that attract further investment*”. For example, the **Sri Lanka** skills passport developed by ILO has been adopted as national policy and integrated into another UN agency's migrant information system. In **Ghana**, the 16 Sector Skills Bodies established by ILO are now running with government secretariat staffing. The government recognises Sector Skills Bodies legislatively through the TVET Commission Act 2020 and is now developing a legislative instrument for full legal and financial autonomy. Several interviewees also reported that **Namibia** has taken full ownership of the ILO skills anticipation methodology and is running renewable energy sector analysis without further ILO support. In **Tanzania**, the apprenticeship programme is fully institutionalised and continuing without additional ILO financial support. The **Kenyan** RPL system is also embedded in the national budget. Such examples provide evidence of the efficiency of ILO's work in terms of creating (initial) results that are taken forward at national level without ILO (financial) support. Among the surveyed ILO staff, **55% agree or strongly agree that there is evidence that ILO skills interventions have acted as a catalyst**, leading stakeholders to commit their own budgets or policy actions beyond the initial ILO funding.⁴⁹

A last mechanism for ILO to optimise its efficiency is the **use of flexible financing mechanisms** such as unearmarked funding. Multiple staff describe this flexible funding as enabler to adjust activities to changing constituent priorities, to respond to government requests as they emerge, and to allocate resources across pillars and countries where the strategic case is strongest. However, only very few examples exist of pooled funding in the context of the 2022-2026 skills programming.

BOX 18. THE GSP AS UNIQUE POOLED FUNDING PROGRAMME IN THE SKILLS PORTFOLIO

The Global Skills Programme is the largest pooled funding instrument in the ILO skills portfolio. ILO staff working in the six GSP countries describe the pooled funding model as one of the most important sources of efficiency in their work, for three reasons. First, the funding enables genuinely responsive programming. National coordinators describe being able to adjust workplans when constituent priorities shift, to fund inception activities for new partner requests as they emerge, and to allocate resources across the five Strategy pillars in line with country-specific entry points.

Second, the model enables **comprehensive country-level approaches that combine policy advice, capacity building, normative work, apprenticeship pilots and work-based learning** in one engagement, which staff describe as “hard to do in one-thing projects”.

Third, the pooled funding provides **sustained multi-year staff and operational continuity**. ILO staff describe the GSP funding as the resource that maintains a dedicated regional skills specialist in Abidjan, a regional coordinator and country coordinators in each of the six countries, an architecture that no individual project budget could finance and that produces structural cost-savings across the wider skills portfolio. The GSP also funds HQ staff time on cross-cutting work that bilateral donors would not directly finance.

However, the evaluation evidence also identified the limits of the GSP pooled funding model. The pooled donor base has narrowed substantially during the evaluation period: at the time this HLE was conducted, only one funding partner (NORAD) was contributing to it. The conclusion across the staff interviews is that the pooled funding model demonstrably produces efficiency gains where it is in place, but that the broader donor environment is moving away from the modality, with the consequence that the GSP's pooled funding architecture is structurally underfunded relative to what the Strategy requires.

49 Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO staff (n=49). “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements on the efficiency of ILO's portfolio on skills and lifelong learning? There is evidence that ILO skills interventions have acted as a catalyst, leading stakeholders to commit their own budgets or policy actions beyond the initial ILO funding”

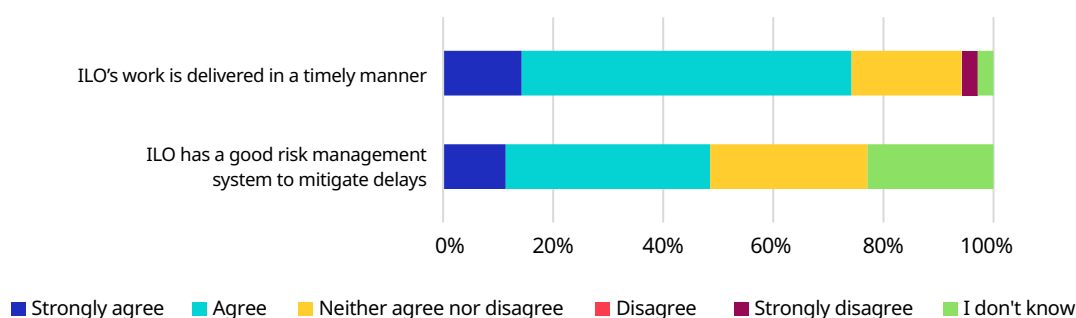
TIMELINESS AND RISK MANAGEMENT

The synthesis review treats **timeliness as one of the most consistently problematic dimensions** of ILO efficiency. The synthesis review of 95 evaluation reports described that ILO interventions are “generally well-managed and produce results, but timeliness and adaptive responsiveness are uneven, particularly in fragile contexts and large multi-component programmes”. Delays have identifiable structural causes that recur across the evidence. The synthesis review identifies procurement and HR processes, funding flows through HQ, tripartite consultation cycles, external shocks and stakeholder availability as the main drivers. The case studies confirm these and add specific instances: political instability (**Bangladesh**), the time required for tripartite ownership-building (**Ethiopia**), and external institutional approval windows (**Moldova**). These are structural rather than incidental issues.

The common pattern is that ILO meets its substantive commitments but does so on timelines that depart from original plans, with the extended timelines often being necessary to secure the institutional outcomes that make the work durable. The trade-off between timeliness and quality of ownership is therefore one that ILO consistently resolves in favour of quality, with the consequence that strict timeliness is the area in which the portfolio underperforms most clearly even where overall efficiency is judged adequate.

Despite the evidence of the evaluations and case studies, surveyed constituents still perceive that the work of ILO is generally delivered in a timely manner, showing that project delays are not detrimental to their expectations. (Figure 31)

FIGURE 31. PERCEPTION OF CONSTITUENTS ON ILO'S TIMELINESS IN DELIVERING ON THE STRATEGY (IN %)



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among constituents (n=35). “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the efficiency of ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning?”

However, surveyed constituents are less positive about **ILO's ability to manage risks and avoid delays**. The synthesis review, case studies and staff interviews identified that risk management exists but operates largely reactively, with limited evidence of systematic proactive identification of risks before they materialise as delays. The synthesis review captures the overall picture in measured terms, noting that “*risk management is generally present but uneven in depth*”, with risk identification at design stage often becoming static rather than dynamic through the project cycle. ILO staff interviews confirmed the reactive pattern. Several staff describe risk management as concentrated at project inception and then becoming dormant through implementation, with active risk discussion typically resuming only when a risk has already materialised.

Overall, timeliness and risk management are the weakest dimension of the portfolio's efficiency. Delays are structural and recur predictably, while risk management remains largely reactive rather than anticipatory, adding little to the mitigation of those delays. This does not amount to a failure to deliver, since substantive commitments are generally met and constituents remain broadly satisfied, but it does confirm that timeliness and proactive risk management are where the portfolio falls furthest short of good practice and where the clearest scope for efficiency gains lies.

Internal coordination

This section examines coordination across ILO units and levels from an operational and technical perspective: the hierarchy of support relationships between country, regional and HQ levels, the structure and frequency of coordination meetings, and the survey evidence on cross-unit collaboration.

The **architecture of internal coordination** follows a clear hierarchical structure in principle. Country-level skills work is delivered by national project coordinators and country office teams (and sometimes by international teams in case of large DC projects), technically backstopped by decent work team/subregional skills specialists, and connected to global thematic expertise through the HQ Skills Branch. Where this hierarchy functions as designed, the support flow runs from HQ through decent work skills specialists to country teams, with country needs and lessons travelling back upward through the same channels.

A specific feature of how internal coordination operates in practice is the **flow of HQ-developed tools, methodologies and frameworks through the coordination hierarchy**. The same tools developed once at HQ are adapted to country contexts by regional specialists and applied at country level by national coordinators, providing consistency across countries without requiring each country to redevelop methodology from scratch.

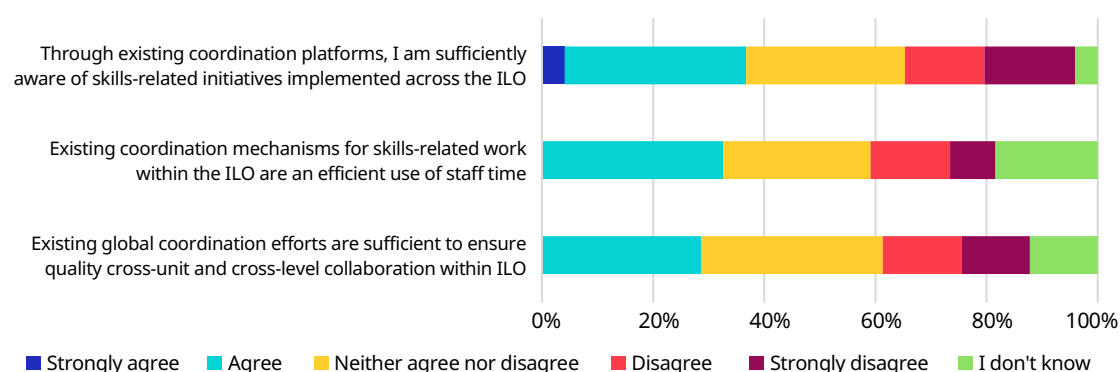
BOX 19. HQ-DEVELOPED TOOLS AS A COORDINATION MECHANISM

Multiple ILO staff describe a set of methodologies and tools that are now used in common across countries: the **STED skills anticipation methodology** has been applied in more than 30 countries across different regions, including, illustratively, Lebanon, Malawi, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Senegal, Malaysia, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vanuatu and Saudi Arabia. The SCORE methodology has been adapted for climate-resilient enterprise development across multiple countries; the in-company trainer competency-based training manual developed at HQ has been applied at scale in Thailand (over 1,000 instructors) and is now being adapted for other Southeast Asian contexts; and the **Greening TVET** tool has been piloted in countries including Ghana, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Cambodia, Thailand, Guyana and the Philippines. These country references are illustrative rather than exhaustive. ILO staff describe these as examples of the same instruments being adapted to country contexts rather than redeveloped from scratch. The flow of these tools from HQ through regional and sub-regional specialists to country teams is one of the strongest practical examples of internal coordination delivering consistency across the portfolio.

Two patterns recur in how country coordinators perceive the technical support they receive from regional sub-regional skills specialists and HQ:

- ▶ The first is that **national project staff describe the technical support from regional skills specialists as high quality but stretched thin**. Country coordinators in regions with dedicated regional skills specialists describe monthly one-to-one meetings, joint mission planning, hands-on review of country workplans, and direct contribution to constituent meetings as routine. The relationship is described as accessible and technically authoritative. The constraint flagged by coordinators is not the quality of the support but the volume: the same regional specialist often backstops multiple countries, projects and thematic dossiers simultaneously, with the consequence that depth of engagement varies and that strategic planning support is harder to secure than reactive technical advice.
- ▶ The second pattern is that **HQ-led meetings and platforms are valued by country coordinators where they exist but are not consistently designed to reach all parts of the portfolio**. For instance, the Africa GSP monthly meetings are described as the strongest mechanisms. The cross-cutting Global Skills Community of Practice meetings are described as useful for knowledge-sharing but as having more uneven attendance. Several national staff outside the GSP architecture described limited participation in any regular cross-country meeting structure, with knowledge exchange depending instead on bilateral contacts with HQ specialists or on ad hoc invitations to thematic events. The implication is that the same coordinator with the same technical needs can have very different access to peer learning depending on whether their project sits inside a structured programme.

The survey of ILO staff is reflective of these issues, demonstrating **uneven experiences and opinions on the efficiency and use of coordination mechanisms**. Overall, the majority of ILO staff perceive global coordination as insufficient. (Figure 32)

FIGURE 32. PERCEPTIONS OF ILO STAFF ON EXISTING COORDINATION MECHANISMS (IN %)

Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team among ILO staff (n=49). "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following questions on the coordination of the skills and lifelong learning portfolio?"

At country level, ILO has established a range of coordination mechanisms that bring multiple skills-related projects together within a single country. The case studies provide concrete examples of how these mechanisms operate in practice. **Ethiopia** describes a monthly internal skills coordination meeting as the principal platform for joint planning across GSP, BRMM, MPTF, PROSPECTS and ONE-ILO projects, with the same regional skills specialist backstopping all three current skills-related projects as a guarantor of consistent technical approach. The PROSPECTS structure adds a further coordination layer in the eight PROSPECTS countries, with country-level coordination embedded as a condition of the donor funding. ILO staff working in countries with established coordination mechanisms describe these as essential to avoiding duplication between ILO's own projects, with one specialist describing the experience of personally convening the coordinators of three separate ILO skills and lifelong learning projects in their country who had not previously been communicating.

Coordination enabled by the Global Skills Programme

CROSS-UNIT COLLABORATION FACILITATED BY THE GLOBAL SKILLS PROGRAMME

The Programme's contribution to cross-unit collaboration varies sharply by layer. It is substantial within the six target countries (where it links co-located ILO skills and lifelong learning projects) and across the six target countries (where it sustains a horizontal peer-learning architecture). It is limited between regions and between HQ technical departments, where the Programme has not meaningfully extended its convening function.

The **within-country layer** is described in **Box 20** below on country coordination platforms convened by the GSP, and highlights the role taken by GSP National Coordinators to lead not only their GSP components, but also lead broader skills initiatives in the country.

BOX 20. COUNTRY COORDINATION PLATFORMS CONVENED BY THE GSP

The most institutionalised contribution of the GSP to internal coordination is the establishment or strengthening of national coordination platforms in which GSP staff convene or co-chair partner alignment. In **Ghana**, the GSP convenes a monthly TVET development partner forum that facilitates coordination with GIZ, UNESCO, and World Investment Service Canada. In **Tanzania**, the GSP coordinator co-chairs the TVET Donor Partner Group that meets every two months and is described as the main platform for skills dialogue in the country, bringing together multiple development partners. In **Ethiopia**, the GSP National Coordination convenes regular internal skills coordination meetings that bring together GSP, BRMM, MPTF, PROSPECTS and ONE-ILO projects under common technical backstopping. These meetings have created concrete examples of projects supporting each other's activities.

The GSP National Coordinator role serves as the first reference point for skills-related questions from skills project teams and from constituents within the country, providing a single coordination anchor for the wider ILO skills work in those countries. This single-anchor model is most institutionalised in the GSP countries but is replicated in slightly different forms in PROSPECTS countries and in country offices with strong skills specialist presence.

Across GSP target countries, the Programme has produced **horizontal cross-country collaboration** initiatives that have no equivalent elsewhere in the ILO skills portfolio. National Coordinators in **Mali, Ghana, Tanzania, Malawi and Senegal** consistently describe the monthly Africa GSP meetings (last Thursday of each month, bringing together the six country coordinators and the regional team), the annual retreat, the global community of practice and the M&E Service Tracker (with monthly one-to-one country verification and quarterly Abidjan team review) as the operational backbone of their peer-learning and knowledge-sharing. Several staff describe a marked improvement in cross-country exchange since the Programme management was decentralised from Geneva to the regional office in Abidjan over the past two years. There is some evidence that tools developed within the Programme are replicated beyond the target countries. For example, the GSP core-skills curriculum being used in **Rwanda** is the clearest example, but such replication remains opportunistic rather than systematic.

The GSP has not meaningfully extended its convening function **between regions and between HQ technical departments**. Staff working in Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe and Central Asia, consistently describe themselves as outside the operational frame of the GSP, with the Programme either unknown to them, or perceived as a generic HQ funding source. At HQ level, technical, P&B and M&E coordination functions for skills continue to be performed through the SKILLS Branch and relevant team leads. However, there is no dedicated standing programme-level mechanism for coordinating the GSP across regions and HQ technical units, a function that was envisaged but weakened when programme management was decentralised to Abidjan. The synthesis review reaches a comparable conclusion, observing that the GSP strengthens cross-level collaboration meaningfully but unevenly, and that **its added value is clearest where it has created structured processes that would not arise through stand-alone projects**.

GSP'S CONTRIBUTION TO ILO'S COORDINATION WITH EXTERNAL ACTORS

The Programme's contribution to external coordination is uneven across levels: substantial at country level and notably present in Africa at regional level, and limited at global level, where most external coordination on skills continues to operate through the SKILLS Branch rather than through the Programme.

At country level, the GSP plays a structural convening role in its target countries, both for constituents and for external partners. With constituents, the Programme operates through and reinforces tripartite skills-governance structures (sector skills bodies in **Ghana, Ethiopia and Tanzania**). As noted earlier, several GSP National Coordinators convene or co-chair structured donor coordination platforms and describe these platforms as actively reducing duplication, with the GSP positioned as the technical and tripartite reference point that other actors seek out.

At regional level, the Programme's convening role is concentrated in Africa. The Abidjan-based GSP management has built regional partnerships through MoUs with the African Development Bank and UN ECA, sustained engagement with the African Union and AUDA, and participation in regional skills initiatives. The ILO contributed actively to Africa Skills Week in Ghana in October 2024 and in Addis Ababa in October 2025, which represent some of the most visible regional convening moments associated with the Programme. Outside Africa, the GSP's regional convening role has been more limited, although it also contributed to initiatives such as the Global Skills Forum held in Malaysia in 2025. **At global level**, the Programme's contribution is more output-based than coordination-based. The Programme has produced specific global outputs (an innovation challenge with the Islamic Development Bank, a lifelong learning costing methodology co-developed with the University of British Columbia, and co-delivery of events), but these are episodic rather than the basis of a sustained global coordination architecture.

ORIENTATION TOWARDS IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

These two criteria focus the assessment on emerging evidence of [impact](#) and the extent to which ILO-supported policies, institutions, governance mechanisms and technical tools have created conditions for [sustained improvements](#) in skills development, employability, labour market

responsiveness and broader socio-economic outcomes. The section also presents findings on the Global Skills Programme's contribution to impact and sustainability, and a dedicated forward-looking section presenting the [strategic implications for implementation through 2030](#).

KEY FINDING 12:

The ILO's strongest contribution to long-term impact lies in embedding skills and lifelong learning reforms within national policy processes, institutions and broader development agendas. Interventions that strengthened governance, qualifications frameworks, RPL, labour market intelligence and quality apprenticeships, while aligning with wider employment priorities, showed greater prospects to support institutionalization and scale. The GSP demonstrated the value of a programmatic approach in advancing system-level reform.



KEY FINDING 13:

The ILO has contributed to establishing conditions for sustainable reform; however, sustaining results depends on embedding these changes within national policy frameworks, institutions, sustainable domestic financing and strengthened institutional capacity.

Orientation towards impact

This section presents the findings on the extent to which the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning has contributed to results that are likely to generate lasting effects beyond interventions. Given the long-time horizons associated with skills system reform, the analysis focuses on evidence of [emerging impact](#) and on the extent to which ILO-supported policies, institutions, governance mechanisms and technical tools have created [conditions for improvements](#) in skills development, employability, labour market responsiveness and broader socio-economic outcomes⁵⁰. It includes a dedicated forward-looking section presenting the [strategic implications for implementation through 2030](#).

Overall, the evaluation finds that the ILO has contributed most convincingly to long-term impact by **strengthening the policy environment and governance/institutional foundations through which skills systems can become more responsive, inclusive and labour-market oriented**. In this regard, the evidence suggests that **ILO strategies and actions on skills and lifelong learning have contributed to conditions that are likely to support long-term impact at country level**. The strongest impact pathways are found where interventions support policy and strategic reforms, strengthen stakeholders' capacity to fulfil their institutional roles, and promote demand-oriented skills systems through qualifications frameworks, competency-based approaches, recognition systems and workplace-based learning. These pathways are particularly relevant where skills reforms are linked to broader employment, productivity and economic transformation agendas.

However, the evidence does not yet support a uniform conclusion that these changes have translated into durable system transformation across countries. **In many cases, the ILO's contribution is best understood as laying the foundations for long-term impact rather than already achieving it**. The evidence of large-scale labour market change remains limited, partly because such effects require longer time horizons and depend on wider economic, institutional and labour demand conditions. **While skills interventions can strengthen employability, workforce adaptability and access to training and certification opportunities, the realization of employment and income outcomes ultimately depends on the capacity of labour markets and economies to generate decent work opportunities**. The ILO has therefore created credible pathways towards long-term impact, but the full realization of that impact remains uneven and still emerging.

⁵⁰ The evaluation's ability to assess long-term beneficiary-level impacts was constrained by the limited availability of tracer studies, graduate tracking systems and other longitudinal monitoring mechanisms across the portfolio. Consequently, the analysis of impact focuses primarily on institutional, policy and system-level changes, while evidence on sustained behavioral, employment and income-related outcomes among beneficiaries remains limited.

Institutional capacities and system-level foundations

Across the country case studies, the strongest pathways towards long-term impact are found where ILO support has influenced the way skills systems are governed, coordinated and connected to labour market needs through long-term multiphase initiatives. Rather than affecting only individual beneficiaries or institutions, **many interventions systematically sought to reshape the rules, relationships and functions that determine how skills are developed, recognized and utilized within national systems.** These reforms have the potential to influence how skills systems function over time by strengthening governance arrangements, employer engagement, training relevance and labour market responsiveness. Their significance lies not only in their continued existence, but in their capacity to improve the behaviour, performance and adaptability of institutions, generating effects that extend beyond the immediate results of individual projects.

In **Panama**, ILO support to INADEH modernization has shown potential to produce long-term institutional impact by shifting the public training system toward competency-based training, labour competency standards, Sector Skills Councils and stronger employer engagement. The intervention is particularly important because it targets the core operating model of a national public training institution. If successfully consolidated, the reform has the potential to influence training quality, employer engagement, curriculum relevance and workforce responsiveness across Panama's public training system. Its impact would therefore extend beyond the immediate outputs of the modernization process and affect how skills are generated and recognized nationally.

Moldova illustrates a different long-term impact pathway. ILO-supported work on green skills, renewable energy qualifications, microcredentials, labour market forecasting and employment services is aligned with structural national challenges, including demographic decline, outward migration and workforce adaptation. This gives the intervention strong strategic relevance and a plausible pathway towards longer-term system effects. The long-term significance of these reforms lies in their potential to improve workforce adaptation, support emerging economic sectors and mitigate some of the skills shortages associated with migration and demographic decline, even if they cannot fully reverse these broader structural trends.

Similar patterns are visible beyond the five country case studies. In **Ghana, Tanzania and Senegal**, interventions contributed to governance reform, green TVET, sector coordination and skills anticipation systems linked to wider employment and transition agendas. In **South Africa**, apprenticeship and artisan development reforms benefited from stronger institutional anchoring within existing national systems, increasing the likelihood that these reforms influence skills delivery and employer engagement over time. In the **Philippines**, ILO support to TESDA strengthened institutional approaches to skills anticipation and labour market responsiveness, while in **Cambodia and Indonesia**, enterprise-based training, digital learning and local development methodologies contributed to longer-term institutional learning within TVET and employment systems.

In fragile and crisis-affected contexts such as **Lebanon**, long-term impact potential is more constrained, but interventions still helped maintain skills, employability and resilience support functions for vulnerable populations, despite highly fragile institutional conditions.

Across countries, the strongest indications of durable impact are found where skills reforms became connected to broader institutional mandates and national policy priorities rather than remaining confined to stand-alone project activities. Conversely, interventions that remained isolated from broader institutional reform, labour market governance or public financing systems appear considerably less likely to generate durable impact beyond immediate project cycles.

POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND TOOLS AS PATHWAYS TO LONG-TERM CHANGE

Policy frameworks and technical tools are among the mechanisms through which the ILO is most likely to influence long-term change. Their significance lies in the fact that they shape how institutions make decisions, allocate resources, engage employers and respond to labour market change over time. Qualifications frameworks, occupational standards, competency-based curricula, RPL methodologies, apprenticeship frameworks, labour market diagnostics and green skills tools can influence training provision, certification pathways, employer engagement and workforce planning well beyond the duration of individual projects. Their impact potential is strongest when they shape institutional decision-making, coordination mechanisms and responses to labour market change over time.

This distinction is visible across countries. In the **Philippines**, ILO-supported skills anticipation work strengthened TESDA's institutional approaches and forecasting capacities, suggesting a credible pathway toward longer-term national capacity. In **Cambodia**, C-BED and life-skills approaches appear to have influenced training and local development initiatives. In **Indonesia**, digital and blended delivery approaches introduced during crisis response may have longer-term relevance if integrated into provider systems. In **South Africa**, apprenticeship and artisan reforms have stronger potential for durability because they are linked to national institutional arrangements. In **Tunisia, Egypt** and the **Bahamas**, apprenticeship and employability frameworks helped strengthen policy dialogue, but long-term impact remains more dependent on labour market absorption and institutional continuity.

Green transition work also shows significant long-term impact potential. In **Moldova, Ghana, Namibia, Zambia, Senegal, Zimbabwe** and **Southern Africa**, ILO methodologies such as STED, SPEED and Greening TVET helped position skills within emerging sectors and transition agendas. These tools are likely to have durable influence where they feed into occupational standards, curricula, qualifications and sector planning. However, their long-term influence on economic transformation will depend on whether they move beyond diagnostics and pilot initiatives to shape investment decisions, workforce planning and skills provision in emerging sectors.

Pathways to impact beyond project results

The evidence suggests that the ILO's long-term contribution is strongest where interventions affect the policy environment, rules and regulations, institutions and relationships that structure skills and lifelong learning systems. This includes reforms that clarify institutional mandates, strengthen tripartite coordination, improve employer participation, create recognition pathways for informally acquired skills, protect learners in the workplace, promote inclusion or connect skills provision with future labour market demand. These changes can produce impact beyond the direct beneficiaries of individual projects.

Training improves how beneficiaries think and act, but not always what they achieve.

—Beneficiary

At the same time, the transformative potential of interventions is more limited where activities remain concentrated on short-term support through vocational training delivery, localized pilots or project-specific mechanisms. Training may benefit individuals, but its system-level or training provider impact remains limited if it is not connected to certification, employment services, employer demand, financing or institutional reform. This is why the strongest long-term impact pathways are found in interventions that combine policy reform, institutional strengthening, labour market relevance and inclusion.

The Global Skills Programme contributes most visibly where it helps align larger projects and national reforms around shared technical approaches, as in **Bangladesh, Ethiopia** and other **GSP countries**. However, the GSP's long-term impact is also conditional and not necessarily comprehensive. It can contribute to strengthened preconditions for scale and more systematic and coordinated planning and delivery, but it cannot by itself ensure domestic financing, institutional continuity or political commitment.

Limits to long-term impact

The main limits to long-term impact are consistent across the evidence base. First, many labour market outcomes are shaped by factors that lie beyond the direct influence of skills interventions, including economic growth patterns, labour demand, industrial structure and job creation dynamics. Second, improvements in skills systems do not automatically translate into better employment outcomes, productivity gains or economic transformation, particularly where labour markets are characterized by informality, weak demand for skilled labour or limited productive investment. Third, political and administrative turnover can disrupt reforms before they are fully embedded. Fourth, employer participation does not always translate into sustained financing or long-term sector governance. Fifth, broader labour market constraints, informality, weak job creation, low productivity, migration and regional inequalities, can limit the employment impact of even technically strong skills reforms.

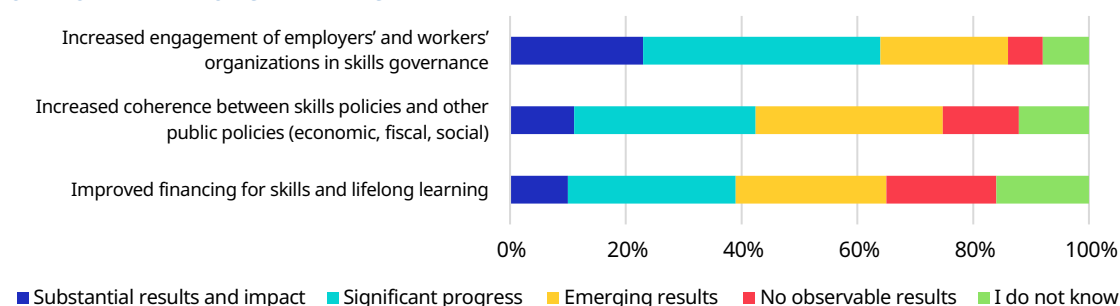
These constraints are important because they affect how the evaluation should interpret impact. **The ILO has contributed to institutional and policy changes that are plausibly linked to long-term outcomes, but it is too early or too ambitious to claim broad labour market transformation across countries.** In many contexts, **the evidence supports a contribution to enabling conditions for impact rather than confirmed impact itself.** This partly reflects the long-time horizons required for systemic skills reforms to influence labour market structures and economic performance.

BOX 21. TRACKING WHAT HAPPENS AFTER TRAINING: A CHALLENGE HIGHLIGHTED BY THE COLOMBIA CASE STUDY

The Colombia case study identified significant limitations in the systems available to track beneficiaries after training. The study found no interoperable mechanism linking training records, employment information and social security data, making it difficult to verify long-term outcomes related to employment, earnings and formalization. While available evidence pointed to positive effects on educational progression and short-term employability, the absence of integrated tracking systems prevented robust assessment of longer-term labour market impacts. The case illustrates a broader challenge facing skills interventions and highlights the importance of investing in systems capable of monitoring beneficiary trajectories over time.

The **Colombia** case study also highlights a broader lesson for the interpretation of skills impacts. While training and certification can strengthen capabilities, confidence and educational progression, labour market outcomes remain heavily influenced by structural factors beyond the direct reach of skills interventions, including informality, labour demand, economic structure and the effectiveness of employment intermediation systems. This finding reinforces the evaluation's broader conclusion that skills interventions often contribute more directly to employability and human capital development than to employment creation itself, which depends on wider economic and labour market dynamics.

Survey findings broadly support this assessment (Figure 33). Respondents perceived the strongest progress in the engagement of employers' and workers' organizations in skills governance and in policy coherence, while financing-related impact was perceived as comparatively weaker and more uneven.

FIGURE 33. PERCEPTION OF ILO CONSTITUENTS ON THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF ILO'S WORK ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team (N=143, with 35 constituents, 59 partners, and 49 ILO staff). "Over the past biennia (2022-2026), to what extent have you seen the following results created by ILO as related to skills and lifelong learning?"

Differences across respondent groups were generally limited. Nevertheless, ILO staff tended to perceive somewhat stronger progress than constituents and partners, particularly regarding policy and institutional changes, while views on financing-related impacts were more cautious across all groups.

Beneficiaries' perspectives

Evidence reveals that beneficiaries consistently experience skills and lifelong learning programmes as empowering and useful, but their testimonies also show that **skills alone do not lead to sustained livelihoods without complementary support systems (finance, markets, institutions)**.

Across projects, beneficiaries consistently report high perceived value of training, particularly when it is practical and linked to livelihoods. A recurring theme is psychological and social empowerment, beyond economic outcomes. Some beneficiaries report income generation and improved economic opportunities, but impacts are often partial or emerging. However, a consistent theme is that skills alone are insufficient.

FIGURE 34. OVERVIEW OF BENEFICIARIES' PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORK OF THE ILO ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Source: HLE own elaboration based on HLE synthesis review of 95 independent evaluations

Some examples serve to illustrate these perspectives. For instance, as evidenced in the independent evaluation of the **ILO-NORWAY programme cooperation agreement on skills development** (2016 – 2023), beneficiaries described tangible changes in their capabilities and opportunities. When asked about their views on training and apprenticeship initiatives, stakeholders reported improved competencies and better employability prospects after engaging in programmes. Similarly, training providers and employers observed that graduates

demonstrated better work attitudes and job readiness, suggesting that beneficiaries themselves can translate training into more confident labour market participation.

For more vulnerable groups, such as women, rural youth, or persons with disabilities, the programme appeared particularly meaningful in terms of access. In Malawi, for example, beneficiaries involved in agricultural training initiatives reported very positive results in terms of skills and livelihoods, even if it was still very early to assess the effectiveness. These early gains point to a perception among beneficiaries that the programme can improve their situation, even if long-term outcomes remain unclear.

However, this positive experience is not without limits. The evaluation repeatedly noted that, from the beneficiary perspective, labour market outcomes remain uncertain and uneven. While some individuals secure employment or start income-generating activities, this is not systematic, and in many cases the evidence remains anecdotal: beneficiaries' improved outcomes were often qualitative testimonials rather than systematically measured results. This reflects a deeper tension in the beneficiary experience: training and support are valued, but their translation into stable livelihoods is not guaranteed. Furthermore, the evaluations highlighted gaps in follow-up, scaling, and systemic support, suggesting that, from their perspective, programmes often end before benefits are fully consolidated.

The **Colombia** country case study led by the ILO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC) in coordination with EVAL included in its scope a **tracer exercise** designed with the objectives of: (i) generating plausible evidence of the intervention's contribution to graduates' individual trajectories; (ii) to test the operational feasibility of an institutionalized information ecosystem based on a systems and data governance approach; and (iii) providing the HLE with contextualized evidence that distinguishes reported coverage from actual effectiveness.

Overall, the tracer reveals that the portfolio is **more effective at strengthening capabilities than generating short-term labour market mobility**. The tracer study found that **the portfolio delivers strong educational progression but limited occupational mobility**, according to the tracer's quantitative findings and the mechanisms identified through focus groups. **Educational progression is the portfolio's strongest outcome**. Administrative records indicate 100% certification coverage, with the SENA Certificate as the dominant credential (41.0% of graduates' responses). Additionally, 65.4% of surveyed graduates (117 individuals) reported enrolling in further education after completing the programme, particularly women. Focus groups identified the mechanism behind this result: psychosocial support and academic bridging reposition technical education as an aspirational pathway, producing a documented shift in participants' educational aspirations. This represents a clear and verifiable achievement in the training dimension.

Occupational mobility, however, is more limited. Reported employment reached 69.9% (71.1% including those temporarily out of work but holding a job), yet employment gains largely reflect upskilling within existing career paths rather than new labour market entry. Among participants in mid-career stages, 13 of 15 profiles secured formal employment, whereas only 1 of 28 early-stage youth profiles did so. Focus groups explained this gap through two mechanisms affecting young participants: employers' limited recognition of SENA credentials despite graduates holding them, and the strong pull of early informal employment.

Formalization outcomes reinforce this pattern. The tracer estimated simultaneous health and pension coverage at 53.2% of the full sample and 61.4% of the applicable labour force, with a gender gap that also appears in perceived improvements in job formalization (57.7% of men versus 40.0% of women among the applicable labour force). These figures are self-reported and have not yet been verified against PILA administrative records; they should therefore be interpreted as perceived rather than confirmed formalization. **Focus groups found that conflict victims often turn to informal self-employment by necessity due to barriers to formal employment, including stigma and difficulties converting certifications into recognized qualifications**. Income

improvements after 18 months remained concentrated between 0.5 and 2 minimum wages (63.2% of valid responses), with only 4.0% reporting earnings above three minimum wages. Gendered caregiving responsibilities further constrained outcomes: 53.1% of women reported caregiving responsibilities compared with 26.6% of men, and caregiving affected the trajectories of 25.5% of women versus 7.8% of men.

Another example is the **ACJEMP⁵¹ programme in Tunisia**, which was designed to support young job seekers and entrepreneurs through three main interventions: soft skills training, job search clubs (CCE⁵²), and entrepreneurship training (GERME⁵³). Across all components, the evaluation showed that beneficiaries experience clear improvements in behaviour, confidence, and skills, even if these did not always translate into strong or sustained employment outcomes. For job seekers, the most immediate change was in how they approach the labour market. After soft skills training, beneficiaries became more active and strategic: they applied more frequently, diversified their search channels, and engaged more directly with employers.

These behavioural changes reflected in how beneficiaries perceive their situation. A large majority reported improvements: 68.4% of participants stated that their professional situation had considerably improved, and 23.8% report moderate improvement. Among those trained, access to jobs remained difficult: 53% of beneficiaries reported not having found employment despite participating in training.

The main barriers identified by beneficiaries were structural: lack of experience; scarcity of suitable job offers; low wages. Beneficiaries themselves recognized these limitations and pointed to what was found missing: longer training duration; stronger follow-up and coaching; more practical components such as internships and networking opportunities.

Among entrepreneurs, the experience was more positive. Beneficiaries of GERME reported strong gains in managerial capacity: 70% stated that they had developed business management skills. They also demonstrated improved practices in pricing and cost calculation; stock and cash flow management; identifying market opportunities.

Looking ahead: strategic implications for implementation through 2030

At the time the HLE was prepared the evidence suggests that implementation of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy up to 2030 is likely to take place in a more constrained institutional and financial environment than originally anticipated. The current international funding context, including reduced or uncertain contributions from major donors and wider pressure on multilateral financing, makes it less realistic to assume that the ILO can continue expanding its skills work across all pillars, countries and thematic areas at the same intensity. In this context, the central strategic issue is not whether all elements of the Strategy remain relevant, they do, but how the ILO can concentrate its limited resources where it has the clearest comparative advantage and where system-level effects are most likely.

The evidence gathered by the HLE does not point to a simple choice between, for example, prioritizing apprenticeships over skills anticipation, or governance over inclusion. The Strategy is systemic by design, and the five pillars are interdependent. Apprenticeships require employer engagement, standards, financing and quality assurance; skills anticipation only matters if it informs curricula, planning and investment; inclusion is more sustainable when linked to qualifications systems, RPL and labour market institutions; and green or digital skills depend on both intelligence and delivery capacity. Therefore, **prioritization should not mean selecting isolated pillars and dropping others. Rather, it should mean concentrating on combinations of functions that produce the strongest systemic leverage with potential short- and long-term impact.**

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Evidence from the Colombia country case study also highlights the **importance of maintaining realistic expectations** regarding the contribution of skills interventions to labour market outcomes. The study found that educational mobility, continued learning and capability development were often more visible and immediate than improvements in employment, earnings or occupational progression. This suggests that future implementation of the Strategy should continue to strengthen linkages between skills interventions, employment policies, labour market institutions and productive development strategies, particularly in contexts characterized by high informality and limited labour demand.

Below is an overview of key evaluation findings on the strategic implications for implementation through 2030:

- ▶ The evidence suggests that **the ILO's strongest comparative advantage is in system reform**, including policy advice, institutional strengthening, tripartite coordination, standards-informed guidance, qualifications systems, RPL, apprenticeships and labour market relevance. **These are areas where the evidence shows the ILO has produced its strongest and most credible results.** The evidence also suggests that the ILO adds more value when it facilitates governments in strengthening the rules, institutions and relationships that shape skills systems than when it supports stand-alone delivery.
- ▶ A second key pattern is that **strongest results emerged where national counterparts had clear ownership, reform windows, institutional mandates and capacity to absorb support.** Where these conditions are weak, ILO interventions risk producing good tools or pilot experiences without consolidation and documentation for institutionalization or durable uptake. Under financial pressure, prospect of institutionalization, co-financing or integration into national systems could be important variables to be considered.
- ▶ The **funding and implementation modalities adopted under the Global Skills Programme provide several important advantages.** The outcome-based financing of the GSP served as a strategic integrator, helping align limited resources around system-oriented reforms, allowing flexibility and avoiding duplication and connecting country-level work with global tools and global and regional expertise. In the period up to 2030, the GSP (or similar modality) could become more important precisely because resources are constrained: it can help define priorities, sequence support, facilitate cross-country learning and ensure that smaller interventions contribute to coherent reform trajectories rather than remaining isolated activities. However, capacities need to be built to keep knowledge management for development and dissemination for tools, international consolidation and capacity building alive.
- ▶ Furthermore, **financing sustainability can no longer be treated as a secondary issue to be addressed after technical reforms are designed.** In areas such as RPL, apprenticeships, sector skills bodies, labour market intelligence, green TVET and lifelong learning, the real sustainability question is who will pay for recurrent programming once external support declines. As presented in the section on Sustainability, many reforms are technically sound but financially dependent on donor funding and therefore fragile. Future implementation therefore needs to ensure that pilot projects and initiatives are from the beginning either embedded in national budgets, linked to employer co-financing or connected to larger institutional financing mechanisms.
- ▶ Finally, given the current implementation progress and environmental constraints, implementation up to 2030 will require a sharper **distinction between what the ILO should lead, what it should enable, where it should contribute and what it should not try to do at scale.** The strategic challenge for the remaining period of the Strategy is therefore **not expansion across all areas, but consolidation, sharpening its own technical advantage within the skills domain (globally and nationally) to ensure that duplications are avoided and stronger impact is created with clearer pathways toward national ownership, financing and system-level.** As mentioned earlier, ILO's comparative advantage lies primarily in its expertise in tripartite governance, institutional reform, policy coherence, quality apprenticeships, RPL, labour market relevance, and the integration of just transition considerations into skills and employment policies. At the same time, the evaluation highlights important limitations in areas requiring large-scale implementation, infrastructure development, or extensive training delivery capacity, which are often necessary to achieve transformative and sustained outcomes. The findings further suggest that delivery models heavily reliant on project-based funding, with limited pathways for institutionalization, are unlikely to be sustainable or to generate lasting impact beyond the project lifecycle.

Survey responses from constituents broadly reinforce the need for a selective but system-oriented approach going forward (Figure 35). Rather than pointing toward a single dominant priority area, constituent preferences suggest continued demand for an integrated skills agenda combining anticipation, TVET reform, digitalization, apprenticeships, social dialogue and green transition dimensions.

FIGURE 35. AREAS THAT THE ILO SHOULD FOCUS ON, ACCORDING TO CONSTITUENTS (N=35)

Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team. "Looking ahead to the remainder of the Strategy period until 2030, which areas could be prioritized in the next phase of ILO skills work? (please select up to 5)"

While the survey results provide an important complement to the strategic analysis (above), they should be interpreted carefully. The responses reflect the perspectives of constituents (N=35), rather than an evaluative recommendation on how the ILO should allocate resources. The findings do not point toward a narrow prioritization of isolated thematic areas. Instead, they suggest **continued demand for interconnected system functions that correspond closely to the integrated logic of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy.**

The findings are also broadly consistent with the effectiveness analysis. Areas prioritized by constituents largely correspond to areas where the evaluation identified comparatively strong ILO comparative advantage and visible results, particularly in governance reform, apprenticeships, skills anticipation, TVET modernization and system-oriented approaches. At the same time, the relatively lower prioritization of financing mechanisms is notable, especially because financing sustainability emerged throughout the evaluation as one of the weakest dimensions of implementation and long-term sustainability. This may suggest that constituents continue to prioritize technical and operational reform areas even where underlying financing constraints remain insufficiently addressed.

The graph also reflects evolving external pressures shaping the future skills agenda. The prominence of digital skills, green transition and workforce anticipation indicates growing concern among constituents regarding technological change, labour market transformation and future employability. This supports the evaluation's finding that **the ILO should continue positioning skills within broader economic transformation and just transition agendas**, rather than treating TVET as a narrow training subsector.

Overall, the survey findings support a nuanced strategic implication: future prioritization should not be understood as selecting a few isolated pillars while abandoning others, but rather as **concentrating resources around combinations of functions that generate the strongest systemic leverage and institutional sustainability.**

The breadth of priorities identified by constituents also reinforces the importance of strategic partnerships and complementarities with other technical and development actors. Given the increasingly constrained resource environment, the ILO's future contribution may depend not only on its technical expertise, but also on its ability to leverage partnerships and position skills within broader employment, social protection and economic transformation agendas.

Sustainability

This section examines the extent to which the results achieved through the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning are likely to be sustained beyond the period of direct ILO support. Sustainability is measured against several factors: [national ownership](#), [institutional capacity](#), [financing arrangements](#), governance mechanisms and the ability of reforms to become embedded within national systems and practices. This section presents findings on the [GSP contribution to sustainability](#).

NATIONAL CAPACITY AND OWNERSHIP

Overall, **ILO interventions have strengthened national capacity and ownership, but the evidence supports a cautious rather than overly positive conclusion.** Across countries, the ILO helped national institutions adopt policies, frameworks, standards, RPL mechanisms, competency-based approaches, labour market intelligence tools and coordination structures. The evidence also suggests that ILO interventions have strengthened national capacities and ownership for skills development and lifelong learning. However, it is difficult to attribute achievements to single interventions, given the long-term perspective of Skills and LLL reforms.

However, the sustainability question is not whether national actors participated in reforms or adopted ILO-supported tools; in many cases they clearly did. The more important question is whether national institutions have the capacities, incentives, staffing, financing and continuity needed to maintain and update those reforms without continued external support. In this regard, the evidence points at a **weaker area being the transition from reform ownership to implementation ownership and capacities.** In several countries, national stakeholders have accepted and participated in reforms, but the systems required to sustain them, financing, staffing, mandates, employer incentives, labour market intelligence and monitoring, remain insufficiently consolidated. Sustainability therefore depends not only on policy commitment and financing, but also on embedding reforms within the routine planning, budgeting, management and implementation systems of national institutions. **From a sustainability perspective, this means that many achievements are promising but not yet secure.** ILO is repeatedly asked to more proactively assume the technical advisory role in system reform roll out beyond policy reforms.

Ownership appears strongest where ILO support was aligned with an existing national reform window and where government institutions saw skills reform as part of their own policy agenda rather than as a project deliverable. Across the evaluation evidence, reforms appear more likely to endure when several enabling conditions are present simultaneously. For instance, the **Colombia** country case study provides an example of how sustained engagement can contribute to institutional ownership. The study identified the development of a dedicated training model for victims within the Ministry of Labour, supported through long-term collaboration between the Ministry and the ILO across successive administrations. While the sustainability of this model will ultimately depend on its formal institutionalization, financing and continued implementation, it illustrates how technical cooperation can contribute to embedding approaches within national institutions beyond the lifespan of individual projects.

Figure 36 summarises identified drivers for strongest sustainability. The evidence also suggests that sustainability weakens significantly when reforms remain dependent on project units, external consultants, temporary coordination mechanisms or short-term donor financing.

FIGURE 36. CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH STRONGER SUSTAINABILITY

Conditions	Evidence across interventions
 Strong national reform ownership	Governments integrate reforms into national strategies and institutional mandates rather than treating them as stand-alone projects. 
 Institutional embedding	Tools and mechanisms become part of routine institutional functions, staffing and planning cycles. 
 Tripartite and sector engagement	Governments and social partners remain engaged beyond consultation phases. 
 Connection to broader national priorities	Skills reforms are linked to employment, industrial policy, migration, green transition or productivity agendas. 
 Existing institutional capacity	National institutions possess sufficient technical and administrative capacity to maintain reforms. 
 Financing continuity	Reforms are supported through recurrent budgets or longer-term financing arrangements. 
 Integration across systems	Skills reforms are connected to labour market institutions, qualifications systems and employment services. 
 Scale beyond pilots	Mechanisms move from isolated pilots toward system-wide implementation. 

Source: HLE own elaboration

This is visible in **Bangladesh**, where national uptake of the BNQF, TVET policy reform and the TVET Implementation Plan points to significant institutional ownership. It is also visible in **Ethiopia**, where the revised TVET strategy, RPL strategy, occupational standards and sector skills bodies indicate strong national engagement in system reform. In **Panama**, INADEH's modernization process shows clear institutional commitment to competency-based reform, labour competency standards and Sector Skills Councils. In **Moldova**, ownership is linked to the national need to respond to demographic decline, migration and green transition through occupational standards, renewable energy qualifications, microcredentials and labour market coordination mechanisms.

However, the **depth of ownership varies considerably**. In several cases, ownership is stronger at the level of formal endorsement than at the level of implementation capacity. Governments and institutions often adopted strategies, frameworks or standards, but their ability to finance, staff, coordinate and maintain these systems remained weaker. The evidence from the effectiveness

section already points to this pattern: policy and governance achievements frequently advanced faster than implementation and delivery capacity, with reforms constrained by underfunded institutions, fragmented mandates, staffing shortages and dependence on external support.

Kenya illustrates this distinction particularly clearly. National ownership is not limited to RPL. The broader set of interventions contributed to institutional capacity around competency-based training, refugee and host-community inclusion, local economic development, work-based learning, digital skills, entrepreneurship and links between vocational training centres and employers. These areas show that ILO support helped connect skills development with wider national priorities, including youth employment, informality, forced displacement and local economic development. At the same time, sustainability remains constrained by the scale of Kenya's informal economy, uneven county-level capacity, weak institutionalized labour market intelligence, limited financing for scale and under-utilization of existing training levy mechanisms. The issue is therefore not lack of relevance or national interest, but whether national systems can absorb and finance reforms at the scale required.

Panama provides a strong example of institutional ownership. The modernization of INADEH demonstrates sustained commitment to competency-based reform, labour competency standards, Sector Skills Councils and closer alignment between training provision and labour market needs. The reform process also reflects significant institutional engagement by INADEH and other national stakeholders, suggesting that skills modernization has become part of a broader national reform agenda rather than a stand-alone project intervention.

In **Ethiopia**, national capacity and ownership have advanced through the TVET strategy, RPL, sector skills bodies and occupational standards. However, sustainability remains fragile because several mechanisms still depend on external technical support and project financing. Sector skills bodies, labour market intelligence functions and implementation coordination require continuous facilitation, updating and financing. This suggests that the ILO helped establish important institutional architecture, but full national ownership will depend on whether government and social partners can maintain these structures as functioning systems, rather than as project-supported mechanisms.

Similar sustainability challenges appear in other countries where promising institutional mechanisms were established but remain dependent on continued facilitation. In **Ghana, Tanzania, Senegal** and **South Africa**, ILO support contributed to governance reform, sector coordination, green skills and apprenticeship-related systems, but the durability of these gains depends on whether national institutions and social partners can maintain coordination, update standards and finance implementation over time. In **Tunisia** and **Egypt**, employability and youth employment initiatives helped strengthen institutional coordination, but broader labour market constraints, fragmented mandates and limited absorption capacity reduced the likelihood that technical achievements would translate into sustained system-level change.

Comparable issues are visible in **Cambodia, Indonesia** and the **Philippines**, where ILO-supported tools and methodologies contributed to digital learning, enterprise upgrading, skills anticipation and TVET modernization. These examples show that national institutions can absorb and adapt ILO tools, but sustainability depends on whether innovations are integrated into regular budgets, staff functions, training provider systems and national quality assurance mechanisms.

Moldova is one of the more promising examples of ownership because skills interventions respond to nationally recognized pressures: demographic decline, migration, labour shortages and green transition. Labour Market and Occupational Barometers, employer forecasting exercises and green skills work appear increasingly integrated into the practices of national employment and skills institutions. However, Moldova also shows that national ownership can be constrained by structural factors outside the skills system. Even strong institutional ownership may not be sufficient if outward migration, demographic contraction and weak domestic labour absorption

continue to limit the returns of skills investments. Similarly, evidence from the **Colombia** country case study illustrates how sustained technical cooperation can contribute to institutionalisation processes. The study identified the development of a dedicated training model for victims within the Ministry of Labour, supported through long-term collaboration between the Ministry and the ILO across successive government administrations. While the long-term sustainability of this model will depend on formal adoption, financing and implementation arrangements, it demonstrates how technical cooperation can influence institutional frameworks beyond the lifespan of individual projects.

In several green transition contexts, including **Ghana, Namibia, Zambia, Senegal and Zimbabwe**, ownership has been strengthened by linking skills work to national priorities around renewable energy, green TVET, agriculture, mining and emerging green industries. However, these cases also show that green skills initiatives often remain concentrated in specific projects, sectors or pilot exercises. Their sustainability will depend on whether green skills become embedded in national curricula, qualifications systems, financing arrangements and routine labour market planning.

Across the wider evidence base, institutional roles and responsibilities were strengthened most clearly in areas where the ILO supported governance mechanisms, qualifications systems, sector coordination, employer engagement and training institution modernization. Examples include sector skills bodies in **Ethiopia**, Sector Skills Councils in Panama, RPL and qualifications institutions in **Kenya**, labour market forecasting functions in Moldova, and TVET governance reforms in **Bangladesh**. Similar patterns are visible in **Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Senegal and Zimbabwe**, where interventions strengthened governance systems, competency-based approaches, sector coordination and industry engagement.

However, **institutional role clarification should not be confused with institutional consolidation**. Many mechanisms were established or strengthened, but their long-term viability depends on whether they are used routinely, financed domestically, supported by staff with adequate technical capacity and embedded in decision-making cycles. This is especially relevant for skills anticipation, RPL, apprenticeship systems and sector skills bodies, all of which require strong mechanisms and continuous updating, stakeholder participation and administrative capacity. Where these functions remain dependent on project teams or external consultants, ownership remains incomplete.

For us, sustainability depends on continued investment in institutional capacity.

— ILO staff

A further sustainability challenge concerns the **uneven ownership of social partners**. Employer engagement is relatively strong where skills interventions are linked to apprenticeships, occupational standards, curriculum relevance and sector coordination. This gives the ILO a clear comparative advantage. However, workers' organizations appear less consistently embedded in skills governance, except where skills are connected to broader labour rights and protection, just transition or employment security agendas. This creates an imbalance in tripartite ownership: formal structures may exist, but the depth and continuity of participation across constituents are uneven.

Financing sustainability

The ILO interventions have contributed significantly to strengthening governance, policy frameworks and technical capacities, but financing sustainability remains comparatively weak. National budget allocations and diversified financing sources have not evolved at the same pace as institutional and technical reforms. As a result, many achievements remain vulnerable to budget fluctuations, donor dependency, political turnover and uneven institutional absorption capacity.

From a sustainability perspective, the central challenge is no longer primarily whether countries can design skills reforms, but whether they can finance them as permanent public and labour market functions over time.

Across countries, skills systems continue to depend heavily on external funding, fragmented project financing, short-term donor support and uneven public budget allocations. As a result, sustainability risks are often linked less to the technical quality of reforms than to the absence of predictable and institutionalized financing mechanisms.

This financing gap is important because many of the reforms promoted through ILO interventions generate recurrent costs rather than one-off investments. Competency-based systems, RPL, sector skills bodies, apprenticeship systems, labour market intelligence, green TVET, instructor upgrading, quality assurance and occupational standards all require continuous financing for updating, coordination, assessment, certification, staffing and stakeholder participation. The evidence suggests that these functions are frequently established successfully during implementation phases but are less consistently financed once external support declines.

Across the country case studies, financing sustainability appears strongest where reforms are connected to existing public systems or national policy priorities. However, even in these cases, long-term financing remains uncertain. In **Bangladesh**, reforms linked to the National Skills Development Policy, the BNQF and the TVET Implementation Plan benefited from strong government engagement and donor coordination. Nevertheless, the scale and fragmentation of the TVET system create significant financing pressures, particularly regarding provider quality, instructor capacity, implementation consistency and system-wide coordination. The evidence suggests that while policy ownership is relatively strong, financing arrangements remain uneven across institutions and providers.

In **Ethiopia**, sustainability challenges are closely linked to financing and operational continuity. Sector skills bodies, occupational standards, RPL systems and labour market coordination mechanisms require recurrent resources and technical staffing that remain partially dependent on project support. Although reforms are embedded within national strategies, institutional financing and implementation capacity remain uneven. This creates a risk that governance structures continue to exist formally while operating below their intended capacity.

Panama illustrates a different financing challenge. The modernization of INADEH involved substantial investment in competency-based reform, institutional strengthening, Sector Skills Councils and labour competency standards. However, sustaining these reforms requires continuous investment in instructor development, quality assurance, labour market intelligence, curriculum updating and institutional management systems. The evidence suggests that long-term sustainability depends not only on technical reform, but also on continuity of budgetary and political support across government administrations. At the time of the evaluation, the expected continuation of support through a new CAF financing arrangement appeared likely to strengthen prospects for continuity. Nevertheless, political and administrative turnover remains a sustainability risk in a reform process that requires long-term institutional consolidation.

In **Kenya**, financing sustainability is affected by the scale of informality and the fragmented nature of the skills ecosystem. Mechanisms such as RPL, competency-based approaches, entrepreneurship support and local economic development initiatives have demonstrated relevance, but scaling remains constrained by limited institutional financing, uneven county-level capacity and the difficulty of extending services to large informal populations. Kenya also illustrates a broader challenge visible across several countries: skills levies, employer contributions or training funds may formally exist, but are not always strategically aligned with inclusive lifelong learning priorities or with the needs of informal workers, refugees, migrants and small enterprises.

Moldova presents a more favourable example in some areas, particularly where green transition and labour market adaptation priorities are increasingly linked to national policy concerns. Occupational standards, renewable energy qualifications, microcredentials and labour market forecasting tools appear progressively embedded within national institutions. However, financing sustainability remains vulnerable to broader demographic and economic pressures, including outward migration, labour shortages and limited fiscal space, compounded by a comparatively constrained development cooperation funding environment in the region..

Beyond the HLE country case studies, the wider evidence base shows similar patterns. In **Ghana, Tanzania, Senegal, Malawi and Zimbabwe**, interventions supported governance reform, green skills, skills anticipation and sector coordination, but long-term scaling depends heavily on whether governments and social partners allocate recurrent financing to maintain these functions. In several **Arab States**, financing sustainability was affected by broader macroeconomic pressures, political instability and dependence on externally funded youth employment and resilience programmes. In fragile and crisis-affected settings, including **Lebanon**, sustainability remains strongly tied to donor continuity and humanitarian-development financing dynamics.

The evidence also suggests that diversified funding sources remain relatively underdeveloped across many interventions. Most skills reforms continue to rely primarily on combinations of government budgets, donor-funded projects and development cooperation support. There is comparatively less evidence of durable co-financing arrangements involving employers, sector financing schemes, social protection systems or long-term cost-sharing mechanisms. This is particularly relevant for apprenticeships, RPL and lifelong learning systems, which require sustained incentives for enterprise participation and adult learner access.

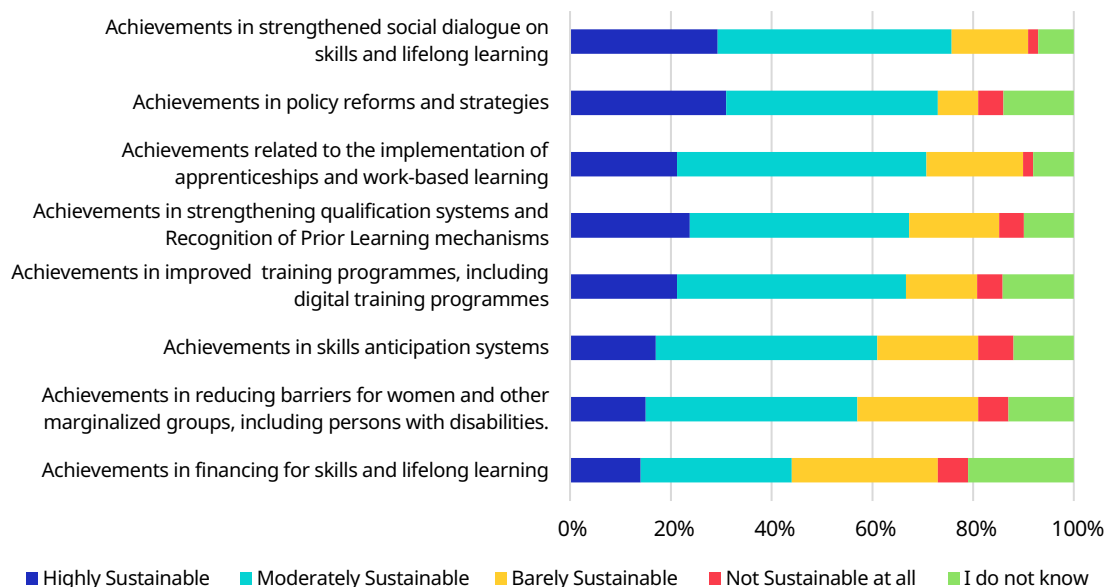
In several countries, employers contributed to occupational standards, apprenticeships, sector dialogue and curriculum validation. However, employer participation in governance does not automatically translate into financial commitment. Many systems continue to rely on public or donor financing even where employer engagement is relatively strong. This creates a recurring sustainability tension: labour market relevance may improve through employer participation, but financing responsibility often remains concentrated within public institutions or externally funded projects. In several contexts, this is reinforced by the fact that governments continue to view TVET primarily as a public responsibility, limiting the extent to which financing and delivery functions are shared with employers and other stakeholders.

Another recurring issue concerns the financing of lifelong learning beyond initial TVET. While many interventions addressed youth employment, employability and vocational training, fewer countries demonstrated sustainable financing arrangements for adult learning, reskilling, upskilling or continuous workforce adaptation. This is especially significant in contexts affected by digitalization, green transition, migration and demographic change, where labour market adaptation increasingly requires continuous learning systems rather than one-off training interventions. The evidence suggests that lifelong learning remains more visible at strategic and policy level than as a fully financed operational reality.

The evaluation also points to an important structural issue: **many skills reforms generate benefits over long time horizons, while financing cycles remain short-term and project-based**. Development cooperation projects often operate within two- to four-year implementation windows, whereas institutional transformation in TVET and lifelong learning systems may require a decade or more. This temporal mismatch creates incentives to prioritize visible outputs, frameworks, standards, pilots, curricula or training delivery, over slower and politically more difficult reforms related to financing systems, recurrent budgets and institutional staffing.

Survey results broadly confirm this pattern (Figure 37). Respondents perceived policy reforms, social dialogue, qualifications systems and apprenticeships as comparatively more sustainable, while financing-related achievements were consistently rated as the least sustainable area across the intervention landscape.

FIGURE 37. ILO STAFF AND CONSTITUENTS' VIEWS ON THE RESULTS MOST AND LEAST OFTEN PERCEIVED AS SUSTAINABLE



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team (N=84, with 35 constituents and 49 ILO staff). To what extent do you believe the following results of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning can be sustained beyond ILO's involvement and project work?

Global Skills Programme: contribution to sustainability and scaling

The evidence suggests that the **GSP has strengthened some important conditions for sustainability and scaling, but mainly in an indirect and catalytic way.** Its strongest contribution has not been large-scale delivery, but the creation of technical, institutional and strategic conditions that can allow reforms to continue beyond individual projects. This includes **support to policy coherence, institutional ownership, governance mechanisms, sector approaches, RPL, skills anticipation, green TVET, apprenticeship systems and cross-project alignment.** However, the evidence also suggests that the GSP has not yet consistently solved the more difficult sustainability questions around domestic financing, institutional absorption capacity, long-term staffing, implementation mandates and scale-up beyond project-supported environments.

The GSP contributed most effectively to sustainability where it reinforced broader national reform processes rather than operating as a stand-alone project mechanism. In these cases, **the programme helped connect global tools and methodologies with country-level institutions and larger development cooperation initiatives.** Ethiopia is a clear example. The GSP helped provide direction and technical coherence to a wider set of skills-related interventions, including work linked to TVET strategy, RPL, sector skills bodies, green TVET and occupational standards. Its value was not primarily the size of its own budget, but its ability to influence and align larger streams of work, including BRMM, PROSPECTS and ProAgro.

BOX 22. OVERVIEW OF THE GSP'S CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALING OF SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING WORK IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

The GSP has strengthened several conditions for sustainability and scaling, particularly by promoting system-oriented reform, institutional ownership, cross-project alignment and the use of global tools in national settings. However, the evidence supports a cautious conclusion. The GSP has strengthened the preconditions for sustainability more than it has ensured sustainability itself. It has supported governance, ownership and technical coherence, but sustainable financing, routine institutionalization and large-scale implementation remain uneven.

The evidence suggests that the programme's contribution to sustainability and scale is strongest where catalytic technical support is accompanied by clearer sustainability pathways, including domestic financing strategies, stronger institutional mandates, employer co-financing models and explicit scale-up plans embedded in national systems from the beginning.

A. STRENGTHENED INSTITUTIONAL OWNERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The evidence suggests that the GSP strengthened institutional ownership and governance in several countries. In **Ethiopia**, support to sector skills bodies and RPL contributed to institutional mechanisms that are now linked to national reform processes. In **Ghana** and **Tanzania**, the programme contributed to governance and sector coordination efforts. In **Malawi**, skills anticipation and system-building work supported national capacity around labour market responsiveness. In **South Africa**, apprenticeship and sector-related reforms were more closely linked to existing institutional systems. In **Senegal**, green and digital skills work was connected to wider just transition and employment agendas. In **Lebanon**, the programme operated in a more fragile and crisis-affected context, where sustainability depends heavily on institutional stability, donor coordination and the ability to maintain skills work within broader recovery and resilience frameworks.

However, institutional ownership remains uneven, which is to some extent expected given the diversity of country contexts, institutional capacities and reform trajectories. In some countries, national counterparts have absorbed tools and approaches into policy dialogue or institutional practice; in others, GSP-supported actions still resemble high-quality technical assistance rather than fully embedded national systems. The critical sustainability question is whether ministries, TVET agencies, qualifications bodies, employment services, employers and workers' organizations have the capacities, resources and incentives to continue using and updating the mechanisms introduced. Where ownership is concentrated in a small group of champions or project-supported units, reforms remain vulnerable to staff turnover, changes in political leadership or shifts in donor priorities.

Drawing on country case studies, interviews, project evaluations and the broader evidence reviewed by the HLE, sustainability appears significantly stronger when functions are institutionalized beyond individual champions, technical units or project structures and become embedded within regular administrative procedures, staffing systems and budgetary cycles.

On governance, the GSP has supported **a system-oriented approach that is more conducive to sustainability than isolated training delivery**. Its emphasis on sector skills bodies, RPL, apprenticeship governance, skills anticipation and green TVET helps strengthen the institutional architecture through which skills systems can operate. This is important because scaling does not come only from training more beneficiaries; it comes from embedding functions into institutions. The programme's contribution is therefore strongest when it helps clarify roles, establish coordination mechanisms, connect employers with training systems and link skills development to national policy frameworks.

At the same time, governance mechanisms are not automatically sustainable. Sector skills bodies, RPL systems, labour market intelligence mechanisms and apprenticeship arrangements require regular financing, data, convening capacity, employer participation, quality assurance and administrative support. The evidence suggests that the GSP has helped create or strengthen such

mechanisms, but their long-term operation often remains dependent on continued facilitation. This should not be interpreted solely as a limitation of the programme. As a catalytic mechanism, the GSP is not designed or resourced to finance comprehensive institution-building processes over the long term. However, it can play an important role in facilitating dialogue on sustainability and financing arrangements. This is a key limitation: the programme can help design and launch governance mechanisms, but scale requires national systems to maintain them as routine functions.

B. POSITIONING OF TVET AND SKILLS WITHIN NATIONAL SYSTEMS

The positioning of TVET and skills development within national education systems is another important sustainability factor. In several GSP countries, the programme has helped **raise the strategic profile of TVET and skills within national educational reform agendas**. Ethiopia's TVET strategy and sector skills body work, South Africa's apprenticeship and artisan systems, Ghana's and Tanzania's governance reforms, and Senegal's green and digital skills agenda all point to efforts to position skills as part of broader lifelong education, employment, productivity and transition strategies rather than as a narrow training subsector. This is positive for sustainability because skills reforms are more likely to endure when linked to national education, employment, industry and just transition priorities.

However, in some countries, skills development is still institutionally fragmented between ministries of education, labour, youth, migration, agriculture and sector bodies. This can weaken ownership and complicate scaling. TVET systems may be formally located within education structures, but the labour market functions required for demand responsiveness, employer engagement, anticipation, apprenticeships, RPL, certification and employment services, often sit across several institutions.

The GSP's system-oriented approach is particularly relevant in this regard because it seeks to strengthen the links between institutions that often operate separately within skills ecosystems. Through its support to governance reforms, sector skills bodies, skills anticipation, RPL, apprenticeship systems and policy dialogue, the programme has encouraged greater interaction between ministries, planning commissions, training institutions, employers' organizations and workers' organizations. However, sustainability ultimately depends on whether these institutional interfaces become routine and adequately governed after external support declines. Where coordination mechanisms are embedded within regular institutional processes and supported by clear mandates and responsibilities, the prospects for sustaining and scaling reforms are considerably strong.

C. SYSTEM-LEVEL REFORMS AND PATHWAYS FOR SCALE-UP

There is evidence of system-level reforms that can support scale-up. RPL is one of the most important examples because it can expand access to certification for informal workers, migrants, refugees and workers trained outside formal systems. Sector skills bodies and apprenticeship reforms can also support scale if they become permanent mechanisms for employer engagement and training relevance. Skills anticipation systems can support scale by informing planning and resource allocation across ministries, while green TVET can help align training systems with emerging economic sectors. The GSP's contribution has been to support these functions and connect them with national reform processes.

Nevertheless, scale remains often indirect. The most convincing scaling pathways are found where GSP-supported tools or models are absorbed by larger projects, national institutions or government systems. Ethiopia again provides a strong example, where sector skills body templates, occupational standards and RPL-related approaches moved beyond narrow pilot settings through links with government institutions and other ILO projects. This suggests that **the GSP can enable scale, but usually by influencing broader systems rather than by scaling through its own resources**.

In other GSP countries, the scaling potential is more conditional. In **Ghana, Tanzania and Malawi**, governance and skills anticipation work can support wider system change if institutional capacity and financing are sustained. In **Senegal**, green and digital skills approaches have scaling potential if linked to national TVET, employment and just transition frameworks. In **South Africa**, apprenticeship and sector systems already have stronger institutional anchoring, but scaling depends on employer incentives and the ability to address persistent inequalities in access and completion. In **Lebanon**, scaling is more constrained by crisis conditions, institutional fragility and reliance on external support.

D. SUSTAINABLE FINANCING AND INSTITUTIONAL ABSORPTION

Sustainable financing remains the weakest area. The GSP appears to have helped mobilize and align resources, and its pooled or flexible funding has allowed some responsiveness to national demand. However, while the programme contributed in some contexts to policy dialogue on governance and financing issues, its contribution to financing sustainability was necessarily more indirect. Domestic financing of skills systems is largely determined by national fiscal space, political priorities, employer incentives and broader education and labour market financing arrangements. While the GSP and other ILO interventions have contributed to greater awareness and understanding of skills financing challenges, this has not necessarily translated into expanded fiscal space or increased budget allocations for TVET and lifelong learning. As a result, although the GSP helped strengthen the institutional and policy foundations of skills systems, there is less evidence that it directly influenced the long-term financing arrangements required to sustain some reforms once external support declines. In many countries, public budgets remain under pressure and TVET funding continues to compete with other policy priorities.

In addition, in several countries, scaling still depends on larger donor-funded projects, government budget allocations that are not yet secure, or the ability of institutions to absorb costs after external support declines. This is particularly important for RPL, skills anticipation, apprenticeships and green TVET, all of which require recurrent financing rather than one-off technical inputs.

This limitation should not be interpreted only as a weakness of the GSP. Domestic financing of skills systems is often shaped by national fiscal space, political priorities, employer incentives and broader education and labour market financing arrangements. However, from a sustainability perspective, the GSP could do more to make financing strategies explicit from the outset. Where reforms require assessment systems, certification processes, occupational standards updates, sector councils or labour market forecasting, the programme needs to clarify who will finance these functions, through which budget lines, and with what co-financing arrangements from employers or other national actors.

Overview of overarching challenges to sustain results

The evidence suggests that the main challenges to sustaining results achieved are not primarily technical but rather in their long-term operational consolidation. The central challenge is therefore not whether countries can design policies, tools and institutional mechanisms, but whether they can maintain, finance, update and scale them as routine public and labour market functions after project-supported implementation declines.

Across most interventions, the ILO demonstrated strong capacity to support policy reform, governance modernization, competency-based approaches, occupational standards, RPL, apprenticeship systems, labour market intelligence and green skills frameworks. The more significant sustainability risks emerge in the transition from reform design and project-supported implementation toward long-term institutional operation at scale. These risks are linked to financing, institutional continuity, political turnover, staffing limitations, fragmented mandates, uneven constituent engagement and broader labour market and economic conditions (Figure 38).

FIGURE 38. OVERVIEW OF OVERARCHING SUSTAINABILITY RISKS FOR SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING REFORMS



Source: HLE own elaboration

One of the most recurrent sustainability challenges concerns the **dependence of reforms on external financing and short-term project-based implementation structures**.

If you don't address what they need, you don't get their involvement. Ownership becomes an issue, then sustainability also becomes an issue.

— ILO staff

In many countries, important governance mechanisms, coordination spaces, labour market intelligence systems, sector skills bodies and technical functions were established or strengthened with ILO and donor support, but their continued operation remains uncertain once project facilitation declines. This creates a recurring pattern across the evidence base: institutions adopt reforms and participate actively during implementation periods, but struggle to maintain the same level of coordination, updating, staffing and stakeholder engagement without continued technical and financial accompaniment.

A related sustainability challenge concerns the **continuity of institutional functions that require ongoing technical and administrative support**. Across several countries, mechanisms such as RPL, apprenticeship governance, labour market forecasting, instructor development, graduate tracking, sector skills coordination and quality assurance were successfully established or strengthened. However, their long-term viability depends on stable institutional mandates, adequate technical staffing, recurrent financing and sufficient operational authority. Without these conditions, reforms may remain formally in place while functioning below their intended capacity.

The evidence also suggests that monitoring and follow-up systems for sustainability remain weak across many interventions. While projects frequently track implementation outputs and immediate results, few mechanisms exist to assess whether reforms continue functioning effectively several years after project completion.

Political and administrative turnover emerged repeatedly as a sustainability risk, particularly in reforms dependent on long-term institutional continuity. In **Panama**, the modernization of INADEH, competency-based reform and Sector Skills Councils demonstrate strong institutional progress, but stakeholders repeatedly emphasized the vulnerability of these reforms to changes in government leadership and management structures. Sustaining reforms of this scale requires continuity across political cycles. Similar concerns appeared in other contexts where reforms relied heavily on ministerial leadership, project champions or specific technical teams rather than on fully institutionalized systems.

A further sustainability challenge concerns **maintaining stakeholder engagement beyond the period of active project support**. Many of the governance arrangements promoted through skills interventions depend on sustained participation by governments, employers and workers' organizations. While stakeholder engagement was often strong during implementation, maintaining the same level of commitment over time proved more difficult once external facilitation declined. In several countries, employers remained actively involved where skills systems responded directly to recruitment, apprenticeship or occupational standards needs, but engagement was less consistent in areas requiring long-term governance or financing commitments. Similarly, worker participation tended to be stronger where skills issues intersected with employment protection, migration, just transition or labour rights concerns than in more technical aspects of skills system management.

Sustainability risks are especially pronounced where interventions remain concentrated at pilot level. Across countries, **many innovative practices generated promising results in specific institutions, sectors or localities, but scaling pathways were not always clearly defined from the beginning**. As highlighted in the synthesis review of 95 independent evaluation reports, several evaluations suggest that innovation was often more advanced than institutional scaling: pilot initiatives frequently demonstrated technical relevance and stakeholder interest, but pathways toward large-scale operational integration were less consistently defined from the outset.

Several reviewed evaluations and interviews conducted by the HLE also highlighted risks linked to **weak labour market absorption and broader structural economic conditions**. Even where skills systems improved, labour markets frequently remained characterized by informality, underemployment, low productivity, limited industrial diversification or insufficient demand for skilled labour. In such contexts, sustaining political and institutional support for skills reforms becomes more difficult because employment outcomes may remain below expectations despite improvements in governance and training quality. This is particularly relevant in countries facing demographic pressures, outward migration or persistent youth unemployment.

Digitalization and green transition introduced additional sustainability challenges. Although the ILO increasingly incorporated digital skills, e-learning, green TVET and future-of-work approaches, several interventions still depended on infrastructure, equipment, connectivity and specialized expertise that remain unevenly distributed across institutions and regions. Green skills initiatives

often generated strong strategic momentum, but less evidence exists regarding long-term financing, institutional anchoring and systematic curriculum integration. Similarly, digital tools expanded rapidly during COVID-19 and related disruptions, but their sustainability depends on whether institutions possess the capacity and resources to maintain platforms, update content and support instructors and learners over time.

A further challenge concerns the **limited operational consolidation of lifelong learning systems** beyond initial TVET and youth employability interventions. While lifelong learning is strongly present in the Strategy as a conceptual framework, implementation remains more concentrated around TVET reform, youth employment and initial skills provision. Adult learning, reskilling, upskilling and continuous workforce adaptation remain less institutionally developed and less consistently financed across many countries. This suggests that lifelong learning remains more consolidated as a strategic aspiration than as a fully operationalized and financed system reality in many country contexts. In addition, this creates a sustainability gap in contexts where labour market transformation increasingly requires continuous learning systems rather than one-time training interventions.

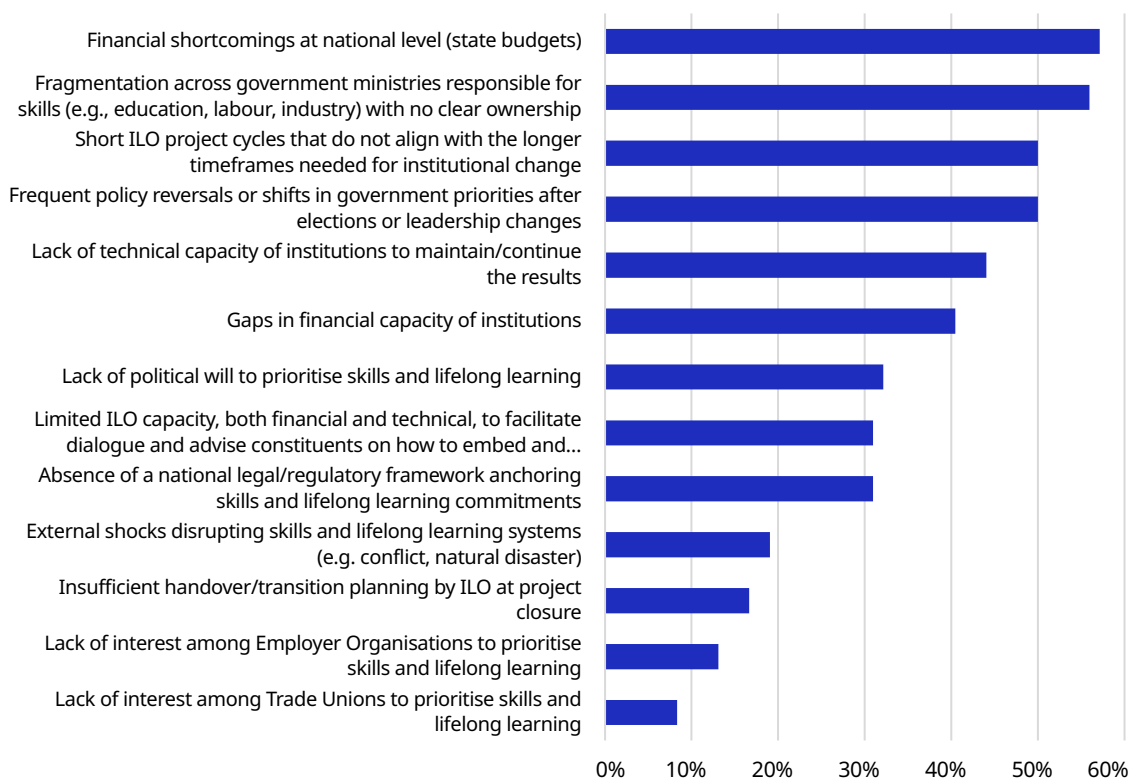
At organizational level, the evaluation also identifies sustainability risks linked to **staffing and implementation architecture**. Patterns drawn from collected evidence repeatedly pointed to a mismatch between the breadth of the ILO's skills agenda and the staffing resources available across HQ, regional and country levels. Skills work frequently relies on relatively small technical teams operating across large and diverse implementation landscapes. Dependence on short-term project staff, consultants and externally funded technical arrangements creates flexibility, but may weaken institutional continuity, knowledge retention and long-term accompaniment. In practice, sustainability often depends heavily on a limited number of technical specialists, increasing vulnerability when projects close or staff turnover occurs.

The Global Skills Programme partially mitigated some of these risks by promoting greater coherence and continuity across interventions. However, its catalytic model ultimately depends on the ability of national institutions and larger programmes to absorb and sustain reforms once initial support declines.

The evaluation also points to an important temporal challenge. Institutional transformation in skills systems typically requires long-term engagement, while development cooperation cycles remain relatively short. **Several reforms supported by the ILO are still in transitional phases, meaning that their ultimate sustainability cannot yet be fully assessed.** This is especially true for green transition, digitalization, RPL expansion, apprenticeship reform and skills anticipation systems, all of which require continuous adaptation and institutional learning over time.

Survey findings strongly reinforce the sustainability challenges identified throughout the evaluation and provide an important cross-cutting perspective on the factors most likely to undermine long-term results (Figure 39). Notably, respondents point less to technical shortcomings in the design of reforms and more to systemic constraints, including financing limitations, fragmented institutional responsibilities, short project cycles, political discontinuity and insufficient institutional capacity. These findings are highly consistent with the evidence emerging from country case studies, interviews and the synthesis review, suggesting that the main sustainability risks lie in the broader enabling environment rather than in the technical quality of the reforms themselves.

FIGURE 39. FACTORS MOST OFTEN PERCEIVED BY ILO CONSTITUENTS AND STAFF AS HINDERING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF ILO'S WORK



Source: Survey launched by the evaluation team (N=84, with 35 constituents and 49 ILO staff). Which factors do you think most often hinder the sustainability of ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning? (select the top 5)



- ▶ **Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Emerging Good Practices**

► CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES

CONCLUSIONS

The ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning (2030) remains highly relevant and provides a credible framework to position skills and lifelong learning as drivers of decent work, productive employment, social inclusion and just transitions. The evaluation finds that the principal challenge lies not in the Strategy's relevance, but in translating its strategic ambition into sustainable implementation, institutionalization and scale.

Consistent with its comparative advantage in policy reform and system-level support, the ILO's strongest contributions have been in strengthening governance, evidence-informed skills policies, institutional capacity, qualifications systems, recognition of prior learning (RPL), quality apprenticeships, and social dialogue. The ILO has also strengthened labour market and skills-needs intelligence to inform TVET reform, occupational standards and sectoral planning, reflecting its normative mandate, technical expertise and convening role. Progress has been more limited in supporting operational implementation and the institutionalization of reforms in national systems. Maintaining this comparative advantage will require strategic partnerships and stronger evidence of the ILO's contribution.

Across the Strategy's five pillars, performance remained uneven. While significant progress was made in labour market and skills-needs intelligence, comparatively less progress was evident in the institutionalization and routine use of these systems, as well as in sustainable financing and the capacity to implement and scale reforms. In an increasingly constrained financing environment, implementation of the Strategy should complement support for policy and governance reform with greater attention to operational implementation, institutional capacity of skills system actors and sustainable financing. Prioritization of resource allocation may be needed towards interventions with the greatest potential to strengthen national systems, while further reinforcing ILO's enabling and partnership role. The sustainability of results will ultimately depend on sustained national ownership, domestic financing and implementation capacity.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lesson learned 1: Skills interventions generate stronger and more durable results when designed as system reform rather than stand-alone training initiatives. Embedding training within governance, institutional and labour market reforms strengthens long-term impact.

Lesson learned 2: Sustainable reform depends less on policy adoption than on implementation. Policy adoption remains essential, but sustainability depends on translating policies into routine implementation. Institutional and teacher/trainer capacity, national ownership, domestic financing, including realistic costing of skills development, and implementation mechanisms are critical determinants of long-term sustainability.

Lesson learned 3: Programmatic approaches can amplify impact beyond their financial scale by connecting projects, expertise and national reform processes. The GSP demonstrates the value of sustained coordination, technical continuity and cross-country learning in supporting system-wide reform.

EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES

Good practice 1: Adopting system-oriented approaches that integrate policy support, institutional strengthening, tripartite engagement and technical assistance within broader national development agendas strengthens ownership, coherence and the sustainability of skills reforms.

Good practice 2: Positioning skills as a cross-cutting development priority, rather than a stand-alone TVET intervention, helps mobilize political commitment and sustain reforms beyond project support.

Good practice 3: Embedding social partners in skills governance and implementation, not only consultation, through apprenticeships, occupational standards, sector skills bodies and labour market intelligence improves labour market relevance, responsiveness and institutional ownership.

Good Practice 4: Flexible RB resources (RBSA/RBTC) can generate impact beyond their financial scale by incubating innovation, responding rapidly to emerging needs and mobilizing larger investments. For instance, strategic seed funding for RPL in the Arab States demonstrated how modest institutional resources can reduce innovation risks, attract donor financing and support the expansion of system-level reforms.



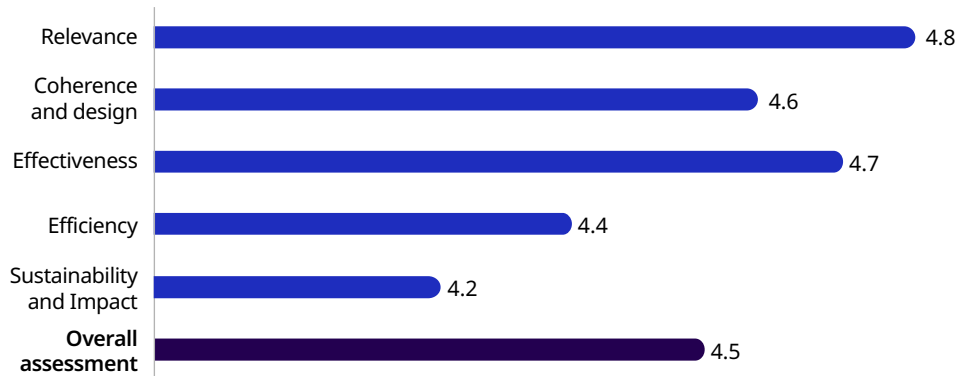
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► Overall
assessment

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Figure 40 depicts the scores attributed to the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning. Ratings comprise the survey results, scores from the Synthesis Review Report, and the assessment of the evaluation team. The evaluation used a six-point scale to express these scores, with 1 being the lowest score, indicating highly unsatisfactory, and 6 being the highest, indicating highly satisfactory.

FIGURE 40. EVALUATION OF THE ILO STRATEGY ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING. RATINGS BY CRITERION



Overall Assessment Ratings. Relevance: 4.8; Coherence and Design: 4.6; Effectiveness: 4.7; Efficiency: 4.4; Sustainability and Impact: 4.2; Overall: 4.5



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► Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1. UPDATE THE STRATEGY'S IMPLEMENTATION, RESULTS AND MONITORING FRAMEWORK FOR 2026–2030

The ILO should update the Skills and Lifelong Learning Action Plan as the implementation framework for the Strategy for 2026 – 2030. The revised Action Plan should establish a roadmap with milestones, measurable results, and monitoring and reporting arrangements aligned with corporate planning and reporting systems, while strengthening the tracking of beneficiaries and results achieved through ILO support. It should incorporate evaluation findings and recommendations from the first implementation cycle, prioritizing resource allocation to interventions with greatest potential for systemic change, institutionalization and national ownership. The framework should strengthen outcome-level monitoring and knowledge management, relying primarily on existing Programme and Budget, CPO and development cooperation reporting mechanisms. Complementary tools, such as the Service Tracker, should be upgraded to support cross-portfolio analysis and reporting, organizational learning and adaptive management without increasing reporting burdens.

RESPONSIBLE UNITS	PRIORITY	TIME IMPLICATION	RESOURCE IMPLICATION
Employment, Skills and Sustainable Enterprises (SKILLS) Strategic Programming and Management (PROGRAM)		Short-term	Low

RECOMMENDATION 2. FOCUS IMPLEMENTATION ON AREAS OF HIGHEST SYSTEMIC LEVERAGE AND COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

In an increasingly constrained funding environment, the Office should focus its technical and financial resources where they add the greatest value, while remaining responsive to constituent priorities. Implementation should continue to build on the ILO's comparative advantage in policy reform, institutional development, governance and social dialogue, while strengthening institutional capacity, labour market intelligence and sustainable financing through evidence-based approaches. The Office should continue enhancing the capacities of governments, employers' and workers' organizations to contribute to skills and lifelong learning policy and implementation, promoting strategic tripartite engagement. Skills should remain integrated within broader employment, productivity, enterprise transformation, social protection and just transition agendas, including workforce transitions linked to technological and environmental change.

RESPONSIBLE UNITS	PRIORITY	TIME IMPLICATION	RESOURCE IMPLICATION
SKILLS		Short- to Mid-term	Medium

RECOMMENDATION 3. STRENGTHEN SUSTAINABILITY, INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE-MANAGEMENT AND SCALE-UP

The ILO should place greater emphasis on sustainability, institutional change management, financing and scale-up from the outset of programme design. The evaluation found that reforms often progressed faster at policy than operational levels, with long-term success dependent on domestic financing, institutional capacity, implementation incentives and political continuity. Future interventions should continue to define realistic pathways for financing, institutionalization and sustained implementation by aligning with nationally owned reform processes and using pilot initiatives to generate evidence that informs domestic financing and scale-up. Particular attention should be given to institutional capacity-building, RPL, quality apprenticeships, sector skills council, labour market intelligence, lifelong learning systems and skills for green jobs.

RESPONSIBLE UNITS	PRIORITY	TIME IMPLICATION	RESOURCE IMPLICATION
SKILLS		Short- to Mid-term	Low

RECOMMENDATION 4. INSTITUTIONALIZE THE GLOBAL SKILLS PROGRAMME'S CORE FUNCTIONS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY ON SKILLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

The ILO should define how the core functions demonstrated by the GSP—including strategic portfolio coordination, dedicated capacity building, technical backstopping, cross-country learning, common methodologies, and support to system-oriented reforms—can be sustained and adapted across regions, regardless of future financing arrangements. These functions enhance coherence, technical continuity and implementation, and will become increasingly important if external resources remain constrained during the Strategy period. Building on GSP evidence, the ILO should articulate a clear financing proposition demonstrating to funding partners the added value of pooled, flexible funding as means to advancing the objectives of the Strategy.

RESPONSIBLE UNITS	PRIORITY	TIME IMPLICATION	RESOURCE IMPLICATION
SKILLS		Short-term	High

RECOMMENDATION 5. STRENGTHEN THE ILO'S STRATEGIC POSITIONING AND PARTNERSHIPS TO MOBILIZE RESOURCES AND SCALE IMPACT

The ILO should strengthen its position as the partner of choice for national skills and lifelong learning systems by leveraging its comparative advantages in normative guidance, technical expertise, tripartite engagement and convening capacity. This requires continuing the shift from project-centred delivery towards a stronger enabling and partnership role, grounded in long-term engagement with national TVET actors and training institutions and country-tested proof of concepts that support adaptation, national ownership and scale-up.

The Office should strengthen long-term partnerships with national training entities, international financing institutions, UN and regional organizations, seeking collaboration where the ILO has a clearly defined strategic role, and contributes recognized technical expertise. Such partnerships should reinforce the ILO's comparative advantage while enhancing visibility and resource mobilization. The Office should also embed core GSP functions—including technical backstopping, common methodologies, coordination and peer learning—within broader financing and partnership arrangements to sustain them if dedicated GSP funding declines. Continued attention should be given to embedding skills and lifelong learning and social dialogue into employment, productivity and just transition initiatives, including through multi-partner financing mechanisms such as the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions.

RESPONSIBLE UNITS	PRIORITY	TIME IMPLICATION	RESOURCE IMPLICATION
SKILLS Multilateral Partnerships and Development Cooperation (PARTNERSHIPS) Regional and Country Offices		Short- to Mid-term	Medium



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► Office response



OFFICE RESPONSE

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Office will update the Skills and Lifelong Learning Action Plan, which will serve as the implementation framework for 2026–30 and incorporate the evaluation findings and recommendations. The revised Action Plan will prioritize resources for interventions with the greatest potential to bring about systemic change, define measurable results and establish monitoring and reporting arrangements aligned with the Programme and Budget and with CPO and development cooperation reporting requirements. The Office will strengthen monitoring and knowledge management mechanisms while ensuring that reporting requirements remain manageable.

RECOMMENDATION 2

During the remainder of the Strategy period, the Office will strategically deploy its technical and financial resources in areas where it can add the greatest value, building on the ILO's comparative advantages in policy reform, institutional development, governance and social dialogue. The Office will continue enhancing the capacities of governments, employers' and workers' organizations to contribute to skills and lifelong learning policy and implementation, promoting strategic tripartite engagement.

The Office will place greater emphasis on operational approaches that strengthen institutional capacity, skills intelligence and sustainable financing. It will also continue to integrate skills into broader agendas on employment, productivity, sustainable enterprises and a just transition, including transitions driven by technological and environmental change, while maintaining the distinct role of skills as a policy area.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Office will embed sustainability, institutional change management, scale-up and domestic financing in programme design from the outset. It will develop realistic pathways for domestic financing, institutionalization and sustained implementation beyond the duration of individual projects. The Office will continue to provide demand-driven services to constituents, giving greater attention to priority areas where demand is strongest.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Office will draw on lessons learned from the GSP and other projects and initiatives, identify its core functions, good practices and effective approaches, and determine how these can be sustained and adapted across regions in implementing the next phase of the Strategy on Skills and Lifelong Learning.

In collaboration with PARTNERSHIPS, the SKILLS Branch will build on the results achieved through the GSP and make an evidence-based case to potential funding partners for pooled, flexible funding to support implementation of the Strategy across regions.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Office will further consolidate its position as a leading development partner in strengthening national skills and lifelong learning systems by drawing fully on the ILO's normative leadership, technical credibility, tripartite mandate and convening capacity.

The Office will strengthen communication of the results achieved during the first phase of implementation of the Strategy, including good practices emerging from the GSP and other projects. It will also refine its value proposition to deepen partnerships with international financial institutions, UN agencies and regional organizations.

The Office will intensify efforts to mainstream skills in broader initiatives on employment, productivity and a just transition, including through multi-partner financing mechanisms such as the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions.



► Annexes

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. HLE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Relevance and Coherence		
EQ 1.1 – Relevance to constituents <i>To what extent have the ILO's Strategy and actions on skills and lifelong learning responded to the priorities, needs and practical requirements of ILO constituents?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ To what extent do the Strategy and actions reflect the priorities of governments, employers and workers? ▶ Have constituents' priorities evolved during the implementation period?	Alignment and demand-responsiveness: (i) alignment between Strategy/Action Plan priorities and expressed constituent needs; (ii) evidence priorities were informed by consultations/tripartite inputs; (iii) extent support addresses practical requirements (constraints, delivery mechanisms, tools, guidance, capacities) (iv) alignment with expressed needs of women, PWD, and vulnerable groups. Perceived relevance and satisfaction: (v) constituent satisfaction with the ILO offer and delivery (timeliness, usability, responsiveness); (vi) evidence of gaps/unmet needs (themes, groups, geographies, delivery modalities). Differentiation / comparative advantage: (vii) recognition of the ILO value proposition (normative anchor, tripartism, labour-market lens, systems perspective). Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Synthesis review report Strategic ILO documents (Strategy/Action Plan; Global Programme on Skills and Lifelong Learning; GB progress reports; Programme and Budget; Strategic Plans; PIRs; DWCPs; regional skills strategies) DW Results analysis Interviews with ILO staff, tripartite constituents and partners Surveys Country case studies
EQ 1.2 – Normative framework and social dialogue <i>To what extent are social dialogue and the ILO's normative framework effectively embedded in the design and implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan across global, regional and country levels?</i> Sub-questions: - How are tripartite mechanisms integrated into governance, implementation and monitoring? - To what extent are international labour standards mainstreamed into programme design and policy dialogue?	Tripartite governance and engagement: (i) existence and quality of tripartite structures supporting the Action Plan; (ii) meaningful involvement of employers' and workers' organisations across the programme cycle. Normative mainstreaming: (iii) explicit integration of international labour standards and normative guidance in programme design, tools, training content and policy advice; (iv) use of the normative continuum from standard-setting to technical cooperation. Implementation modalities and consistency: (v) use of social dialogue in policy formulation and implementation; (vi) coherence between normative guidance and operational delivery. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Strategic and programme documents Normative analysis Synthesis review report Evidence of tripartite consultation mechanisms Interviews Surveys Country case studies

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
EQ 1.3 – Coherence of the Global Skills Programme <i>To what extent has the Global Skills Programme translated the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy into coherent, coordinated and demand-driven action across global, regional and country levels?</i> Sub-questions: Has the GSP reduced fragmentation of skills-related interventions? ► To what extent has the GSP provided a clear and shared results logic linking the Strategy and Action Plan to concrete activities across levels? ► To what extent has the GSP functioned as a unifying framework (e.g. common priorities, approaches, sequencing) rather than a loose aggregation of projects? ► To what extent has the GSP facilitated alignment and complementarity between global, regional and country-level actions?	Translation into action: (i) evidence the Programme catalysed and structured implementation of the Strategy; (ii) clarity of the results chain from Strategy to Action Plan to Programme-supported activities. Coordination and coherence: (iii) reduction of fragmentation across organisational levels and units; (iv) use of integrated intervention packages / common approaches and sequencing. Constituent alignment and operational effectiveness: (v) responsiveness to constituent priorities; (vi) timeliness, relevance, flexibility and accessibility of the Programme. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Global Skills Programme documentation Strategy and Action Plan GB reports Interviews Surveys Country case studies
EQ 1.4 – External coherence <i>To what extent has the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning aligned with and complemented global strategies and the initiatives of the UN system and other international partners?</i> Sub-questions: ► Where is complementarity with UN agencies and international partners most evident? ► Are there overlaps, gaps or missed opportunities for synergy?	External coherence: (i) alignment with relevant global and UN strategies (including on gender and cross-cutting concerns). Complementarity: (ii) clear division of labour and avoidance of duplication. Synergies and added value: (iii) evidence coordination generated tangible benefits. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Review of global and UN strategies Mapping of complementarities Synthesis review report Interviews with partners Surveys Country case studies
Effectiveness and Efficiency		
EQ 2.1 – Achievement of intended results <i>To what extent has ILO work across the five interrelated components contributed to achieving the intended short- and medium-term outcomes of the Strategy and Action Plan at country level?</i> Sub-questions: ► Which components have translated most effectively into country-level results? ► How have global standards-related actions and global leadership functions supported or enabled these outcomes?	Country-level translation: (i) evidence of implementation across the five components and differences in progress across components. Outcome achievement: (ii) progress towards short- and medium-term outcomes. (iii) Stakeholders attribute perceived outcomes to the interventions of ILO. Enabling role of standards and leadership: (iv) contribution of standards-related work and global leadership functions. Implementation quality: (v) timeliness, adaptation and delivery performance. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	DW Results analysis/ILO dashboard/CPOs Implementation reports Interviews with ILO staff and constituents Synthesis review report Country case studies

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
EQ 2.2 – Addressing skills and lifelong learning gaps <i>To what extent are the results likely to contribute to addressing key skills development and lifelong learning gaps and their underlying causes?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Which gaps (institutional, governance, financing, inclusion) are being addressed most effectively? ▶ To what extent are root causes of skills mismatches being tackled?	Contribution logic: (i) plausibility of causal pathways from outputs/outcomes to closing gaps. Addressing root causes: (ii) extent to which structural drivers are tackled. Magnitude and equity: (iii) likely scale and distribution of benefits. Risks and assumptions: (iv) key assumptions holding or failing. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Theory of Change and contribution analysis Synthesis review report Interviews Surveys Country case studies
EQ 2.3 – Intended and unintended results <i>What intended and unintended results have emerged from the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning at global, regional and country levels?</i>	Identification of unintended effects: (i) positive spillovers and negative effects. Drivers and significance: (ii) materiality and causes. Learning: (iii) evidence of adaptation or course correction. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Progress and implementation documentation Interviews Surveys Synthesis review Country case studies
EQ 2.4 – Responsiveness to emerging challenges <i>To what extent has ILO work on skills and lifelong learning responded to emerging global challenges and opportunities?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ How have actions addressed issues such as digitalisation, green transition, demographic change or crises? ▶ Is there evidence of adaptive programming?	Responsiveness: (i) attention to digitalisation, green transition, labour-market change or crises. Innovation: (ii) new tools and approaches. Scalability: (iii) potential for replication and scale. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Progress and implementation documentation Interviews Surveys Synthesis review Country case studies
EQ 2.5 – Cross-cutting principles <i>To what extent have ILO actions been implemented in line with cross-cutting principles, including tripartism and social dialogue, gender equality, non-discrimination, and just transition?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Are social partners meaningfully involved at country level? ▶ How are gender equality, disability inclusion and just transition operationalised in practice?	Tripartism and dialogue: (i) quality of social partner engagement. Gender and non-discrimination: (ii) integration in needs assessments, design, implementation, M&E frameworks, and results. Just transition: (iii) consideration of environmental transition and worker protection. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Country-level documentation Gender and inclusion analysis Interviews Surveys Synthesis review Country case studies
EQ 2.6 – Value added of the Global Skills Programme <i>What has been the specific value added of the Global Skills Programme compared with stand-alone development cooperation initiatives?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Has the GSP accelerated results? ▶ Fostered innovation? ▶ Enabled scale that would not otherwise have been achieved?	Additionality: (i) acceleration and scale attributable to the Programme. Innovation: (ii) new approaches enabled. Scaling pathways: (iii) institutionalisation and replication. Perceptions: (iv) stakeholder views on value added. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Global Skills Programme portfolio review Partner interviews Surveys Contribution analysis Synthesis review Case studies

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
EQ 2.7 – Efficiency and resourcing <i>To what extent have actions been adequately resourced and implemented efficiently?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Are financial and human resources aligned with strategic priorities? ▶ Are there efficiency gains through coordination, pooling or joint delivery?	Design efficiency ▶ Cost-sharing: (i) The action design relies on mutual reinforcement and/or cost-sharing with other ILO/UN projects. (ii) The action builds on prior activities and efforts. ▶ Efficiency of coordinated funding: (iii) Pooled funding allows prioritization and efficient reallocation based on most urgent priorities. ▶ Prioritisation of Resources (iv) resources are directed toward the highest-priority root causes or most urgent priorities / challenges. (v) resources are allocated/foreseen to involve women and vulnerable groups. ▶ Alignment with objectives: (vi) resources align with and are sufficient for the envisaged objectives Utilisation & Goal efficiency ▶ Timeliness of spending: (i) The action allocated its resources within the foreseen timeline. ▶ Actual use: (ii) The action used its programmed financial, human and temporal resources (iii) the action made savings on implementation costs ▶ Inclusion: (iv) resources were sufficient to involve women and vulnerable groups. Results efficiency ▶ Catalytic efficiency: (i) stakeholders created tangible results beyond the action's interventions. (ii) stakeholders are taking steps to further the results (e.g. continued policy discussion, allocation of budget). ▶ Multiplicative Effect: (iii) Additional people and organisations were impacted through "Cascaded impact" beyond the ILO intervention and funding. ▶ Future mobilization: (iv) Additional funding was secured to support the impact ▶ Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Budget and expenditure data Interviews Synthesis review report
EQ 2.8 – Internal and external coordination <i>How effective have internal ILO coordination mechanisms and external partnerships been in supporting integrated delivery of the Strategy?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ How effective is coordination across ILO units and levels? ▶ How effective is coordination with constituents, ITC-ILO, CINTERFOR, UN partners and donors?	Coordination mechanisms: (i) functioning and effectiveness. Outcome relevance: (ii) contribution of coordination to results. Transaction costs: (iii) bottlenecks and enablers. Programme as platform: (iv) strengthening cross-unit and cross-level collaboration and alignment with other initiatives; effects on coherence and results. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Coordination documentation Global Skills Programme governance documentation Interviews Surveys Synthesis review Country case studies

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
EQ 2.9 Coordination enabled by the Global Skills Programme <i>To what extent has the Global Skills Programme effectively enabled internal coordination across ILO units and levels, and external coordination with constituents, partners (e.g. GIZ, World Bank, UNESCO) and other projects or interventions, in support of integrated delivery of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy?</i> Sub-questions ▶ To what extent has the Global Skills Programme functioned as a coordination platform across headquarters, regional and country levels? ▶ To what extent has the Programme facilitated cross-unit collaboration within the ILO (e.g. between technical departments, regions, and country offices)? ▶ How effectively has the Programme enabled coordination and complementarity with constituents and external partners at global, regional and country levels? ▶ To what extent has coordination supported integrated delivery, reduced duplication, or generated synergies with other skills-related projects and initiatives? ▶ What coordination mechanisms have worked well, and where have gaps, bottlenecks or transaction costs persisted?	Internal coordination (i) Extent and quality of coordination across ILO units, departments and levels facilitated by the Programme. (ii) Clarity of roles, responsibilities and communication channels. External coordination and partnerships (iii) Effectiveness of coordination with constituents and external partners (e.g. UN agencies, IFIs, bilateral partners). (iv) Evidence of complementarity, joint planning, or aligned implementation. Contribution to integrated delivery (i) Extent to which coordination enabled by the Programme supported integrated, multi-component delivery of the Strategy. (ii) Evidence of reduced fragmentation or duplication across interventions. Efficiency and transaction costs (i) Balance between coordination benefits and transaction costs. (ii) Timeliness and practicality of coordination mechanisms. Programme-level added value (i) Evidence that coordination outcomes would not have occurred without the Global Skills Programme. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Global Skills Programme governance and coordination documentation Internal coordination mechanisms (meeting records, guidance notes, joint workplans, platforms) Interviews with ILO HQ, regional and country-level staff Interviews with constituents and external partners (e.g. UN agencies, IFIs, bilateral partners) Surveys Synthesis review report Country case studies
Sustainability and Orientation towards Impact		
EQ 3.1 National capacity and ownership <i>To what extent have ILO interventions strengthened national capacities and ownership for skills development and lifelong learning?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Is there evidence of political will and leadership among national stakeholders? ▶ Have institutional roles and responsibilities been strengthened?	Capacity development quality: (i) Constituents and key national partners have taken project results forward without ILO support, or demonstrate concrete plans to do so. Institutionalisation: (ii) Concrete evidence of uptake and routine use by national actors, e.g. allocation of budget, integration of results in SOPs, recruitment of technical staff. Reduced dependency / ownership: (iii) decreasing reliance on external assistance; evidence of political will and leadership. Sustainability assessment: apply streamlined sustainability matrix dimensions (institutionalisation; ownership/ governance; financing; system integration; risk/mitigation). Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Programme and project documents Capacity development reviews Interviews Surveys Synthesis review report Country case studies
EQ 3.2 Sustainability and scaling (Global Skills Programme) <i>To what extent has the Global Skills Programme strengthened conditions for the sustainability and scaling of results beyond the life of individual projects?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Has it strengthened institutional ownership and governance? ▶ Has it supported sustainable financing mechanisms? ▶ How are TVET and skills development positioned within national education systems? ▶ Are there system-level reforms supporting scale-up?	Sustainability conditions: (i) institutional ownership and governance. Financing: (ii) budgeting and diversified funding. System reforms: (iii) integration within education systems (positioning of TVET and skills development). Scaling: (iv) replication and national roll-out. Sustainability assessment: apply streamlined sustainability matrix dimensions (ownership/governance; financing; system integration; scale/replication; risk/mitigation). Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	National policy and education sector documents Global Skills Programme portfolio review Interviews Surveys Synthesis review report Country case studies

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)	SOURCES OF INFORMATION
EQ 3.3 Financing sustainability <i>To what extent do national budget allocations and diversified funding sources support the sustainability and scaling of skills systems?</i>	Earmarking: (i) existence and adequacy of budget lines. Diversification: (ii) range and stability of funding sources. Governance: (iii) accountability of financing mechanisms. Sustainability assessment: apply streamlined sustainability matrix financing dimension (predictability; adequacy; governance; inclusion). Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Budget and financing documents Interviews Donor information Financial reports Synthesis review report Country case studies
EQ 3.4 Challenges to sustainability <i>What are the main challenges and risks to sustaining results achieved under the Strategy and the Global Skills Programme?</i>	Risks and constraints: (i) institutional, financial, political and contextual factors. Mitigation: (ii) adaptive responses. Sustainability assessment: identify key sustainability risks and mitigation measures across the sustainability matrix dimensions. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Risk assessments Interviews Surveys Synthesis review report Country case studies
EQ 3.5 – Orientation towards long-term impact <i>To what extent have ILO strategies and actions contributed, or are likely to contribute, to sustainable long-term impacts at country level?</i> Sub-questions: ► Have institutional capacities been durably strengthened? ► Have policy frameworks and tools been improved in ways likely to endure?	Sustainable impacts: (i) durability of institutional and policy change. Breadth and equity: (ii) scope of benefits. Contribution strength: (iii) plausibility of ILO contribution. Sustainability assessment: link sustainability conditions to likelihood of long-term impact (institutionalisation; financing; governance; system integration). Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Contribution analysis Policy and institutional reviews Interviews Surveys Synthesis review report Country case studies
EQ 3.6 – Lessons learned and forward-looking orientation <i>What lessons learned and good practices should inform the implementation of the Strategy up to 2030?</i>	Good practices: (i) transferability and effectiveness. Lessons: (ii) sequencing, scaling and partnership models. Actionability: (iii) operational relevance for ILO and constituents. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.	Synthesis review report Interviews Surveys Country case studies

ANNEX 2. JUDGEMENT CRITERIA MATRIX

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	JUDGEMENT SCALE	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)
Relevance and Coherence		
EQ 1.1 – Relevance to constituents <i>To what extent have the ILO's Strategy and actions on skills and lifelong learning responded to the priorities, needs and practical requirements of ILO constituents?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ To what extent do the Strategy and actions reflect the priorities of governments, employers and workers? ▶ Have constituents' priorities evolved during the implementation period?	Strong	Alignment and demand-responsiveness: (i) alignment between Strategy/Action Plan priorities and expressed constituent needs; (ii) evidence priorities were informed by consultations/tripartite inputs; (iii) extent support addresses practical requirements (constraints, delivery mechanisms, tools, guidance, capacities) (iv) alignment with expressed needs of women, PWD, and vulnerable groups. Differentiation / comparative advantage: (vii) recognition of the ILO value proposition (normative anchor, tripartism, labour-market lens, systems perspective). Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 1.2 – Normative framework and social dialogue <i>To what extent are social dialogue and the ILO's normative framework effectively embedded in the design and implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan across global, regional and country levels?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ How are tripartite mechanisms integrated into governance, implementation and monitoring? ▶ To what extent are international labour standards mainstreamed into programme design and policy dialogue?	Moderate	Tripartite governance and engagement: (i) existence and quality of tripartite structures supporting the Action Plan; (ii) meaningful involvement of employers' and workers' organisations across the programme cycle. Normative mainstreaming: (iii) explicit integration of international labour standards and normative guidance in programme design, tools, training content and policy advice; (iv) use of the normative continuum from standard-setting to technical cooperation. Implementation modalities and consistency: (v) use of social dialogue in policy formulation and implementation; (vi) coherence between normative guidance and operational delivery. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 1.3 – Coherence of the Global Skills Programme <i>To what extent has the Global Skills Programme translated the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy into coherent, coordinated and demand-driven action across global, regional and country levels?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Has the GSP reduced fragmentation of skills-related interventions? ▶ To what extent has the GSP provided a clear and shared results logic linking the Strategy and Action Plan to concrete activities across levels? ▶ To what extent has the GSP functioned as a unifying framework (e.g. common priorities, approaches, sequencing) rather than a loose aggregation of projects? ▶ To what extent has the GSP facilitated alignment and complementarity between global, regional and country-level actions?	Strong	Translation into action: (i) evidence the Programme catalysed and structured implementation of the Strategy; (ii) clarity of the results chain from Strategy to Action Plan to Programme-supported activities. Coordination and coherence: (iii) reduction of fragmentation across organisational levels and units; (iv) use of integrated intervention packages / common approaches and sequencing. Constituent alignment and operational effectiveness: (v) responsiveness to constituent priorities; (vi) timeliness, relevance, flexibility and accessibility of the Programme. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	JUDGEMENT SCALE	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)
EQ 1.4 – External coherence <i>To what extent has the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning aligned with and complemented global strategies and the initiatives of the UN system and other international partners?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Where is complementarity with UN agencies and international partners most evident? ▶ Are there overlaps, gaps or missed opportunities for synergy?	Moderate	External coherence: (i) alignment with relevant global and UN strategies (including on gender and cross-cutting concerns). Complementarity: (ii) clear division of labour and avoidance of duplication. Synergies and added value: (iii) evidence coordination generated tangible benefits.
Effectiveness and Efficiency		
EQ 2.1 – Achievement of intended results <i>To what extent has ILO work across the five interrelated components contributed to achieving the intended short- and medium-term outcomes of the Strategy and Action Plan at country level?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Which components have translated most effectively into country-level results? ▶ How have global standards-related actions and global leadership functions supported or enabled these outcomes?	Moderate	Country-level translation: (i) evidence of implementation across the five components and differences in progress across components. Outcome achievement: (ii) progress towards short- and medium-term outcomes. (iii) Stakeholders attribute perceived outcomes to the interventions of ILO. Enabling role of standards and leadership: (iv) contribution of standards-related work and global leadership functions. Implementation quality: (v) timeliness, adaptation and delivery performance. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 2.2 – Addressing skills and lifelong learning gaps <i>To what extent are the results likely to contribute to addressing key skills development and lifelong learning gaps and their underlying causes?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Which gaps (institutional, governance, financing, inclusion) are being addressed most effectively? ▶ To what extent are root causes of skills mismatches being tackled?	Moderate	Contribution logic: (i) plausibility of causal pathways from outputs/outcomes to closing gaps. Addressing root causes: (ii) extent to which structural drivers are tackled. Magnitude and equity: (iii) likely scale and distribution of benefits. Risks and assumptions: (iv) key assumptions holding or failing. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 2.3 – Intended and unintended results <i>What intended and unintended results have emerged from the ILO's work on skills and lifelong learning at global, regional and country levels?</i>	Moderate	Identification of unintended effects: (i) positive spillovers and negative effects. Drivers and significance: (ii) materiality and causes. Learning: (iii) evidence of adaptation or course correction. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 2.4 – Responsiveness to emerging challenges <i>To what extent has ILO work on skills and lifelong learning responded to emerging global challenges and opportunities?</i> Sub-questions: - How have actions addressed issues such as digitalisation, green transition, demographic change or crises? - Is there evidence of adaptive programming?	Moderate	Responsiveness: (i) attention to digitalisation, green transition, labour-market change or crises. Innovation: (ii) new tools and approaches. Scalability: (iii) potential for replication and scale. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	JUDGEMENT SCALE	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)
EQ 2.5 – Cross-cutting principles <i>To what extent have ILO actions been implemented in line with cross-cutting principles, including tripartism and social dialogue, gender equality, non-discrimination, and just transition?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Are social partners meaningfully involved at country level? ▶ How are gender equality, disability inclusion and just transition operationalised in practice?	Strong	Tripartism and dialogue: (i) quality of social partner engagement. Gender and non-discrimination: (ii) integration in needs assessments, design, implementation, M&E frameworks, and results. Just transition: (iii) consideration of environmental transition and worker protection. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 2.6 – Value added of the Global Skills Programme <i>What has been the specific value added of the Global Skills Programme compared with stand-alone development cooperation initiatives?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Has the GSP accelerated results? ▶ Fostered innovation? ▶ Enabled scale that would not otherwise have been achieved?	Strong	Additionality: (i) acceleration and scale attributable to the Programme. Innovation: (ii) new approaches enabled. Scaling pathways: (iii) institutionalisation and replication. Perceptions: (iv) stakeholder views on value added. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 2.7 – Efficiency and resourcing <i>To what extent have actions been adequately resourced and implemented efficiently?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Are financial and human resources aligned with strategic priorities? ▶ Are there efficiency gains through coordination, pooling or joint delivery?	Moderate	Design efficiency Cost-sharing: (i) The action design relies on mutual reinforcement and/or cost-sharing with other ILO/UN projects. (ii) The action builds on prior activities and efforts. Efficiency of coordinated funding: (iii) Pooled funding allows prioritization and efficient reallocation based on most urgent priorities. Prioritisation of Resources: (iv) resources are directed toward the highest-priority root causes or most urgent priorities / challenges. (v) resources are allocated/foreseen to involve women and vulnerable groups. Alignment with objectives: (vi) resources align with and are sufficient for the envisaged objectives Utilisation & Goal efficiency Timeliness of spending: (i) The action allocated its resources within the foreseen timeline. Actual use: (ii) The action used its programmed financial, human and temporal resources (iii) the action made savings on implementation costs Inclusion: (iv) resources were sufficient to involve women and vulnerable groups. Results efficiency Catalytic efficiency: (i) stakeholders created tangible results beyond the action's interventions. (ii) stakeholders are taking steps to further the results (e.g. continued policy discussion, allocation of budget). Multiplicative Effect: (iii) Additional people and organisations were impacted through "Cascaded impact" beyond the ILO intervention and funding. Future mobilization: (iv) Additional funding was secured to support the impact Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	JUDGEMENT SCALE	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)
EQ 2.8 – Internal and external coordination <i>How effective have internal ILO coordination mechanisms and external partnerships been in supporting integrated delivery of the Strategy?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ How effective is coordination across ILO units and levels? ▶ How effective is coordination with constituents, ITC-ILO, CINTERFOR, UN partners and donors?	Moderate	Coordination mechanisms: (i) functioning and effectiveness. Outcome relevance: (ii) contribution of coordination to results. Transaction costs: (iii) bottlenecks and enablers. Programme as platform: (iv) strengthening cross-unit and cross-level collaboration and alignment with other initiatives; effects on coherence and results. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 2.9 Coordination enabled by the Global Skills Programme <i>To what extent has the Global Skills Programme effectively enabled internal coordination across ILO units and levels, and external coordination with constituents, partners (e.g. GIZ, World Bank, UNESCO) and other projects or interventions, in support of integrated delivery of the Skills and Lifelong Learning Strategy?</i> Sub-questions ▶ To what extent has the Global Skills Programme functioned as a coordination platform across headquarters, regional and country levels? ▶ To what extent has the Programme facilitated cross-unit collaboration within the ILO (e.g. between technical departments, regions, and country offices)? ▶ How effectively has the Programme enabled coordination and complementarity with constituents and external partners at global, regional and country levels? ▶ To what extent has coordination supported integrated delivery, reduced duplication, or generated synergies with other skills-related projects and initiatives? ▶ What coordination mechanisms have worked well, and where have gaps, bottlenecks or transaction costs persisted?	Moderate	Internal coordination: (i) Extent and quality of coordination across ILO units, departments and levels facilitated by the Programme. (ii) Clarity of roles, responsibilities and communication channels. External coordination and partnerships: (iii) Effectiveness of coordination with constituents and external partners (e.g. UN agencies, IFIs, bilateral partners). (iv) Evidence of complementarity, joint planning, or aligned implementation. Contribution to integrated delivery: (i) Extent to which coordination enabled by the Programme supported integrated, multi-component delivery of the Strategy.(ii) Evidence of reduced fragmentation or duplication across interventions. Efficiency and transaction costs: (i) Balance between coordination benefits and transaction costs. (ii) Timeliness and practicality of coordination mechanisms. Programme-level added value: (i) Evidence that coordination outcomes would not have occurred without the Global Skills Programme. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
Sustainability and Orientation towards Impact		
EQ 3.1 National capacity and ownership <i>To what extent have ILO interventions strengthened national capacities and ownership for skills development and lifelong learning?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Is there evidence of political will and leadership among national stakeholders? ▶ Have institutional roles and responsibilities been strengthened?	Moderate	Capacity development quality: (i) Constituents and key national partners have taken project results forward without ILO support, or demonstrate concrete plans to do so. Institutionalisation: (ii) Concrete evidence of uptake and routine use by national actors, e.g. allocation of budget, integration of results in SOPs, recruitment of technical staff. Reduced dependency / ownership: (iii) decreasing reliance on external assistance; evidence of political will and leadership. Sustainability assessment: apply streamlined sustainability matrix dimensions (institutionalisation; ownership/governance; financing; system integration; risk/mitigation). Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.

EVALUATION QUESTION (INCL. SUB-QUESTIONS)	JUDGEMENT SCALE	INDICATORS / JUDGEMENT CRITERIA (ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS)
EQ 3.2 Sustainability and scaling (Global Skills Programme) <i>To what extent has the Global Skills Programme strengthened conditions for the sustainability and scaling of results beyond the life of individual projects?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Has it strengthened institutional ownership and governance? ▶ Has it supported sustainable financing mechanisms? ▶ How are TVET and skills development positioned within national education systems? ▶ Are there system-level reforms supporting scale-up?	Moderate	Sustainability conditions: (i) institutional ownership and governance. Financing: (ii) budgeting and diversified funding. System reforms: (iii) integration within education systems (positioning of TVET and skills development). Scaling: (iv) replication and national roll-out. Sustainability assessment: apply streamlined sustainability matrix dimensions (ownership/governance; financing; system integration; scale/replication; risk/mitigation). Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 3.3 Financing sustainability <i>To what extent do national budget allocations and diversified funding sources support the sustainability and scaling of skills systems?</i>	Limited	Earmarking: (i) existence and adequacy of budget lines. Diversification: (ii) range and stability of funding sources. Governance: (iii) accountability of financing mechanisms. Sustainability assessment: apply streamlined sustainability matrix financing dimension (predictability; adequacy; governance; inclusion). Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 3.4 Challenges to sustainability <i>What are the main challenges and risks to sustaining results achieved under the Strategy and the Global Skills Programme?</i>	Moderate	Risks and constraints: (i) institutional, financial, political and contextual factors. Mitigation: (ii) adaptive responses. Sustainability assessment: identify key sustainability risks and mitigation measures across the sustainability matrix dimensions. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 3.5 – Orientation towards long-term impact <i>To what extent have ILO strategies and actions contributed, or are likely to contribute, to sustainable long-term impacts at country level?</i> Sub-questions: ▶ Have institutional capacities been durably strengthened? ▶ Have policy frameworks and tools been improved in ways likely to endure?	Moderate	Sustainable impacts: (i) durability of institutional and policy change. Breadth and equity: (ii) scope of benefits. Contribution strength: (iii) plausibility of ILO contribution. Sustainability assessment: link sustainability conditions to likelihood of long-term impact (institutionalisation; financing; governance; system integration). Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.
EQ 3.6 – Lessons learned and forward-looking orientation <i>What lessons learned and good practices should inform the implementation of the Strategy up to 2030?</i>	Moderate	Good practices: (i) transferability and effectiveness. Lessons: (ii) sequencing, scaling and partnership models. Actionability: (iii) operational relevance for ILO and constituents. Judgement scale: Strong, Moderate, Limited.

ANNEX 3. LIST OF CONSULTED STAKEHOLDERS

ILO STAFF

LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	ORG UNIT	JOB TITLE
LEE	Sangheon	EMPLOYMENT	Department Director
DARU	Patrick	SKILLS	Head, Skills Training Excellence Unit
OKAL	Albert	DWT/CO-Pretoria	Skills and Lifelong Learning Specialist
SCHMID	Laura	DWT/CO-Cairo	Spec, Skills and Employability
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