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High-level evaluations of strategies and Decent Work Country Programmes

Purpose of the document

This document presents a summary of the findings and recommendations of three independent high-level evaluations conducted during 2021. Part I pertains to the ILO's strategy and actions for promoting fair and effective labour migration during the period 2016–20. Part II covers the ILO's gender equality and mainstreaming efforts during the period 2016–21. Part III concerns the ILO's programme of work in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, including its Decent Work Country Programmes. The Governing Body is invited to endorse the recommendations and request the Director-General to ensure their implementation (see draft decision in paragraph 142).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

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

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

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None.

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

Author unit: Evaluation Office (EVAL).

Related documents: GB.343/PFA/9; ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work.

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► Introduction

1. This report presents a summary of the findings of three independent high-level evaluations conducted by the ILO's Evaluation Office (EVAL) in 2021.¹ The evaluations were undertaken using the internationally accepted evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Data derived from various methods (desk reviews, synthesis reviews of related project evaluations, interviews, online surveys and case studies) were triangulated to ensure consistency and reliability.² A six-point rating scale – in which 1 is “highly unsatisfactory” and 6 is “highly satisfactory” – was applied to complement the findings. The evaluations were undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic using adapted methods.³

► Part I. Independent high-level evaluation of the ILO's strategy and actions for promoting fair and effective labour migration, 2016–20

Purpose and scope

2. The evaluation reviewed all of the Office's efforts to support the achievement of its commitment towards promoting fair and effective labour migration and mobility. It covers the period 2016–20 and focuses predominantly on efforts to achieve outcome 9 of the ILO's Programmes and Budgets for 2016–17 and 2018–19 and output 7.5 of the Programme and Budget for 2020–21, on labour migration. The evaluation is based on the results of a synthesis review of 22 evaluation reports on labour migration; a review of ILO documentation on the subject; interviews with ILO staff, constituents, donors, United Nations (UN) partners and other partners; six case studies (including a large case study on fair recruitment); and a survey among ILO staff, constituents, donors and other partners.⁴

¹ The full texts of the evaluation reports provide further details to substantiate the key findings and conclusions presented in the summaries. These reports can be consulted on [EVAL's web page](#).

² Country or topical case studies and other supporting documentation for each evaluation are available upon request by contacting eval@ilo.org.

³ See ILO, *Implications of COVID-19 on evaluations in the ILO: Practical tips on adapting to the situation*, 24 April 2020.

⁴ Eight countries, entities and regions/corridors were selected as the subject of more detailed studies: Ethiopia, Thailand and Tunisia; the Support Free Movement of Persons and Migration in West Africa (FMM) project; ILO support to the organization of a regional conference in Central America on labour migration; and the corridors of Nepal–Jordan, Guatemala–Mexico, and the Philippines–Hong Kong, China. A total of 64 interviews with 108 participants (60 per cent women) were conducted with ILO staff, constituents, donors, other UN partners and other stakeholders; 73 ILO staff members and 38 constituent and donor representatives participated in the online surveys.

Summary of findings

A. Relevance

Key finding 1: The ILO's work is unique in the global area of labour migration, particularly owing to its ability to connect migrants to the labour market. It is the only agency that addresses labour migration through social dialogue and tripartism, which is perceived as its main added value compared with other agencies.

Key finding 2: The topic of labour migration was considered highly relevant to all constituents, including donors and migrant workers themselves. All constituents agreed on the importance of the fair recruitment programmes. Constituents at the regional economic community or international levels more often perceive the ILO's work as relevant and important, in comparison with those at the national level, where a "nationals first" attitude often prevails among certain trade unions.

Key finding 3: The ILO's work has remained relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the Organization managed to adjust its activities and enhance its focus on returnees and access to social protection, the most pressing issues of the time. Some of these topics, such as that of returnees, were not previously prioritized by the ILO, which shows the flexibility of the Organization to switch its fields of work to address urgent arising needs.

3. Due to the global scale of labour migration and the importance of labour migration for access to labour at all skill levels, remittances and salaries, among other things, the topic of labour migration is of great importance to constituents, although workers' organizations are more concerned about rights and employers' organizations are more concerned about skills. The ILO balanced different interests by ensuring the involvement of all constituents in its interventions.
4. The request by constituents for enhanced attention to be paid to fair recruitment was well integrated in the ILO's work over the evaluation period. The evaluation found that a variety of initiatives and projects on fair recruitment were under way, and the ILO's work was considered highly relevant by constituents.
5. The COVID-19 pandemic enhanced the importance of the ILO's work to protect the rights of migrants and refugees in the labour market. Social protection for migrant workers and the integration of returnees were most prominent on the international agenda, and the ILO ensured that its efforts were readjusted to meet these demands. In addition, the pandemic heightened the importance of the ILO's work to combat the harassment and negative stereotyping of migrant workers.

B. Coherence

Key finding 4: The ILO managed to coordinate its interventions in the area of labour migration with those of other organizations to avoid overlap, although in some instances overlap could not be prevented.

Key finding 5: While the ILO's added value is known, its achievements and interventions are not always clearly visible to all stakeholders. In fact, several stakeholders consider that the ILO sometimes "gets lost" in the plethora of labour migration actors.

Key finding 6: The ILO's work on labour migration is coherent with ILO strategies on gender equality, non-discrimination and social dialogue, while increasing attention is paid to environmental sustainability. Little evidence was found of the integration of disability perspectives in ILO labour migration interventions.

6. The ILO actively works and collaborates with many other international organizations, such as the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the various UN organizations. This allows for the creation of synergies and complementarity with various other initiatives.
7. The fact that both the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the ILO work on labour migration has led to an overlap in the work of the two organizations, which became more prominent due to the ILO's growing involvement with crisis migration, and after the IOM's establishment of a labour migration unit. Despite initial frictions between the two organizations, both sides are coming to a mutual understanding, illustrated by their ongoing cooperation and a recent memorandum of understanding. However, representatives of both the ILO and the IOM indicated that cooperation and collaboration could still be improved, particularly at the country level.
8. While the ILO's added value and unique characteristics are recognized by constituents, partners and donors, the sheer number of actors working in the field of migration can reduce the Organization's visibility and limit its ability to ensure that the positive impacts are attributed to its work. The ILO's Fair Recruitment Initiative is one endeavour in respect of which some stakeholders indicated that too many measures were under way, and the ILO's work sometimes got "lost".

C Effectiveness

Key finding 7: In almost all instances, the ILO met its programme and budget targets. It exceeded some of the expected results under indicator 9.1 (2016–17) by supporting Member States and regional or subregional institutions in the process of developing and implementing policy, legislation, bilateral and multilateral agreements, and under indicator 9.3 (2018–19) by supporting Member States in the process of establishing or strengthening institutional mechanisms to implement and monitor governance frameworks on labour migration. The Programme and Budget for 2016–17 transposes the labour protection resolutions adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 104th Session (2015) by including a commitment to protect migrants and to address the discriminatory impact of wage policies. Some aspects of these resolutions are also reflected in the Programmes and Budgets for 2018–19 and 2020–21.

Key finding 8: Of the survey respondents, 66.4 per cent agree that the ILO has a clear approach to fair and effective labour migration (rating 5 or 6). The Fair Recruitment Initiative – specifically the *General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and definition of recruitment fees and related costs* – has high potential to respond to Member States' needs and respective legal systems.

Key finding 9: Improved capacity of constituents and enhanced social dialogue on labour migration were found to be an important outcome of many ILO interventions.

Key finding 10: The ILO's cross-cutting work on international labour standards and gender equality was mostly effective. The advancement of compliance with international labour standards positively affected social dialogue and the inclusion of relevant stakeholders. Environmental sustainability is growing as a concern; however, it is hard to assess effectiveness in this regard, as the current consideration of the topic is fragmented and is not integrated in monitoring frameworks. No evidence was found on the effectiveness of the ILO's work on labour migration for persons with disabilities.

Key finding 11: The ILO's work on mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic – in particular, its technical support to Member States on protecting the rights of migrant workers and negotiating with other countries on wage payments, as well as its research on the effects of COVID-19 on labour migration – was perceived as one of its most effective fields of work over the evaluation period (by 57.3 per cent of survey respondents).

9. Enhanced capacity is one of the main outcomes of the ILO's interventions. Examples include capacity to conduct social dialogue, capacity to monitor migration processes and capacity to engage in policymaking on labour migration. Increased capacity was also found in terms of knowledge and awareness of migrant-related issues.
10. Another important outcome was the strengthened social dialogue that occurred, both at the country level and at the level of regional economic communities. The ILO's labour migration projects contributed to the establishment of regional tripartite dialogue measures and of regional employers' and employees' organizations (such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the Southern African Development Community).
11. Survey respondents generally perceived the Fair Recruitment Initiative as effective, and examples were found of fair recruitment principles transposed to national policies and laws. However, interviews also highlighted the need for enhanced efforts on this topic, as the principles tend to be only partially implemented locally, making it difficult to govern the fair recruitment of migrant workers.

D. Efficiency

Key finding 12: Constituents and other stakeholders are generally satisfied with the timeliness, accessibility and availability of the ILO's work, despite occasional delays in project execution.

Key finding 13: The ILO's human resources for labour migration issues are perceived as being stretched to meet the volume of projects and demand in the field. Whereas the number of regular budget core staff at the headquarters level remained relatively stable in 2016–20 (11 regular budget core staff at the headquarters level in 2016–20), five P4 positions were nevertheless added (one at headquarters and four in the field) during the same period. Resource mobilization increased substantially between 2016–17 and 2018–19, from US\$24.9 million to US\$57.5 million.

Key finding 14: Existing monitoring and evaluation approaches do not always allow for the effective evaluation of the impact of labour migration projects, due to a lack of data on results, missing baselines and weak or absent monitoring frameworks. However, steps have already been taken to improve these approaches.

Key finding 15: Survey respondents evaluated coordination and collaboration between technical units at the headquarters level (82 per cent) and between headquarters and the field (74 per cent) as highly effective. The survey findings were supported by interviewees providing examples of successful cooperation. Labour migration projects often benefit from the expertise of different branches or departments (for example, the expertise of the Labour Migration Branch (MIGRANT) combined with that of the Social Protection Department (SOCPRO) or the Skills and Employability Branch (SKILLS)), ensuring that labour migration is addressed in different dimensions of the labour market.

12. Relevant constituents and other stakeholders perceived the ILO's work as timely, easily available and accessible. Its effective internal collaboration helps deliver projects in an efficient manner. Interaction between headquarters and field offices only intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, as more meetings moved online, allowing staff to share best practices.
13. The majority of interviewed and surveyed ILO staff who work on labour migration issues stated that human resources are insufficient. Staff pressures were eased somewhat by hiring for more positions in 2018–19, yet the number of positions with high technical expertise – as reflected in the staff grades – remained low.

14. Donors often put limits on the share of funds that could be used to hire staff. Interviewed ILO staff were convinced that, in some cases, the caps reduced rather than enhanced project outcomes. This is because, unable to hire staff, project managers rely on consultants, who take time to get familiar with the country and project context, or simply are unable to deliver some of the project activities to the quality needed. Some donor organizations indicated their openness to flexibility in terms of budget allocations.
15. The adequacy of monitoring and evaluation frameworks varied from “completely adequate” in some countries, to “inadequate” in others, when essential information on project activities could not be traced back. The evaluation of the impact of particular initiatives appeared particularly challenging, due to difficulties in measuring the ILO’s outcomes and the multitude of similar projects, making it difficult to attribute impact to one particular intervention. The limited ability of the ILO to clearly identify its contribution to impact also leads to low awareness and visibility of ILO actions on labour migration.

E. Likelihood of impact and sustainability

Key finding 16: The most visible and clear impact of the ILO’s work is the adoption of legislation and policies facilitating fair labour migration. Examples of legal and policy changes in Member States were noted worldwide, although progress towards the ratification of Conventions related to migrant workers was slow.

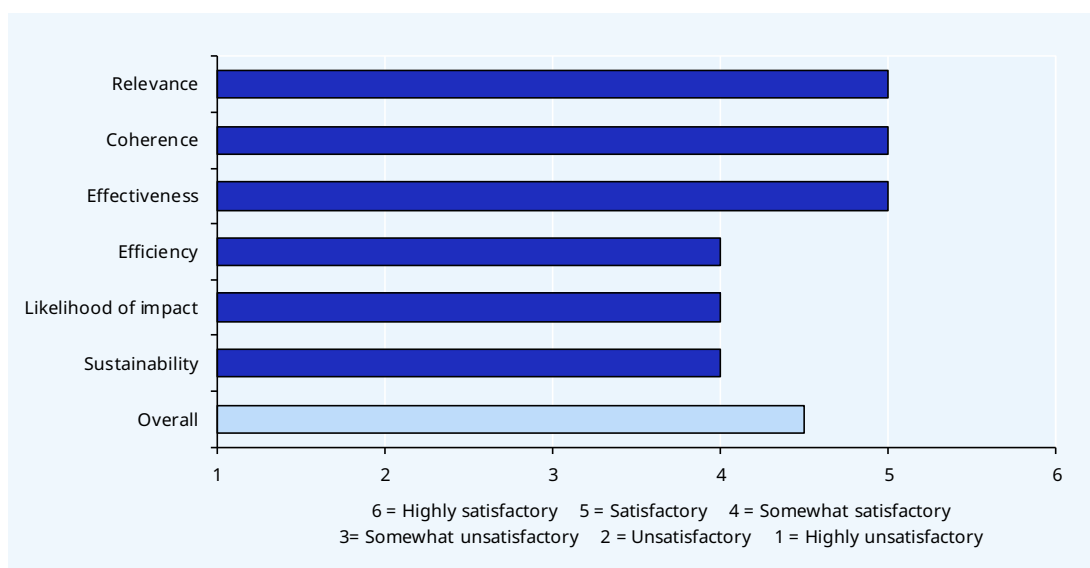
Key finding 17: The adoption of legislation and policy frameworks is a crucial facilitator of sustainability. However, impact can be affected by a lack of implementation measures, as well as by labour migration barriers put up by other countries.

Key finding 18: Enhancing impact and facilitating sustainability raise similar challenges, particularly changing political contexts and short project durations that do not allow for long-term implementation support.

16. The Fair Recruitment Initiative is a good example of where greater impact can be achieved through a focus on regulatory frameworks at the country level. Constituents believe that the introduction of legislation and policy frameworks applicable to all labour migration actors would enhance the impact and sustainability of fair recruitment achievements more than interventions targeting migrant workers and employers alone.
17. Various examples were found of increased capacity and ownership of results (such as co-funding and buy-in) by constituents, which serve as positive indicators for the likelihood of sustained impact.
18. The ILO’s lack of a field presence in Member States where it provides technical support prevents it from providing continuous services, not just during a project, but also in respect of providing follow-up to support the implementation of new laws and policies.

Overall assessment

19. Figure 1 presents the scores attributed to the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the ILO’s work on labour migration, taking into account the survey results, the scores in the synthesis report, the programme and budget results (for effectiveness only) and the assessment of the evaluation team.

► **Figure 1. Evaluation of the ILO's work on labour migration: Ratings by criterion**

Conclusions and lessons learned

20. During the period under review, the ILO has made significant progress in its overall work on fair labour migration, including in the context of fair recruitment. It has been able to position itself vis-à-vis other international actors and agencies as an organization with a unique mandate and expertise in respect of the labour market dimensions of migration governance.
21. Major projects at the regional, interregional and country levels have included legal and political reform among their principal objectives, and ample examples have been found worldwide over the period 2016–20 in the field of labour migration. This is a key element facilitating the impact and sustainability of the ILO's work.
22. The work of the ILO on labour migration was perceived as highly relevant, useful and effective over the period 2016–20. Despite one missed target in the biennium 2018–19, the ILO exceeded its targets set for 2016–17, and demonstrated significant progress in 2020. The work of the ILO in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic was found particularly relevant and effective. However, the impact of the pandemic will persist in the years to come, and will continue to affect labour migration. Therefore, constituents request additional and enhanced efforts from the ILO to address the issues caused by the pandemic in countries of both origin and destination.
23. The evaluation found multiple barriers to the work of the ILO, related to both internal and external challenges. The changing political context is a crucial factor that affects the work of the ILO. Its work, predominantly at the political level, was found to be both highly valuable and extremely vulnerable in respect of impact and sustainability.
24. The heavy workload places a substantial burden on ILO staff, and interventions often lack personnel with sufficient technical expertise. Short-term projects witness higher consultant turnover, which increases the work needed to onboard consultants and limits knowledge management within the ILO. Short-term projects also limit the ability to provide long-term technical assistance, particularly in respect of the implementation of newly adopted laws and policies.
25. Gaps in the ILO's visibility were identified, both in terms of its overall vision and activities, and in terms of the ILO standing out among other agencies. This is linked to the lack of

an ILO presence on the ground in many countries, which would facilitate ongoing engagement and visibility among stakeholders.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

26. Increase ILO visibility by expanding capacity to communicate and by strengthening its participation in global, regional and country-level groups and networks. The ILO should lead initiatives, demonstrate impact and set the agenda in promoting fair and effective labour migration and in addressing labour mobility issues related to crisis, such as access of refugees and those forcibly displaced to labour markets.
27. Global advocacy – including through the development of guidance materials and other efforts to share the ILO's strengths and values with international partners – has been of key importance. Ensuring the visibility of the ILO's achievements is also of key importance, particularly in order to demonstrate impact. However, this high-level evaluation has shown that the achievements and roles of the ILO are not always visible, particularly among other international actors.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
MIGRANT, Department of Communication and Public Information (DCOMM), regional offices, decent work technical support teams (DWTs)	High	Long-term	Low-medium (dissemination) Medium (on-the-ground presence)

Recommendation 2

28. The ILO should continue and enhance its work in respect of migration corridors and regional economic communities, through capacity-building and the sharing of best practices with regional economic communities and constituents.
29. The continuation and strengthening of cooperation with regional economic communities can have a significant impact on various factors affecting labour migration. While in some areas, the effectiveness of this approach is already clear, other regional economic communities still require strengthening before impact can be achieved.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
MIGRANT, Governance and Tripartism Department (GOVERNANCE), regional offices, DWTs, International Training Centre of the ILO	Medium	Long-term	Medium

Recommendation 3

30. The ILO should ensure that its development cooperation work explicitly identifies a sustainability plan and follow-up, and provides for greater technical support at the

country level to encourage the implementation of and compliance with ratified Conventions, relevant policies and laws, and its global guidelines and recommendations.

- 31.** The ILO created impact through the design and adoption of labour migration policies and legislation. However, a pressing need for the future is to strengthen mechanisms for implementation and supervision. The high workload and insufficient resources on the ground are key barriers in this regard. The ILO's non-binding documents (guidelines and recommendations) require extensive follow-up and advocacy to ensure their implementation.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
MIGRANT, Partnerships and Field Support Department (PARDEV), International Labour Standards Department (NORMES), regional offices, DWTs, Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP), Strategic Programming and Management Department (PROGRAM)	High	Long-term	High

Recommendation 4

- 32.** The ILO should strengthen its monitoring and evaluation approaches on labour migration at the global, regional and national levels.
- 33.** Several reports noted that it was not possible to assess impact, owing to a lack of data, missing baselines and weak, inadequate or absent monitoring frameworks. A similar issue was noted in terms of cross-cutting issues addressed through labour migration projects. Gaps in monitoring and evaluation translate to a lack of evidence on the achievements of the ILO and the impact on migrant workers attributable to the ILO's work.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
MIGRANT, PARDEV, PROGRAM, support from EVAL	High	Medium-term	Medium

Recommendation 5

- 34.** The ILO should continue to strengthen its work on fair recruitment, particularly in order to better translate global outputs to the national level, and enhance synergies between its projects and between ILO initiatives and other organizations' initiatives on fair recruitment.
- 35.** Whereas the ILO's work on fair recruitment was found to be highly relevant and effective, an insufficiency of regulations and enforcement of fair recruitment persists, which could relate to the non-binding nature of the guidelines and the need for increased awareness

of the potential of this instrument to support governments and constituents. More attention should be paid to the translation of the fair recruitment principles and guidelines into national legal frameworks.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
MIGRANT with NORMES, and Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch (FUNDAMENTALS)	High	Long-term	Medium

Recommendation 6

36. The ILO should enhance its efforts to address the challenges caused by COVID-19 on social protection for migrant workers and refugees in the labour market and enhance its engagement with both origin and destination countries in respect of decent work opportunities and skills recognition and protection, both in the short term and in the longer term.
37. The ILO has already conducted some important work on this issue. However, some stakeholders indicate that the ILO can still do more, and the issues related to COVID-19 and labour migration are far from resolved. To restart labour migration and ensure the protection of migrant workers' rights, renewed and enhanced efforts are needed worldwide to address the challenges caused or enhanced by COVID-19.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
MIGRANT, SOCPRO, GOVERNANCE, Deputy Director-General for Policy (DDG/P), Deputy Director-General for Field Operations and Partnerships (DDG/FOP), DWTs	High Medium	Short-term Medium-term	Medium

Office response

38. The Office welcomes the findings of the high-level evaluation, which recognize the significant progress made in its overall work on fair and effective labour migration governance, including fair recruitment, and the unique nature of its mandate and expertise in this area.

Recommendation 1

39. The Office generally agrees with the recommendation to strengthen the visibility of the ILO's work on labour migration. The Office will continue to step up its communication efforts with its constituents and in collaboration with UN agencies and other stakeholders, while asserting leadership within national and regional migration networks. The Fair Recruitment Initiative will launch a Knowledge Hub, which will further expand the ILO's visibility and outreach.
40. The Office notes that the ILO is an active member of the Executive Committee of the UN Network on Migration and is active in 26 national and regional subnetworks. The ILO is

leading as a co-chair or executive committee member in 15 of these. The ILO's capacity to participate in these groups can be limited by a lack of an ILO in-country field presence.

Recommendation 2

41. The Office agrees with the recommendation to continue enhancing capacity-building in this area, including through the mobilization of resources. The ILO will continue to strengthen its partnership with the International Training Centre of the ILO in order to deliver targeted training activities.

Recommendation 3

42. The Office agrees with the recommendation and the finding that, as the workload has increased, staff resources may be insufficient to meet the increasing demand. A sustainability plan can support monitoring and evaluation, though it may not address the staffing deficit. While a substantial increase in development cooperation funds can help to support regular budget staff in some countries, a multiplicity of development cooperation projects can also raise expectations for and place burdens on regular budget staff to provide more technical oversight. Relevant technical units and decent work technical support teams could explore the strategic prioritization of field- and headquarters-level resources to close staffing gaps, and support the implementation of international labour standards and ILO tools and guidance.

Recommendation 4

43. The Office agrees with the recommendation. As indicated in the ILO's Strategic Plan for 2022–25 and the Programme and Budget for 2022–23, the ILO will continue enhancing its measurement, monitoring and reporting systems to improve results-based management, transparency and accountability.

Recommendation 5

44. The Office agrees with the recommendation to continue strengthening work in the area of fair recruitment. The Office also recognizes that the ILO's work on fair recruitment has had a significant impact thus far, and has demonstrated concrete results at the national, regional and global levels, including in regulatory and policy reform. The adoption of the new five-year Fair Recruitment Initiative strategy and accompanying Knowledge Hub will further increase constituents' capacity to implement ILO standards and guidance.
45. Evidence of how widely governments and the social partners recognize the importance of the ILO's fair recruitment guidelines is their inclusion in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, endorsed by 152 countries and in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly in indicator 10.7.1, for which the ILO is a custodian agency.
46. As for the recommendation to enhance synergies with other organizations' initiatives on recruitment, it would be important for an appropriate division of responsibilities with the IOM to be followed on both sides, to ensure that institutional mandates are respected and that joint work contributes to higher impact, rather than to competition or duplication.

Recommendation 6

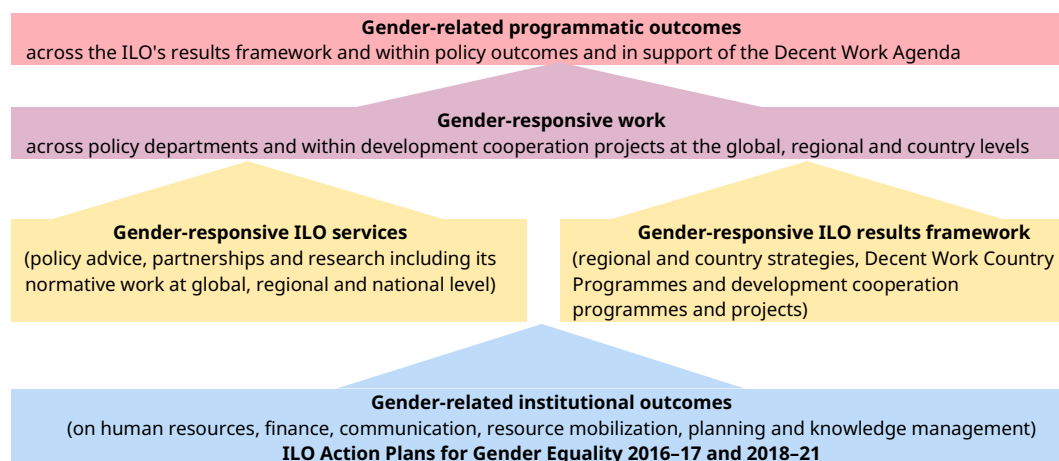
47. The Office agrees with the recommendation and will continue to enhance its efforts to address the challenges caused by COVID-19.

► Part II. Independent high-level evaluation of the ILO's gender equality and mainstreaming efforts, 2016–21

Purpose and scope

48. The evaluation analyses the achievements and outcomes of the ILO's gender equality and mainstreaming efforts at the programme and institutional levels for the period 2016–21. It includes a review of the progress made and gaps in implementing the *ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2016–17* (Action Plan 2016–17) and the *ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2018–21* (Action Plan 2018–21), in response to a Governing Body request for an evaluation of the action plans to inform the development of a new action plan.⁵ The Governing Body also requested a specific focus on the positioning of a more gender-responsive ILO in the UN system.⁶ The evaluation focuses on the strategies, approaches, outcomes, achievements, gaps and lessons learned related to gender equality and mainstreaming, with summative and formative aims.⁷
49. The scope of the evaluation is Office-wide. It covers external programme results (policy outcomes) and internal institutional changes and considers how they complement one another. A reconstructed theory of change was developed and figure 2 summarizes the key programmatic and institutional components of gender equality and mainstreaming, to inform the evaluation.

► **Figure 2. Components of ILO gender equality and mainstreaming**



⁵ GB.338/INS/7.

⁶ Gender-responsiveness (or a gender-responsive approach) means intentionally employing gender considerations to influence the design, development, implementation and results of programmes and strategies, policies, laws and regulations, as well as collective agreements.

⁷ A total of six case studies on gender equality and mainstreaming were conducted. These were: programmatic outcome case studies in respect of (1) policy outcomes and (2) Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) and country programme outcomes; in addition to institutional outcome case studies on (3) institutional support to gender equality and mainstreaming within the ILO; (4) gender equality and mainstreaming performance within selected departments; (5) results-based gender action plans; and (6) partnerships related to gender equality and mainstreaming. In addition, web-based surveys of constituents (150 respondents) and ILO staff (448 respondents), including the ILO Gender Network Global Technical Teams, were conducted.

Summary of findings

A. Relevance

Key finding 1: The ILO Policy on Gender Equality and Mainstreaming * and the ILO action plans on gender equality are highly relevant to the Organization's social justice mandate and standard-setting agenda in addressing gender equality and non-discrimination.

Key finding 2: Gender equality and mainstreaming at the ILO is relevant to the needs and demands of constituents. This is reflected in the gender-transformative interventions that aim to deliver structural and institutional changes needed in the world of work.

Key finding 3: The relevance of gender equality indicators in policy outcomes, country programme outcomes and development cooperation projects is clear. However, the inclusion of specific gender objectives is uneven.

* The policy was announced in 1999 and shared in updated form with the Senior Management Team in 2016. It can be found at: ILO, *ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2018–21*, Geneva, 2018, Appendix II.

50. The ILO's Transitional Strategic Plan for 2016–17 and Strategic Plan for 2018–21 and the respective programme and budget documents are relevant in responding to gender equality needs in the world of work by showing a growing focus on mainstreaming gender equality at the strategic level. As a cross-cutting policy driver, gender equality is mainstreamed in 17 indicators out of 35 in the Programme and Budget for 2016–17 and in 18 indicators out of 36 in the Programme and Budget for 2018–19. In the Programme and Budget for 2020–21, gender equality and non-discrimination are identified as a dedicated policy outcome with 8 indicators, and an additional 16 indicators across all other policy outcomes, ensuring continuity of previous strategies on gender equality.
51. Most of the ILO's policy documents approach gender in a manner that is coherent with the Office's mandate and in line with the gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) framework.⁸ Nine out of ten policy outcomes in the biennium 2016–17 have at least one gender-transformative intervention, with this figure standing at eight out of ten and seven out of eight for the biennia 2018–19 and 2020–21, respectively. Gender-transformative approaches are programmes and interventions that create opportunities for individuals to actively challenge gender norms, promote positions of social and political influence for women in communities, and address power imbalances between persons of different genders.
52. The strategic relevance of gender equality and mainstreaming to the Future of Work agenda was demonstrated through the launch of the Women at Work Initiative, which contributed to adoption of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190); the inclusion in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work of a transformative agenda on gender equality; and the adoption in 2021 of the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. Persistent demands from constituents for training and gender-responsive policy briefs on gender equality and mainstreaming confirm the relevance of the ILO's agenda on this subject.

⁸ The GESI framework assesses gender interventions, and discerns the extent to which a programme addresses gender inequalities and social exclusion in a spectrum that ranges from "gender-blind and exploitative" to "gender-sensitive, empowering and transformative".

B. Coherence

Key finding 4: At the policy outcome level, the ILO has maintained a high level of coherence between its strategic plans and its efforts in relation to gender equality, particularly under the Women at Work Initiative.

Key finding 5: There is alignment between the ILO's Decent Work Agenda and the strategic documents that establish gender equality as one of its cross-cutting objectives and as a policy driver in the policy outcomes of its programme and budget.

Key finding 6: The ILO's gender equality and mainstreaming strategies and approaches are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Key finding 7: The ILO action plans for gender equality are fully aligned with the second United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP 2.0).

53. At the policy framework level, there is strong coherence between the ILO's different strategic plans and its initiatives, as reflected, for example, in the coherence between the Strategic Plan for 2018–21 and the Women at Work Initiative. Coherence is also ensured through the continuing cross-cutting policy issues on gender in both the Transitional Strategic Plan for 2016–17 and the Strategic Plan for 2018–21.
54. The Programmes and Budgets for 2016–17, 2018–19 and 2020–21 included significant outputs and synergies to achieve gender-responsive outcomes that are coherent at the national, regional and global levels. These included clear actions and measurable results within the institutional framework provided by the Women at Work Initiative and in line with other efforts, such as those related to decent work for domestic workers.
55. The reviewed ILO action plans for gender equality are aligned as required with the UN-SWAP and UN-SWAP 2.0, including the UN System-wide strategy on gender parity.
56. Gender equality and mainstreaming strategies and approaches, through policy outcome gender equality indicators and gender-responsive actions, show coherence with SDGs 5, 8 and 1 and the ILO's role as the custodian for 13 SDG targets, including target 5.5, can also not be ignored in this respect.⁹

C. Effectiveness

Programme outcome level

Key finding 8: ILO country programmes show a consistent, although varying, presence of gender-responsive results by policy outcome, but there is a lack of systematic monitoring and reporting on specific gender programme objectives.

Key finding 9: The mixed progress and results on gender equality in programmes and budgets and in ILO action plans for gender equality during the period reflect the complexity of achieving programmatic change on gender-responsive outcomes.

Key finding 10: The ILO's performance under the UN-SWAP 2.0 shows uneven achievements.

Key finding 11: Partnerships helped to improve the implementation of gender equality and mainstreaming efforts from policy development to development cooperation projects.

Institutional outcome level

Key finding 12: The ILO has improved its framework to support institutional gender equality and mainstreaming efforts in key core institutional processes, but more can be done.

⁹ Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

57. An overall analysis of the ILO's country programme outcomes shows a consistent, although varying, presence of significant results in respect of gender-responsiveness per policy outcome. From 2016–19, country programme outcomes linked to all policy outcomes reported at least one significant result in respect of gender-responsiveness, although there was significant variation across policy outcomes. The most effective country programme outcomes were those linked to the formalization of the informal economy, and to promoting fair and effective labour migration policies. Country programme outcomes linked to the ratification and application of international labour standards registered the lowest frequency of gender-responsiveness results. Many of these country programme outcome results were achieved through development cooperation projects and through working with a range of partners.
58. Decent work results ¹⁰ for 2016–17 and 2018–19, when gender equality and non-discrimination were only a cross-cutting policy driver, are shown in table 1. Most telling in terms of progress is the increase of country programme outcomes in which gender equality made a "significant" contribution: from 39 per cent in 2016–17 to 48 per cent in 2018–19.

► **Table 1. Gender equality and non-discrimination: Distribution of decent work results**

Biennium	Country programme outcome contribution to gender		
	Limited	Significant	Principal objective
2016–17	54%	39%	7%
2018–19	47%	48%	5%

Note: For 2020–21, data were not complete enough to provide comparable data.

59. Progress reporting on results for 2020–21, which become more stringent with the introduction of the gender marker, show that many of the country programme outcomes are contributing to gender equality or have it as its principal objective, with 20 per cent of country programme outcomes being unmarked for gender results. The country programme outcomes under the policy outcome on gender equality and non-discrimination showed a somewhat lower performance in some gender-responsive indicators, but this was counterbalanced by the mainstreaming of gender equality across policy outcomes, in particular those on employment, sustainable enterprises and social protection.
60. The overall performance of the Action Plan 2016–17 and the Action Plan 2018–21 is shown in table 2. ¹¹ While both have some similar indicators and targets, the majority are different because of alignment with different versions of the UN-SWAP, making it difficult to undertake a comparison and to determine whether efforts are having the desired impact over the full period of the evaluation.

¹⁰ The gender and non-discrimination marker assigned during programme design to reflect perceived gender-responsiveness was used in the analysis. Reasonable attempts were made to allow for any inflation of the trends due to the self-assigned nature of the marker.

¹¹ A detailed review of the achievements of the action plans for 2016–17 and 2018–21 can be consulted on the ILO website.

► **Table 2. Performance of the Action Plan 2016–17 and the Action Plan 2018–21**

Area of results	Results (indicators met/exceeded out of total indicators)	
	Action Plan 2016–17	Action Plan 2018–21
Results-based management	1 out of 3 (33.3%)	7 out of 12 (58%)
Accountability	4 out of 6 (66.6%)	3 out of 10 (30%)
Oversight	5 out of 10 (50%)	4 out of 7 (57%)
Human and financial resources	5 out of 5 (100%)	8 out of 14 (57%)
Capacity	2 out of 3 (66.6%)	3 out of 7 (43%)
Knowledge, communication and coherence	5 out of 6 (83.3%)	4 out of 7 (57%)
TOTAL	19 out of 33 (57.5%)	29 out of 57 (51%)

Note: Data for 2018–21 are based on the latest available as of June 2021; reporting by the end of the year could change the results.

61. There has been a structured process to follow up on the recommendations from the 2016 evaluation¹² of the Action Plan 2010–15. The majority of recommendations have been acted upon, with the exception of those that were determined to be of less importance, those for which circumstances had evolved and those for which a lack of resources hampered implementation.
62. The ILO improved its framework to support the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming over the review period in core processes.¹³ This framework includes the increased roles and responsibilities of the Human Resources Development Department (HRD), the reformed process for appraising development cooperation projects, and the efforts of specific gender-focused staff within departments to support gender-responsive work.

D. Efficiency

Programme outcome level

Key finding 13: Efficient delivery of inclusive gender-responsive activities is demonstrated by the increased mobilization of resources to promote and realize gender equality in the world of work without an increase in staff capacity.

Institutional outcome

Key finding 14: The ILO's institutional capacity-building on gender equality and mainstreaming is uneven across the ILO's operations, for constituents and in particular for staff.

Key finding 15: The ILO's gender equality and mainstreaming support structures, including those based in the Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Branch (GEDI), as measured against responsibilities, are not sufficient. Overall resource allocations (staff and non-staff) to implement the ambitious Action Plan 2016–17 and Action Plan 2018–21 appear insufficient.

Key finding 16: More resources for the ILO's gender equality and mainstreaming efforts can be accessed by creating more opportunities and tapping into the ILO's staff commitment and interest in gender equality and mainstreaming, such as network- and team-based collaboration.

¹² ILO, *Independent thematic evaluation of ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality, 2010–15*, 9 February 2016; summarized in GB.332/INS/6.

¹³ Custodians were assigned in different departments on the different targets of the action plans to distribute responsibilities, ownership and accountability.

- 63. Financial allocations to gender-responsive actions across policy outcomes targeting jobs and employment, labour migration, workplace compliance and labour inspection, and the protection of vulnerable groups have increased. Gender equality-responsive actions in 2020–21 were concentrated on delivering adequate and effective protection for all and on employment and skills promotion.
- 64. Many policy outcomes include capacity development for constituents through training on gender equality. This led to improvements in areas such as employment services, active labour markets, skills and employability programmes, disaster management, migration and fair recruitment initiatives.
- 65. The action plans did not present any framework or annual plan for capacity development. For instance, current training on gender equality and mainstreaming is conducted on demand or on an ad hoc basis. Training is constrained by resource availability and varying levels of expertise among staff and awareness as to what training material is available.
- 66. Resource-efficient implementation has taken place for the action plans, but has not been sufficient to support institutional capacity on gender equality at all levels. The current approach assumes that a significant amount of the coordination and implementation support can be conducted by a small team. However, resources are not sufficient to realize a more strategic and systemic approach, including systemic support in key areas and a space for a structured dialogue on how to progress in respect of gender equality and mainstreaming in various departments and policy outcomes.

E. Likelihood of impact and sustainability

Gender equality and mainstreaming in programmatic work

Key finding 17: The ILO's programmatic work is generating some impact with a gender dimension, but it is not always visible, clearly monitored or communicated.

Key finding 18: The ILO's programmatic work on gender equality lacks, in part, an overall strategy, an identity with a clear value proposition, and strategies, targets and tools to optimize impact and ILO positioning on gender, including within the UN system.

Key finding 19: The ILO has used partnerships in areas with a gender dimension to good effect. This has generated additional visibility and impact, although these instances tend to be more ad hoc in nature.

Key finding 20: ILO funding for gender equality and gender-responsive actions is increasing, but more can and needs to be done to mobilize funding, in order to increase the rate of progress for achieving outcomes.

Institutional gender equality and mainstreaming

Key finding 21: The ILO has built institutional gender equality and mainstreaming capacity to oversee a wide range of gender-related actions with impact and successes, but impact on the institution is constrained by challenges in respect of sustained and mainstreamed gender-responsive capacity development.

Key finding 22: The sustainability of gender equality and mainstreaming in the Organization is mixed. Some progress has been made in respect of its institutionalization, but sustainability needs to be built more explicitly into gender action planning and strategies to increase prospects for sustainability and to accelerate change.

- 67. Impact with a clear gender dimension is taking place in some policy areas, but may not be fully captured. There are weak gender-responsive project indicators and poor monitoring and reporting practices. The creation of a dedicated gender policy outcome

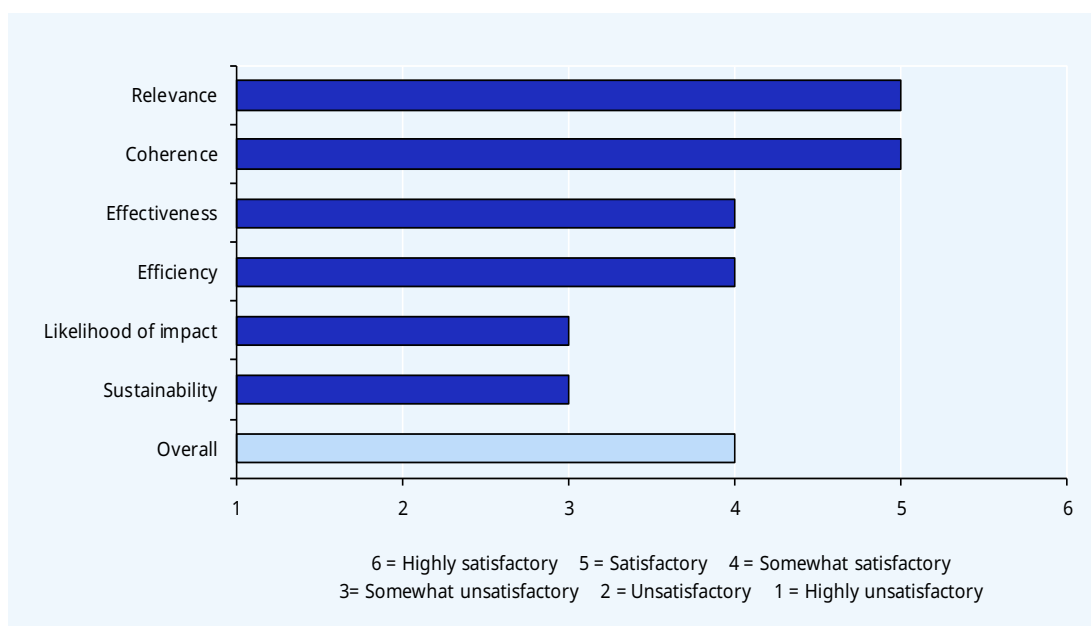
has been welcome, but there is a perception that this has not been matched by visible mainstreaming along with gender-targeted programmes across the other policy outcomes. While the visibility of global research publications, flagship products and global products that have a gender dimension or a focus on gender has improved significantly, a reliable assessment of the impact of these knowledge investments is not available.

68. The ILO's strategy and value proposition on gender equality and mainstreaming in programmatic work lacks a clear framework, both in respect of articulation and in the communication of results – in part a consequence of the mixing of both institutional change (internally) and programme outcome results (through ILO action and services) in the same gender equality and mainstreaming policy and action plans. In the absence of an ILO-wide common framework on gender equality in the ILO's programmatic work, interviews with staff do not demonstrate a clear or consistent interpretation of what ILO gender equality and mainstreaming is in the context of development cooperation. Gender equality and mainstreaming-related systems and support to develop strong gender-related impact are piecemeal rather than comprehensive.
69. The ILO policy departments, regions, decent work technical support teams and country offices have interesting experiences, assets and tools that could contribute to the ILO's value proposition on gender equality and mainstreaming, but this is poorly documented. A well-articulated framework is required to establish a portfolio of gender-responsive interventions and typologies that reflect specific needs for support to achieve gender equality in countries. Likewise, a structured reflection on – and process for assessing – gender equality and mainstreaming-related offers relative to other actors (for example, other UN agencies) in terms of innovation, added value and how to use gender equality and mainstreaming would be welcome to create additional funding and opportunities for implementation.
70. Good examples of partnerships with a gender dimension exist, such as the Equal Pay International Coalition, but collaboration is not necessarily systematic, often ad hoc and less effective than desirable with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). The ILO has specific core competency areas, but is risk-averse, and staff gender capacity is uneven in the Office. There continues to be scope for a more proactive approach to partnerships and funding opportunities.

Overall assessment

71. Figure 3 presents a general assessment of the identified performance levels for ILO gender equality and mainstreaming efforts.

► **Figure 3. Evaluation of the ILO's gender equality and mainstreaming efforts: Ratings by criterion**



Conclusions and lessons learned

72. The ILO's Policy on Gender Equality and Mainstreaming and its action plans on gender equality are relevant to its policy framework and results framework, including its strategic plans, related programmes and budgets, and to the realization of the SDGs.
73. The ILO's gender equality and mainstreaming strategy and approaches are coherent with the Organization's internal framework and its development cooperation programmes. Its gender equality and mainstreaming efforts have increased the coherence between its policies, plans and Conventions. Its action plans are fully aligned with the UN-SWAP 2.0.
74. The ILO country programmes show a consistent, although varying, presence of gender-responsive results per policy outcome, though there is a lack of systematic monitoring and reporting on specific gender programme objectives. Support for programme outcomes on gender equality and mainstreaming is also uneven, and assumptions for achieving gender equality and mainstreaming results need to be reviewed. At the institutional level, while progress has been made to support gender mainstreaming in core institutional processes, more can be done.
75. The ILO's programmatic work is generating some gender-related impact and visibility in policy declarations, standard-setting, global knowledge and research publications. Gender-related impact is also being generated in country programmes and project work, although this is limited by a lack of strategies and tools to optimize impact, including systematic impact monitoring to inform these strategies.
76. The lack of a clearly articulated gender-equality and mainstreaming strategic framework and value proposition for programmatic outcomes that reflect the ILO's distinctive features and current or potential comparative advantage is constraining innovation, staff contribution and product development in gender equality and mainstreaming. This, in turn, is limiting impact prospects, including a more systematic approach to partnering in order to increase impact and sustainability (including financial sustainability via new funding related to gender equality and mainstreaming).

77. The sustainability of institutional gender equality and mainstreaming needs to be factored more explicitly in strategy-setting, with more strategic-level and management-level dialogue around gender equality and mainstreaming implementation, and more empowerment and ownership at the staff level.

Recommendations

78. The following recommendations are complementary, and should be considered for inclusion in the new action plan.¹⁴ The new action plan should also consider targets from previous action plans that have not been met but are still valid.

Recommendations regarding gender equality and mainstreaming in ILO programmes

Recommendation 1

79. Develop an ILO gender equality and mainstreaming value proposition to facilitate the ILO's strategic positioning and enhance the visibility and impact of its programmatic outcomes.
80. The value proposition on the added value and contribution of the ILO in respect of gender equality should include priorities for a medium-term time frame of five years and a portfolio of gender-responsive interventions within policy areas and for a typology of countries. It would also require mapping work conducted by partners, the documenting of the ILO's comparative advantage and the identification of modalities for tools, innovations, strategies and partnerships and for the use of statistics. Gender-specific and gender-responsive programmes could create new funding opportunities and increase the ILO's comparative advantage.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ILO Senior Management (Office of the Director-General (CABINET)), DDG/P (policy departments), DDG/FOP (ILO regions), Deputy Director-General for Management and Reform (DDG/MR) PROGRAM	High	Medium-term	Low

Recommendation 2

81. Develop a dedicated and comprehensive support programme for gender-responsive programmatic work to support constituents and enhance their capacity to achieve gender equality in the world of work.

¹⁴ A more detailed explanation of these recommendations is provided in [section 6](#) of the main evaluation report.

- 82.** This will require greater collaboration between ILO regions and headquarters to ensure region-relevant strategies and gender-responsive capacity development programmes to serve the needs of ILO constituents, including a focus on recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ILO Senior Management (CABINET), DDG/P (policy departments), DDG/FOP (ILO regions), DDG/MR, International Training Centre of the ILO, ACTRAV and ACT/EMP	High	Medium-term	Low

Recommendation 3

- 83.** Strengthen the ILO's framework for partnering on gender equality.
- 84.** A more structured framework (partnership management framework) for approaching gender-related collaboration should complement the ILO's value proposition in respect of gender equality in its programmatic work and in the UN system. This would build on the portfolio of interventions for typologies of countries mentioned in recommendation 1, and lead to a better matching of partnerships.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ILO Senior Management (CABINET), DDG/P, DDG/FOP, Multilateral Cooperation Department (MULTILATERALS), PARDEV, DDG/MR	Medium	Long-term	Medium

Recommendations regarding institutional and programme outcomes

Recommendation 4

- 85.** Develop a more systemic, programme-based approach and delivery system for capacity development and training within the ILO relating to gender equality and mainstreaming.
- 86.** This should include a comprehensive structuring of needs relating to gender equality and mainstreaming competencies, using a gender equality and mainstreaming capacity development framework that describes how capacity development will be managed, implemented and monitored; and how it will be institutionalized in core ILO processes and integrated in wider gender equality and mainstreaming tools and support, to facilitate impact optimization. Systematic gender audits based on past experience can help in this regard.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ILO Senior Management (CABINET), DDG/P, GEDI, DDG/MR, HRD, DDG/FOP (ILO regions) International Training Centre of the ILO, ACTRAV and ACT/EMP	High	Short-term (time frame for the formulation of the new action plan)	Low

Recommendations regarding institutional gender equality and mainstreaming

Recommendation 5

87. Develop a medium-term strategy to mainstream gender equality in the ILO.
88. Strengthen the anchoring of, and support for, the ILO action plan for gender equality in the ILO's institutional processes, including a clear strategy-setting process to structure and guide the development of the action plan. This would include a more explicit strategic framework, dedicated strategic and management oversight and guidance, strengthened ILO leadership, on-call external advisory support as needed, and greater involvement of ILO departments and staff to increase bottom-up ownership and sustainability.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ILO Senior Management (CABINET), DDG/P, GEDI, DDG/MR, DDG/FOP (all departments; current and future custodians in the action plan)	High	Short-term (time frame for the formulation of the new action plan)	Low

Recommendation 6

89. Further develop gender equality and mainstreaming support processes and tools to mainstream gender equality within the ILO.
90. The new ILO action plan for gender equality should include strengthened gender equality and mainstreaming support processes and tools to institutionalize gender equality and mainstreaming, based on a systemic approach to gender equality and mainstreaming capacity development for ILO staff. Other elements are a strengthened ILO Gender Network; more collaborative, team-based and project-based work; more opportunities for ILO staff to champion specific areas; and more knowledge-sharing on good practice and communication on success stories.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
ILO Senior Management (CABINET), DDG/P, GEDI, DDG/MR, DDG/FOP (all departments; current and future custodians in the action plan)	High	Short-term (time frame for the formulation of the new action plan)	Low

Office response

Recommendation 1

- 91.** The Office is developing and will operationalize an Office-wide theory of change for gender equality anchored in the ILO's tripartite structure and normative mandate. The theory of change will be informed by in-country realities and the needs of constituents, the transformative agenda for gender equality outlined in the Centenary Declaration and the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, as well as other relevant high-level policy documents and declarations approved by the Governing Body and the International Labour Conference.

Recommendation 2

- 92.** The Office will continue and expand its efforts to support constituents in implementing gender-responsive programmes and strategies. A strengthened ILO Global Gender Network can serve as a catalyst and community of practice for the design of innovative projects, initiatives and interventions. To this end, the Office will enhance technical capacities in the field offices, and increase coordination across Policy Portfolio departments, between the Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) and the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) and in the programming of the International Training Centre of the ILO.

Recommendation 3

- 93.** Building on experiences and lessons learned from past and ongoing partnerships at the field and global levels, as well as from existing UN-related frameworks at the field level, the Office will continue to strengthen its strategic engagement with the UN and the wider multilateral system on gender equality. The above-mentioned Office-wide theory of change on gender equality will assist in providing a clear rationale for the further development of partnerships at the global, regional and country levels.

Recommendation 4

- 94.** An Office-wide strategy for capacity development on gender equality and mainstreaming, as envisaged in the ILO action plan for gender equality, is currently under implementation. Plans for a more systemic approach to programme delivery are being pursued, as described in the programme and budget and the four-year Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 5

95. Better alignment and integration of the implementation of the action plan for gender equality with the implementation of the high-level strategic plan and programme and budget will provide the necessary strategic framework, while providing strengthened leadership and accountability for gender equality and mainstreaming. The Office will ensure this approach in the development of the next action plan for 2022–25.

Recommendation 6

96. The Office will ensure that the continued capacity development of staff, clear recognition of the roles of gender focal points and coordinators, up-to-date practical tools and guidance for programming and designing development cooperation projects, a strengthened ILO Global Gender Network, and increased sharing of experiences and lessons learned are fully incorporated in the action plan for 2022–25.

► Part III. Independent high-level evaluation of the ILO's programme of work in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, 2018–21

Purpose and scope

97. The independent high-level evaluation of the ILO's programme of work in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka examined the extent to which the ILO's programmes have effectively served to achieve the Decent Work Agenda in the four selected South Asian countries during the last two ILO programme and budget biennia (2018–19 and 2020–21). Given the surge of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the evaluation includes consideration of the ILO's support to countries to address the emergent decent work challenges. In line with UN good practices, the evaluation examined the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the programmes.

Summary of findings

A. Relevance

Key finding 1: During the period under review – based on national constituents' feedback, as well as various evaluations and other assessments – the ILO Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were largely aligned with the ILO's mandate and constituents' priorities.

Key finding 2: Country-level ILO staff, constituents and other partners generally viewed ILO capacity-building activities for national government counterparts positively. However, many of the same respondents also perceived that the capacity-building needs of the social partners and of representatives of subnational governments and labour market institutions required more attention.

Key finding 3: While the ILO reportedly conducted frequent consultations with constituents and other stakeholders, and used participatory methodologies to assess needs and agree on priorities, many ILO project and country office personnel, and constituents across all four countries, perceived that consultations on project design could have been more proactive and extensive.

Key finding 4: Based on document review, the ILO, in collaboration with national partners, produced significant amounts of data and research to guide its own and other institutions' decisions. However, both ILO staff and national counterparts highlighted that gaps in knowledge and quality of information persisted in some key areas, release of data could be timelier, and information-sharing between projects and with external stakeholders could be improved.

Key finding 5: Based on accounts from ILO staff, country-level constituents and other partners, as well as document review, the ILO provided various types of assistance to help country counterparts deal with COVID-19 impacts, including by mobilizing resources for recovery efforts in some countries. However, responsiveness to constituents' immediate needs was constrained by limited resources; limited flexibility in donor, as well as its own, financial and administrative mechanisms; and the nature of its expertise. Constituents reported medium- and long-term recovery needs that aligned with current ILO work streams.

98. The relevance of ILO programming to national constituents' needs in the four evaluation countries was high overall, with some gaps. ILO programmes tended to invest the largest share of DWCP time and resources into building the capacities of national government institutions, and although this was useful for policy work and strengthening government services, the Organization paid relatively less attention to the capacity-building needs and expectations of other critical stakeholders. Notably, the representatives of subnational governments and labour-market institutions needed more assistance to strengthen their capacities to implement laws and policies, and employers' and workers' organizations needed more support to defend and serve their members' interests.
99. The ILO's contributions to knowledge creation, its internationally recognized normative frameworks, and its active engagement in UN and other coordination bodies helped to orient activities in ways that increased the overall relevance of labour, vocational training, migration, social protection and employment-oriented development assistance programmes.
100. The ILO's response to COVID-19 included several timely and well-targeted interventions ¹⁵ to help constituents face countries' immediate challenges emerging from COVID-19. Looking forward to countries' medium- and long-term recovery needs, the decent work issues highlighted by COVID-19 reinforced the relevance of the ILO's current work in several current programme areas. ¹⁶

B. Coherence

Key finding 6: Based on constituent and other partner feedback, and document review, ILO interventions, strategies and policy recommendations took into consideration national policies and international development and normative frameworks, including the SDGs. The four DWCPs and related ILO programmes of work were also broadly aligned with the Organization's strategic programme framework. ILO staff and constituents highlighted the important effect

¹⁵ These included needs assessments, COVID-19 workplace safety protocols, and economic recovery assistance for micro and small enterprises (Sri Lanka); skills recognition programmes (Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka); migrant worker repatriation assistance (Nepal); and social dialogue on how to share costs associated with tackling the COVID-19 pandemic (Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan).

¹⁶ These include occupational safety and health, formalizing the informal sector, social protection, technical and vocational skills training and qualification systems, and forward-looking employment strategies.

of donor priorities on resource availability for activities related to different DWCPs and country programme outcomes that resulted in uneven attention being given to some priorities.

Key finding 7: Based on the evaluation team's analysis and stakeholder reports, the four countries applied results-based management principles by formulating DWCPs comprising clear priorities and outcomes. Some monitoring frameworks were overly complicated, and data collection and reporting on DWCP indicators were limited for all countries, making results-based assessment of progress difficult. Based on the synthesis of evaluation reports, weak monitoring and evaluation frameworks were common in many project designs across the four countries.

101. ILO programmes in the four countries were generally well aligned with country, ILO and broader UN development objectives. Overall, ILO country directors were effective in focusing ILO interventions in the four countries on areas where the ILO has strong institutional mandates and comparative advantages, and in ensuring that these were included in broader UN country development frameworks. However, in most case study countries, the ILO's resources were not well distributed among DWCPs and country programme outcomes, largely reflecting challenges in identifying donors whose priorities closely aligned with its own and with those of national constituents.
102. Although designing an overarching DWCP was useful for channelling the ILO's support for constituents to mutually agreed and strategically important outcomes, DWCP monitoring frameworks were not consistently well formulated and used for regular monitoring. While the ILO made some laudable efforts to engage tripartite constituents collectively in monitoring DWCP progress overall, well-documented evidence on accomplishments and gaps, whether compiled by the ILO or by national counterparts, is lacking.

C. Effectiveness

Key finding 8: Based on ILO staff, constituents and other partner accounts, and document review, the ILO made noteworthy contributions to policy and legal framework strengthening, institutional capacity-building, knowledge creation and awareness-raising in various areas, including labour administration, industrial relations, employment, migration, social protection and fundamental principles and rights at work. The volume and key areas of accomplishment, as well as gaps in planned versus actual results, varied by country.

Key finding 9: ILO staff, national counterparts and past evaluations reported that the ILO's technical expertise, strong in-country relationships and relatively long-term investments in some programme areas, and complementary efforts by external stakeholders (such as brands, buyers and trading partners), were key success factors. However, in respect of development cooperation projects, limited time frames and funding, turnover in project and counterpart personnel, persistent counterpart institution capacity deficits, external disruptions from political change and COVID-19, and the ILO's own internal management shortcomings, were often cited as limitations.

Key finding 10: Based on ILO staff accounts and document review, DWCPs integrated ILO cross-cutting international labour standards, social dialogue, non-discrimination and, to a lesser extent, environmental concerns.

Key finding 11: While highlighting multiple ways that ILO specialists contributed positively to DWCP effectiveness, many country-level ILO staff members and constituents perceived that their access to timely, high-quality and relevant expertise could be improved. Specialists from the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team for South Asia and Country Office for India reported that the team had adopted many strategies to meet DWCP demand, while also affirming that new technical assistance modalities merited consideration, post-pandemic.

Key finding 12: Based on document review, the four DWCPs were largely successful in diversifying their funding base and in growing their project portfolios from 2018 to 2021, with some variance between countries. The DWCPs likewise featured several examples of joint programming with ILO strategic partners, including with other UN agencies.

- 103.** In the four countries, the ILO contributed substantially to building the capacity of key labour market institutions in important areas (labour inspection, vocational training, social security administration, employment services, labour migration information and facilitation services). With largely effective contributions from the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team for South Asia and Country Office for India and Geneva-based specialists, the four DWCPs likewise contributed to improvements in national legal, regulatory and policy frameworks in a wide variety of domains.¹⁷ ILO technical advice, support for awareness-raising, advocacy and training, as well as research activities, provided evidence, facilitated dialogue and highlighted ways to improve working conditions and access to jobs. Although mostly on a limited scale, the ILO's enterprise- and community-level interventions improved workers' lives and livelihoods and, in some cases, produced scalable intervention models.¹⁸ The ILO's increasing use of programmatic and regional approaches¹⁹ increased synergies between projects and DWCPs and potential impact, although internal coordination was still often weak.
- 104.** DWCPs were moderately effective in promoting ILO cross-cutting priorities on social dialogue and international labour standards,²⁰ with some noteworthy accomplishments, as well as persistent gaps. Although to differing degrees, the ILO's programming in each country effectively included gender mainstreaming and gender-focused interventions in its projects, even though design and implementation gaps remain.²¹ Similarly, programme portfolios consistently included interventions targeting the needs of marginalized groups.²² Largely due to inadequate guidance on ways to operationalize environmental concerns in traditional ILO programming, DWCP achievements and impact are lacking in this area.

¹⁷ These domains included: labour inspection (Bangladesh and Pakistan); industrial fire, electrical and structural safety (Bangladesh); social security (Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal); occupational safety and health (all four countries); labour migration (all four countries); rural enterprise development and job creation (all four countries); and forced labour and child labour (all four countries).

¹⁸ For example, with support from the World Bank, Nepal scaled up employment centres, modelled after an ILO intervention.

¹⁹ As seen in the multi-project cluster approach, with integrated interventions to address supply-chain working conditions in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and the multi-project migration unit and employment generation projects in Sri Lanka.

²⁰ Many projects featured strategies to promote the ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions. Programmes promoted social dialogue by forming tripartite steering committees and facilitating tripartite and bipartite working groups and negotiations.

²¹ Evident in Sri Lanka's northern province programming, in Better Work Bangladesh, and in the support from Pakistan and Nepal for the formalization of domestic workers and home-based workers.

²² These included informal sector workers, women, young people, persons with disabilities, migrant workers and indigenous peoples.

105. The ILO contributed effectively to UN reforms by leading or co-leading thematic groups, participating in joint programming, and increasingly and usefully building partnerships with sister agencies.²³

D. Efficiency

Key finding 13: ILO staff, tripartite constituents and partners, and independent project evaluators frequently highlighted that the ILO's administrative and financial management procedures and systems are unnecessarily complex and unwieldy, and often contribute to project implementation delays.

Key finding 14: While internal and external stakeholders generally perceived ILO staff to be well qualified and adequately supervised, many ILO project and country office staff thought that clear career paths within the ILO were lacking, especially for national staff. ILO staff and partners also highlighted gaps in country office expertise, and noted examples where country office and project staff roles could be delineated more effectively.

Key finding 15: Based on donor, partner and ILO staff accounts, the ILO made efforts to promote synergies within its project portfolios, by clustering projects in the same geographic or thematic areas, sharing resources and improving coordination between projects and with other UN agencies.

106. While the ILO has decided to increasingly decentralize programme management to the country and regional levels, evaluation findings highlight that administrative, financial and human resource management systems and decision-making authority have not evolved in pace with programme management changes. Moreover, the implementation of current UN reforms demands increased DWCP capacity and agility, so that the ILO can participate fully in country-level joint planning and programme implementation, and is not left out of increasingly important collective resource mobilization efforts.
107. Among the factors affecting programme efficiency, evaluation findings strongly suggest that some of the ILO's corporate administrative procedures hindered DWCP results. These included excessive paperwork, as well as slow recruitment and procurement processes. Insufficient decentralization of decision-making authority, manifested by inadequate differentiation between administrative requirements governing large and small projects or expenditures, and limited discretion in human resource decisions, were likewise barriers to efficiency. Since human talent and initiative ultimately make the difference in advancing the success of organizations, overcoming the deficiencies cited by evaluation respondents in identifying, promoting and retaining qualified personnel is critical for the ILO's future success.

E. Likelihood of impact and sustainability

Key finding 16: ILO staff and other stakeholders perceived the ILO's policy and institutional capacity-building interventions to be highly sustainable, but noted that achieving results in these areas required long-term investments. Document review and stakeholder feedback showed that national ownership, institution-building, development of exit strategies and documenting good practices and lessons learned contributed positively to long-lasting impact.

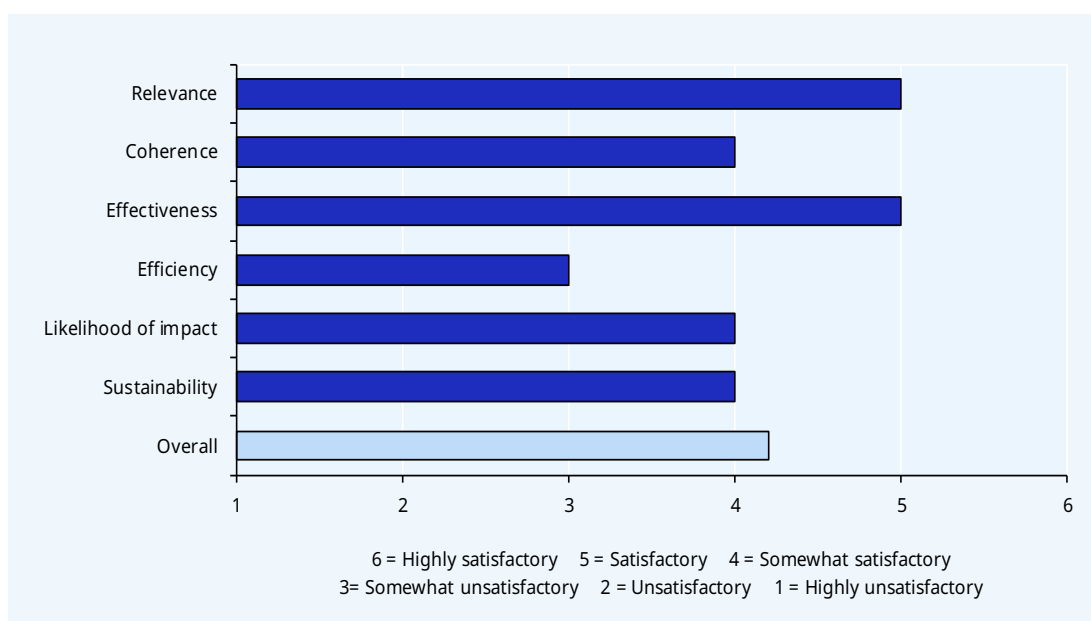
²³ Some examples included partnerships with the IOM and UN-Women on protecting labour migrants, and with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on improved livelihoods and working conditions for rural workers.

- 108.** The ILO has contributed to a significant body of national and subnational legal and policy reform, strengthened critical labour market institutions and functions, and contributed to social partners' and other civil society organizations' voices in policies and their implementation, key factors in building national ownership and sustainable results.
- 109.** The ILO's increasing use of programmatic and regional approaches ²⁴ increased synergies between projects and DWCPs and potential impact, although internal coordination was often still weak.
- 110.** Evaluation findings suggest that important strategies for sustaining results were a relatively longer-term and consistent focus on a limited number of constituent priorities, attention to varied dimensions of institutional capacity, devising and implementing exit strategies, and documenting interventions.

Overall assessment

- 111.** Based on the preceding findings and conclusions, the evaluation team's overall scoring of the ILO's performance in the four case study countries, using EVAL's six-point rating system, is presented in figure 4.

► **Figure 4. Evaluation of the ILO's programme of work in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka: Ratings by criterion**



Recommendations

Recommendation 1

- 112.** Design future projects, mobilize and allocate resources to achieve a more balanced distribution of ILO technical assistance and resources between constituents and national and subnational governance levels, in line with DWCP priorities, social partners' needs and capacities, and available ILO resources.

²⁴ As seen in the multi-project cluster approach with integrated interventions to address supply-chain working conditions in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and the multi-project migration unit and employment generation projects in Sri Lanka.

- 113.** Increase the volume and quality of DWCP interventions that build the institutional capacities of workers' and employers' organizations to grow their membership, defend members' rights and interests, and provide in-demand member services.
- 114.** Increase institutional capacity-building of tripartite subnational and industry-level constituents, building on existing successful interventions.²⁵

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
Country offices, DWTs, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RO-Asia and the Pacific), PARDEV, PROGRAM	Medium	Medium-term	Medium

Recommendation 2

- 115.** Improve monitoring of the progress of DWCPs, in some countries, by establishing practical and feasible DWCP performance monitoring plans; and in all countries, monitor and report progress against DWCP outcomes more regularly.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
Country offices, DWTs, RO-Asia and the Pacific, PROGRAM, DWCP, national steering committees	High	Medium-term	Low

Recommendation 3

- 116.** New projects and programme strategies should focus on work streams that are critical for medium-term socio-economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, and that will contribute to mitigating lasting negative effects on marginalized populations.
- 117.** Expand or introduce support for policies and services that are needed during the recovery period – for example, incentives and intervention models that help recently returned migrant workers and workers from worst-affected industries, enterprises and geographic areas to recover and to re-establish employment/livelihood activities.
- 118.** Continue current technical and financial support for strengthening social protection mechanisms, capitalizing on current high levels of political will.
- 119.** Continue to support constituents' data collection, research and social dialogue activities to assess needs and guide investments to ensure well-targeted and human-centred recovery.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
Country offices, DWTs, relevant headquarters units	High	Short-term	High

²⁵ Includes support for provincial labour-related action plans and policies, social security institutions and tripartite social dialogue mechanisms (Nepal and Pakistan); collaboration with garment industry associations (Bangladesh and Pakistan); and capacity-building on foreign employment and skills recognition frameworks (Nepal and Sri Lanka).

Recommendation 4

- 120.** Building on the emerging good practices of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka with geographic or thematic programme clusters, ILO country offices should design future intervention strategies in ways that favour operational and thematic synergies, and that facilitate resource-sharing between ILO projects and with sister UN agencies.
- 121.** Develop theories of change or intervention models for thematic or geographic programmes (above project level), and use for resource mobilization and operational planning activities.
- 122.** Advocate for more flexible funding modalities based on a cluster approach.
- 123.** When the ILO has clear value added, and strategic advantages outweigh costs, participate in UN agency joint programmes.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
Country offices, DWTs, RO-Asia and the Pacific, PARDEV	High	Immediate	Medium

Recommendation 5

- 124.** Review the technical and oversight responsibilities of country office programming staff, and establish a clear organizational structure, delineating individual officers' responsibility for constituent relationships, technical oversight on thematic areas, monitoring and evaluation, and communications.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
Country offices, DWTs, RO-Asia and the Pacific, DDG/FOP and relevant headquarters units, HRD	Medium	Medium-term	Medium

Recommendation 6

- 125.** Continue to reform the ILO's administrative, financial and human resources management systems, in line with decentralization requirements and in favour of simplification and more flexible and adaptive management.
- 126.** Create a mechanism that allows country offices to flexibly allocate resources for activities under a certain budgetary threshold.
- 127.** Give country directors more discretion in human resources decisions, based on performance evaluation.
- 128.** Simplify internal reporting and other administrative requirements, differentiating between small and larger projects and expenditures.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
RO-Asia and the Pacific, DDG/MR and relevant headquarters units	High	Long-term	Moderate

Recommendation 7

- 129.** Towards a more sustainable contribution to DWCP outcomes, seek donor funding streams and UN agency partnerships, to enable a higher proportion of interventions of a longer duration and larger scale.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
RO-Asia and the Pacific, country offices, DDG/FOP and relevant headquarters units	High	Short-term	Low

Recommendation 8

- 130.** Transition from existing subregional models for delivering ILO specialist expertise to more decentralized and flexible approaches.
- 131.** Outpost more experts in-country versus decent work technical support teams and regional offices, in accordance with assessment of country needs.
- 132.** Building on positive experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, expand the use of virtual communication platforms for the delivery of specialist expertise.

Responsible unit	Priority	Time implication	Resource implication
RO-Asia and the Pacific, DWT, country offices, DDG/FOP, DDG/P and relevant headquarters units	High	Medium-term	Medium

Office response

- 133.** The Office acknowledges the evaluation's overall assessment, and is satisfied with the assessment of the relevance and effectiveness of the DWCPs in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The Office would like to thank the tripartite constituents and key stakeholders in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for their participation and contribution to this evaluation.

Recommendation 1

- 134.** The Office partially agrees with this recommendation, which is to help country offices design projects and mobilize resources to achieve a more balanced distribution of ILO resources, with the proviso that this will be done in line with the capacity to deliver such resources. The ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific will support country offices in increasing the institutional capacity-building of tripartite subnational and industry-level constituents, building on existing successful interventions at the national and subnational levels.

Recommendation 2

- 135.** The Office agrees with this recommendation, and decent work technical support teams in the region and the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific will continue to work with country offices to improve the monitoring and reporting of the progress of DWCPs. The Regional Office will continue to build ILO staff capacity on the monitoring and

reporting of DWCPs. At the country level, the role of tripartite national steering committees in the monitoring of DWCPs has been recognized, and the Regional Office will continue to support country offices in strengthening their capacities in effective monitoring, upon request.

Recommendation 3

- 136.** The Office partially agrees with this recommendation. Country offices and decent work technical support teams play important roles in the design of new projects and programme strategies. Specialists have important roles to play in supporting constituents' data collection, research and social dialogue activities, in order to assess needs and guide investments to ensure well-targeted and human-centred recovery.

Recommendation 4

- 137.** The Office partially supports this recommendation. While resource-sharing with UN agencies has strategic value, the administrative process has not been straightforward. Hence, such arrangements will be supported by the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific based on a careful assessment of advantages, disadvantages and costs.

Recommendation 5

- 138.** The Office partially supports this recommendation. The recommended changes are necessary for improving DWCP implementation and enhancing the effectiveness of ILO technical services to the constituents. However, establishing organizational structure at the country level is beyond the authority of country directors. Any changes, to be effective, must be supported by staff job descriptions and by human resources policy.

Recommendation 6

- 139.** The Office supports this recommendation. It is important to note that the implementation of this recommendation will require continued ILO administrative, financial and human resources management system reforms, and the further decentralization of responsibilities from headquarters departments to the field.

Recommendation 7

- 140.** The Office partially accepts this recommendation. Longer duration and larger-scale resource mobilization will require strong technical support from the Partnerships and Field Support Department (PARDEV) to country offices. This may require developing tools for cost estimates of the DWCP, so that reaching out to donor funding can start early and proactively.

Recommendation 8

- 141.** The Office welcomes this recommendation, which will require the collaboration of the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific with the Strategic Programming and Management Department (PROGRAM) and HRD. The Regional Office will review advantages and disadvantages in outpostting technical specialists at country level, and will facilitate dialogue to achieve the best delivery model.

► Draft decision

- 142.** The Governing Body requested the Director-General to take into consideration the recommendations of the three high-level independent evaluations presented in document GB.343/PFA/10 (paragraphs 26–37, 78–90 and 112–132) and to ensure their appropriate implementation.