



► Synthesis review of the ILO's labour protection interventions since 2015: What works, for whom and why?

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Synthesis review of the ILO's labour protection interventions since 2015: What works, for whom and why?

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▶ **Synthesis review of the ILO's labour protection interventions since 2015: What works, for whom and why?**

This review was prepared as an input into the International Labour Conference Recurrent Discussion on Labour Protection. The synthesis review has undergone quality control by the ILO Evaluation Office.

Foreword

Since 2012, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Evaluation Office (EVAL) has regularly contributed to the Organization's recurrent discussions on selected issues by preparing companion pieces to recurrent reports. The aim is to enhance organizational learning by systematically synthesizing information on results, lessons learned and good practices. So far, EVAL has produced synthesis reviews for recurrent discussions on social dialogue (2013),¹ employment (2014),² labour protection (2015),³ social dialogue (2017),⁴ social protection (2020)⁵ and employment (2022).⁶

This synthesis review report is prepared in advance of the Recurrent Discussion on Labour Protection, which is scheduled for discussion at the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference.

The study was carried out by Julio Sa Rego, an independent consultant, under the supervision of EVAL. It presents results and lessons learned from selected evaluations and relevant ILO publications in the labour protection domain.

We acknowledge with thanks our colleagues from the Work and Equality Department (WORKQUALITY) for their inputs on the scope and preparation of this report. Thanks are also due to Craig Russon, Senior Evaluation Officer, for his support throughout the study.

We hope that the findings from this evaluative study will serve to guide our constituents, colleagues and others who work on the issue of labour protection.

Guy Thijs

Director

ILO EVAL

1 ILO, [Social Dialogue: What works and why? A synthesis review 2002–2012](#).

2 ILO, [Decent work results of ILO employment promotion interventions: Lessons learned from evaluations, 2003–2013](#).

3 ILO, [Effective Labour Protection for All: Lessons learned from a synthesis review, 2004–2014](#).

4 ILO, [Social dialogue interventions: What works and why? Lessons learned from a synthesis review, 2013–2016](#).

5 ILO, [Social protection \(social security\) interventions: What works and why? Lessons learned from a synthesis review, 2012–2018](#).

6 ILO, [Synthesis review of the ILO's employment interventions for the period 2015–2021: What works and why](#).

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Abbreviations

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
EVAL	ILO Evaluation Office
ILO	International Labour Organization
LABADMIN/ OSH	Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health Branch
CPO	Country Programme Outcome
OSH	Occupational safety and health
RBSA	Regular Budget Supplementary Account
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
WORKQUALITY	Work and Equality Department

▶ Executive summary

In the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008, labour protection is one of the essential components of the social protection pillar. With the growing trend of remunerated work, it has become crucial to ensure that workers are adequately compensated for their time, effort and work in safe and healthy environments. This includes ensuring that workers receive fair and reasonable salaries, have reasonable working hours, and enjoy safe working conditions. It is essential to note that these protections apply to all workers, regardless of their employment or contractual status.

A background report is being prepared by the Office for the Recurrent Discussion on Labour Protection by the International Labour Conference, in a context of **increased centrality for labour protection, to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world of work confronted by multidimensional crises**. Digitization, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, armed conflicts and climate change have transformed economies, fragilized the least equipped countries and pressured workers all over the globe, increasing social vulnerabilities.

The present working paper is the second synthesis review on labour protection issues prepared by EVAL as a contribution to the next recurrent discussion. It covers the period 2015–22 to add to the organizational learning and guidance on labour protection, with lessons from past interventions. It ultimately seeks to strengthen the ILO's capacity to make evidence-based decisions from evaluation results.

This working paper is a synthesis review of selected evaluation reports of the ILO's development cooperation programmes and projects, as well as other institutional evaluations and publications, that cover the complexity of labour protection issues. It consists of a desk review using recognized qualitative methodologies of content analysis and visual representation of findings to draw dominant narratives on the ILO's labour protection interventions. Concretely, evaluation reports and publications have been deconstructed using a tailored coding system to identify the mechanisms underpinning ILO interventions, and uncover what works, for whom and why in terms of labour protection.

By examining international labour standards related to decent work, this working paper has made it possible for us to identify a set of interventions based on rights. The underlying principle is that a strong national legal framework is essential for developing effective guidance and tools to ensure the protection of workers in rapidly changing work environments.

Therefore, several projects were oriented to sensitize national governments and other stakeholders on the ratification and implementation of the ILO Conventions. The latter tend to become a compass, providing directions for interventions. All in all, **almost 70 per cent of the evaluation reports connected the interventions with specific international labour standards**. More than 20 Conventions and Recommendations were explicitly mentioned as directly contributing to projects.

Most cited instruments related to freedom of association, collective bargaining and industrial relations. The Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98) and the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) principally seem to have directed a significant proportion of the sample projects.

The comparative advantage and mandate of the ILO in fostering social dialogue over other development actors is recognized by many evaluators. The ILO is the only intergovernmental organization based on tripartite governance that legitimizes its mediation role between governments and social partners. **Social dialogue advances labour rights and improves the livelihood of workers, but its effectiveness depends deeply on the strength of freedom of association for collective bargaining.**

The absence of freedom of association produces atomized economic actors with limited possibilities for collective mobilization for common social interests. Thus, **labour protection projects target the advancement of freedom of association to strengthen collective bargaining with a view to enhancing the protection of workers.** These projects deploy a range of complementary activities to raise awareness of the benefits of collective mobilizations, advocate in favour of freedom of association, develop the knowledge base relating working conditions to productivity, and build the capacities of workers' organizations with a view to ultimately establishing trade unions and developing collective bargaining.

The establishment of workers' organizations to develop collective bargaining may nonetheless be challenging in less structured or formal sectors, such as the digital gig economy or street vending. Workers in these sectors are generally atomized and operate independently from each other. Paradoxically, **these sectors are the most in need of the enhancement of labour protection, due to the context of precariousness and subordination to which the workers are subjected.** Additionally, they are highly vulnerable to the effects of conjunctural crises that generally tend to exacerbate preexisting inequality gaps and vulnerabilities.

The strength of workers' organizations for collective bargaining is also particularly critical in hazardous sectors, such as agriculture, construction and mining. Collective negotiations towards further labour protection may then often focus on issues related to occupational safety and health (OSH). The promotion of safer workplaces for protected workers is a dominant theme in labour protection projects. **They usually act at the prevention and/or reaction levels to secure workplaces and compensate victim workers.** The underpinning rationale is that the improvement of occupational safety and health enhances productivity and workers' quality of life.

The preventive facet is commonly advanced through the development and application of norms at the global, national and factory levels with activities of advocacy, technical assistance, capacity-building, or research and knowledge dissemination. It also relies on the enhancement of labour inspection systems through the training of labour inspectors, or awareness-raising on safety norms directed to employers and workers. The embedded theory of change is that improving capacities to conduct effective inspections results in higher compliance with norms.

The reactive aspect relies on the progress made in developing compensation schemes that safeguard the well-being of workers and their families. These schemes can take various forms, including private insurance systems, mutual-based tripartite compensation schemes or emergency cash transfers.

Cash transfer intervention models undeniably contribute to the immediate relief of issues relating to health, education, income or poverty. They provide beneficiaries with liquidity to counterbalance redistribution inequalities, and cope with immediate individual and family needs. Cash transfers do not, however, transform socio-economic structures to break the cycle of poverty and dependence. **People require regular incomes to ensure adequate living standards.** For workers, wages are their main source of income. They are a major subject of collective bargaining, with a view to ensuring a just share of the fruits of progress.

The ILO is committed to promoting fair wages to protect workers. The foundation of its interventions is enshrined in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, which calls for an adequate minimum wage, whether statutory or negotiated. Minimum wages are proven to protect workers and reduce inequalities without prejudice to competitiveness. **The intervention model of the ILO therefore often promotes the institution of minimum wages, mainly through activities of research, awareness-raising and technical assistance.**

Access to adequate living standards for workers seems to be correlated with the existence of fair wages. The latter tend to derive directly from statutory legal frameworks on wage-fixing and/or dynamic collective bargaining, both linked to the formal economy. Consequently, **the absence of formality creates contexts more conducive to inadequate protection of workers and higher incidence of poverty.**

Thus, for the ILO, the transition to formalization represents the condition to ensure labour protection for informal workers. It targets the formalization of workers by enhancing their employability or building their entrepreneurial capacities, mainly through activities of capacity-building and awareness-raising, but also knowledge production and dissemination.

Access to the formal sector may also be prevented by formal issues apart from individual capabilities, such as for migrant workers dispossessed of work permits. Migrant workers have several vulnerabilities, principally when forcibly displaced because of armed conflicts. The ability of the ILO to connect migrants to the labour market is also recognized.

These intervention models on labour protection are built on a range of activities that derive from a system of intervention based on three core types of actions: the development of capacities, advice on policies, and the production and dissemination of knowledge.

The development of capacities aims at building and maintaining the capabilities of individuals and organizations to ensure effective labour protection. **The advice on policies** aims at supporting improvements in legal and regulatory frameworks related to the protection of workers. **The production and dissemination of knowledge** aim at enhancing global and individual knowledge related to labour protection topics. **The reviewed evaluation reports do not permit a clear identification of the contributions of specific activities to the desired changes in terms of labour protection within this system of intervention.** The descriptions of the activities tend to be imprecise, hindering the identification of mechanisms transforming inputs into outputs and later into outcomes.

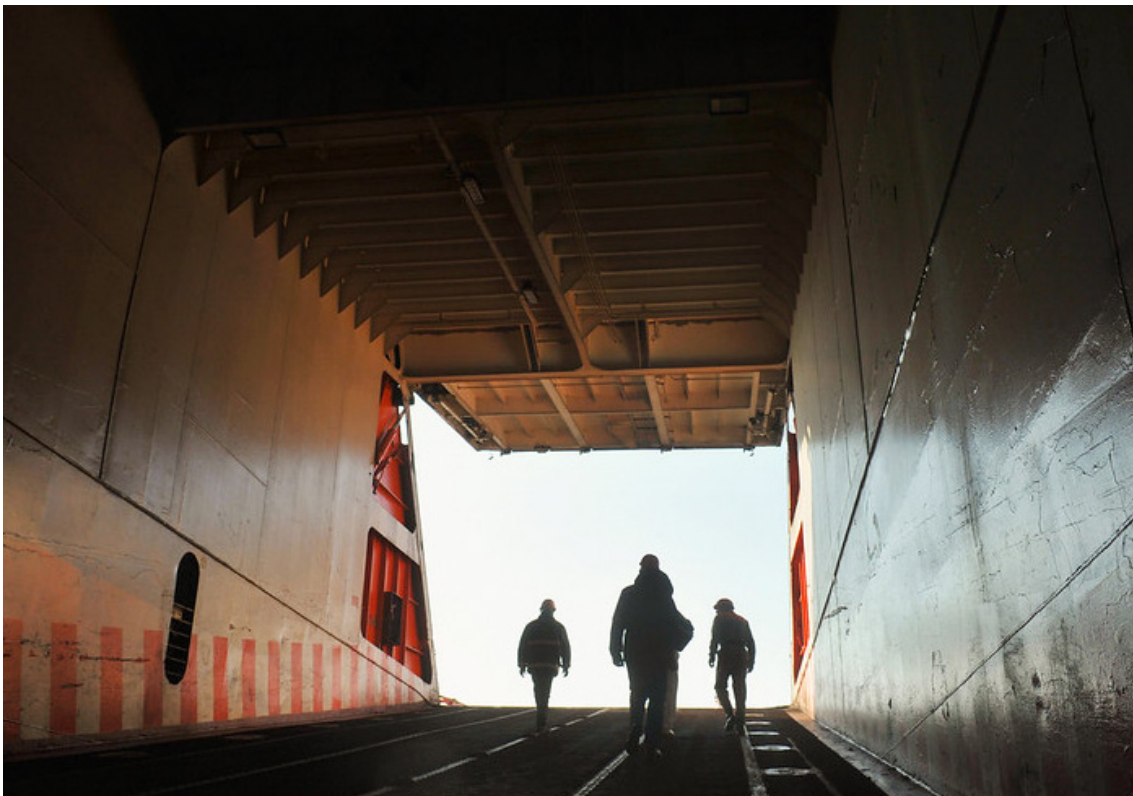
Nonetheless, a more comprehensive reading of evaluation reports shows an intertwined system of interventions that works together to increase individual, collective and institutional knowledge bases, capacities and awareness. It also improves legal environments. In the light of the effectiveness and impacts observed in the evaluation reports, **the successful projects tended to be those that regarded change through this lens of interdependence and proposed a balanced mix of targeted activities.** Thus, it seems imperative to have strong project designs, based on clear intervention logic, to avoid (a) the implementation of projects that are fund-driven rather than needs-driven, or product-based rather than results-based; and (b) a cluster of erratic isolated activities with limited impacts due to the absence of a precise theory of change.

Successful projects have undeniably advanced social inclusion by promoting labour rights and fostering capacity development and the formalization of workers, including those from more vulnerable groups. **The ILO model of intervention is nonetheless being challenged by the rapid transformations of the world of work and is striving to reach a significant portion of vulnerable workers.**

Interventions to enhance and expand labour protection are based on the rights of the formal economy, advanced through collective bargaining and legal frameworks. However, **the transformations of the world of work are intensifying the volume and needs of workers who are distant from formality and collective association.** Natural disasters and armed conflicts are pushing entire communities to cross borders and become refugees or migrants, with limited access to the formal labour markets in the host countries. Global health crises, such as COVID-19, are leaving informal workers behind in terms of governmental aid, to compensate for decreases in income and loss of activities, as well as of protection measures to secure workplaces. Furthermore, these global health crises are also promoting the digital economy and its share of atypical forms of employment.

The evaluation reports did not permit the full understanding of the pathways to promote the protection of informal and atypical workers, as the ILO tripartite intervention model relies on norms, collective bargaining and formalization. What works are intervention projects oriented towards the needs of workers in the formal economy moulded by traditional tripartite governance.

How should we respond to the needs of workers who are distant from formality? How do we include sectors of the world of work that are barely unionized? What will be the adequate intervention models to advance labour protection for all workers in a fast-changing economy? The responses are not yet ready, and discussions on such topics as minimum income schemes and inclusive private insurance systems will most likely gain importance in the public debate over the coming years. Thus, the challenge to advance labour protection for all workers is a critical societal issue, which the ILO has the mandate to address.



▶ Introduction

This working paper is intended to add to the organizational learning and guidance on labour protection, with lessons from past interventions.

In the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008, labour protection is one of the essential components of the social protection pillar. With the growing trend of remunerated work, it has become crucial to ensure that workers are adequately compensated for their time and effort, and work in safe and healthy environments. This includes ensuring that workers receive fair and reasonable salaries, have reasonable working hours, and enjoy safe working conditions. It is essential to note that these protections apply to all workers, regardless of their employment or contractual status.

A Recurrent Discussion on Labour Protection by the International Labour Conference is scheduled as a follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008. It is aimed at understanding the realities and needs of Members States for effective responses on labour protection issues. The last Recurrent Discussion on Labour Protection took place in June 2015, and the Governing Body decided at its 332nd Session in October–November 2017 to include this topic on the agenda of the 111th Session of the International Labour Conference in June 2023 .

A background report is being prepared by the Office for the Recurrent Discussion on Labour Protection by the International Labour Conference, in a context of increased centrality for labour protection, to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world of work confronted by multidimensional crises. Digitization, the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts and climate change have transformed economies, fragilized the least equipped countries, and pressured workers all over the globe, increasing social vulnerabilities.

For close to a decade, EVAL has supported the recurrent discussion process by providing analytical inputs from evaluation products based on synthesis reviews of ILO interventions and activities. It produced synthesis reviews on social dialogue (2013),⁷ employment (2014),⁸ social protection (labour protection) (2015),⁹ social dialogue (2017),¹⁰ social protection (2020)¹¹ and employment (2022),¹² with the goal of delivering tailored findings to inform the strategic decision-making processes of Members States and the Office.

The present working paper is the second synthesis review on labour protection issues prepared by EVAL as a contribution to the next recurrent discussion. It covers the period 2015–22 to add to the organizational learning and guidance on labour protection, with lessons from past interventions. It ultimately seeks to strengthen the ILO's capacity to make evidence-based decisions from evaluation results.

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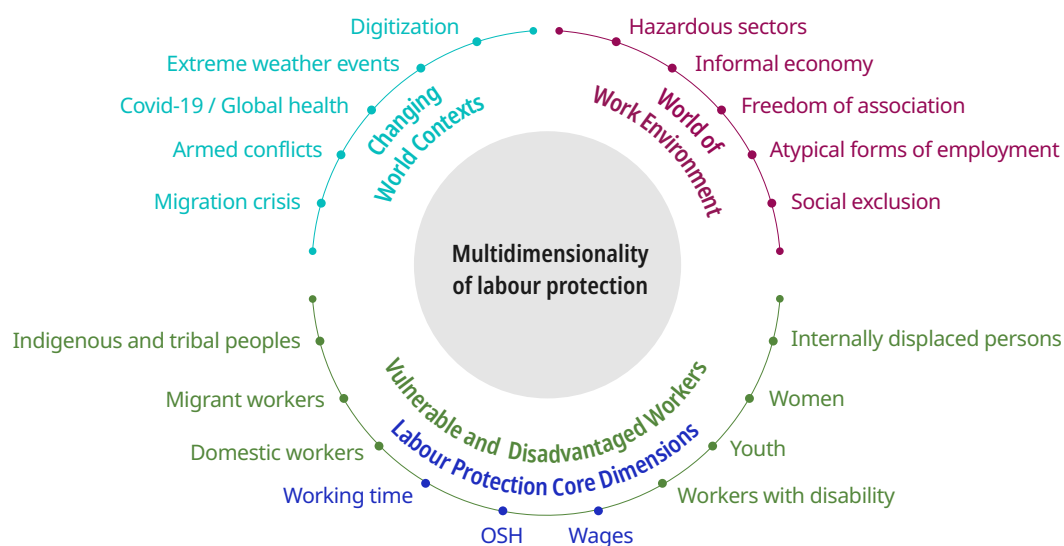
11 ILO, [Social protection \(social security\) interventions: What works and why? Lessons learned from a synthesis review, 2012–2018](#).

12 ILO, [Synthesis review of the ILO's employment interventions for the period 2015–2021: What works and why](#).

An overview of the protection of workers for the period 2015–22 is presented first (section 1) to understand the challenges for labour protection in the context of rapid world transformations. It outlines national realities and workers' needs, including those of vulnerable groups. This working paper then moves to the delineation of a rights-based pattern of interventions that has international labour standards as a baseline, with a view to enhancing and expanding the protection of all workers (section 2), mainly through the advancement of freedom of association and collective bargaining (section 3), the promotion of safer workplaces for protected workers (section 4), the institution of minimum wages (section 5), and the transition to formality (section 6). Finally, it tries to identify the active mechanics underpinning the theories of change related to the ILO's labour protection interventions (section 7). The working paper later concludes that there is a need to renew the historical tripartite intervention model to ensure the protection of all workers.

Labour protection is considered through a multidimensional lens throughout the working paper (figure 1). Findings relate the core dimensions of labour protection (wages, working time, and occupational safety and health), the environment of the world of work and global contexts. Special attention is given to vulnerable and disadvantaged workers.

FIGURE 1. MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF LABOUR PROTECTION



This holistic approach of labour protection was scoped from exploratory interviews with ILO officials arranged by EVAL and conducted in loco at ILO headquarters, Geneva. The mission took place 16–17 November 2022 and facilitated the discussion of the scope of the synthesis review with EVAL, WORKQUALITY, the Jobs for Peace and Resilience Flagship Programme, the Labour Protection Unit, and the ILO Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health Branch (LABADMIN/OSH) (table 1). Interviews were important for grasping the priorities of these different services related to the comprehension of labour protection, with a view to delivering a tailored working paper. It also created an opportunity to discuss the types of documents to be included in the synthesis review and to request additional relevant document references.

TABLE 1. LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Service	Date	Number of interviews	Main concerns
EVAL	16 November 2022	Two	Approach and sampling respond to the needs.
WORKQUALITY	16 November 2022	Two	Protection of atypical workers, transition to formality, and vulnerable workers.
Jobs for Peace and Resilience Flagship Programme	17 November 2022	Two	Crisis and protection of internally displaced persons.
Labour Protection Unit	17 November 2022	One	Mainstreaming of labour standards into field interventions.
LABADMIN/OSH	17 November 2022	One	Comprehensive approach of OSH, and hazardous sectors.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

This working paper is a synthesis review of selected evaluation reports of the ILO's development cooperation programmes and projects, as well as other institutional evaluations and publications, that cover the complexity of labour protection issues. It was conducted using the EVAL synthesis review methodology. Content analysis and visual representation of findings were employed to draw dominant narratives on the ILO's labour protection interventions. Concretely, evaluation reports and publications have been deconstructed using a tailored coding system to identify the mechanisms underpinning ILO interventions and uncover what works, for whom and why in terms of labour protection.

TABLE 2. THEMATIC DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORKING SAMPLE¹³

Themes	Distribution (%)
COVID-19	11%
Decent work	5%
Freedom of association and social dialogue	16%
Gender	13%
Informal economy	16%
Labour inspection	11%
Labour relations	11%
Labour standards	11%
Migration	8%
Wage	3%
OSH	42%
Social protection	11%
Vulnerable groups	11%
Working conditions	21%

¹³ The thematic distribution represents the frequency of theme tags among evaluation reports and publications.

The final working sample is composed of 38 documents in English, Spanish and French, including 27 evaluation reports of development cooperation projects, in addition to 5 ILO institutional high-level evaluations and 6 relevant ILO publications from the recommendations provided by ILO officials. The final sample covers different geographic regions and themes in a holistic perspective of labour protection, as displayed in tables 2 and 3.

TABLE 3. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORKING SAMPLE¹⁴

Regions	Distribution (%)
Africa	13%
Arab States	3%
Asia	18%
Europe	11%
Interregional	42%
Latin America	13%

The approach is aligned with the ILO EVAL standard methodology for synthesis reviews. It:

- ▶ establishes a sample of screened documents based on (a) a search strategy with criteria derived from the overall objectives of the synthesis review and concerns expressed by ILO officials during exploratory interviews, and (b) a qualitative screening of related executive summaries;
- ▶ establishes a coding frame to code relevant qualitative data to apprehend labour protection in its holistic perspective;
- ▶ establishes a data systematization approach to develop a labour protection-related analytical framework;
- ▶ defines research questions for analysing the systematized data, based on the inputs provided by ILO officials during the exploratory interviews; and
- ▶ proposes a presentation of results to answer the research questions with a content analysis methodology.

SAMPLING OF EVALUATION REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS

The sample of evaluation reports was obtained from an iterative selection mechanism of inclusions and exclusions based on logical and thematic criteria. The reports were (a) retrieved from i-eval Discovery from a search strategy, with criteria derived from the overall objectives of the final synthesis review and concerns expressed by ILO officials during the exploratory interviews; and (b) selected through a qualitative screening of related executive summaries (figure 2).

First, a list of 43 evaluation reports was compiled with documents that appeared in both the following:

- ▶ an initial list provided by the ILO that contained 172 documents obtained from free search with relevant thematic keywords in the ILO Evaluation Database i-eval Discovery; and
- ▶ a list of 57 documents also obtained from the i-eval Discovery, but with the thematic filters deriving from the terms of reference and interviews with ILO officials. The filters applied were (a) freedom of association, (b) informal economy, (c) OSH, (d) social exclusion, (e) social protection, (f) tripartism and governance, (g) vulnerable groups and (h) working conditions.

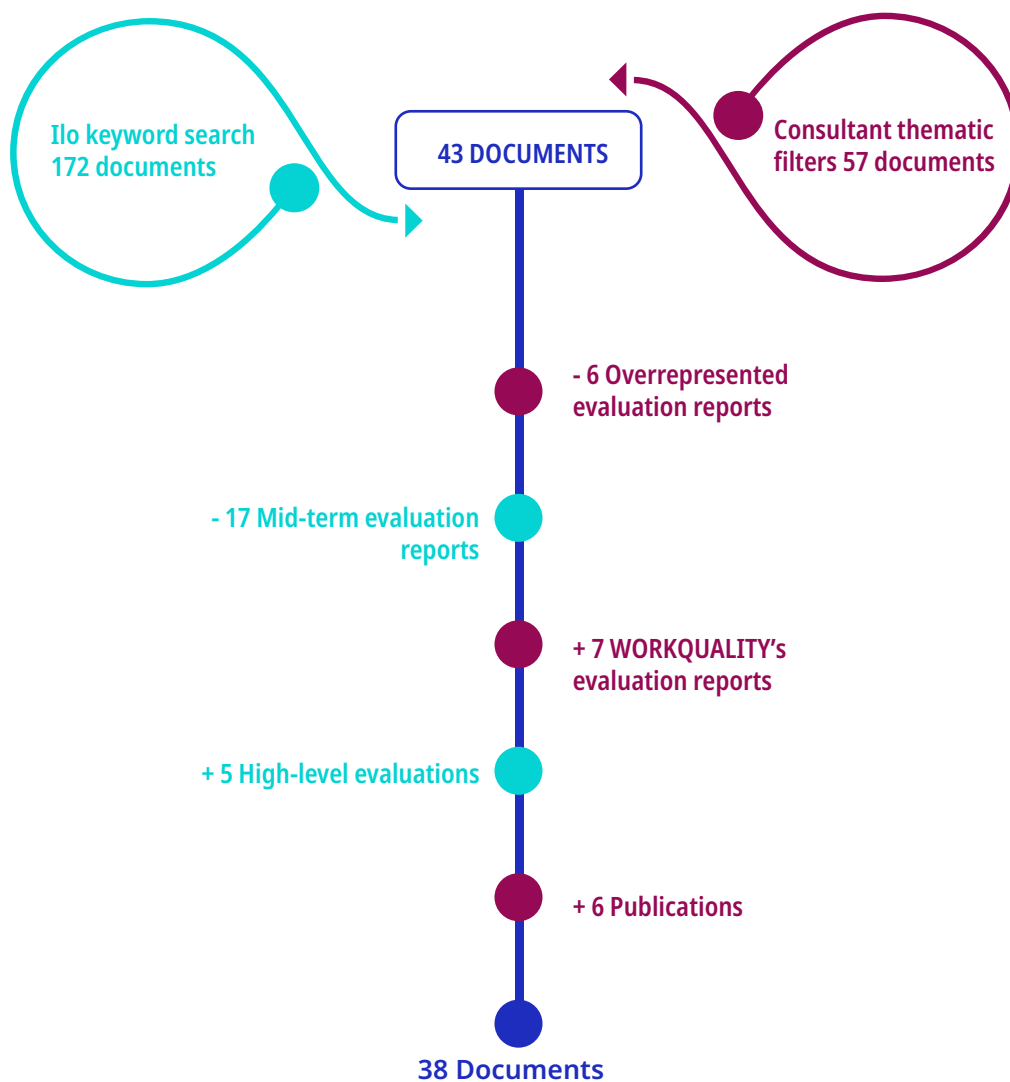
¹⁴ The disproportional distribution in favour of interregional documents is due to the presence of high-level evaluations and other international ILO publications in the sample. The low presence of the Arab States in the sample may represent a structural asymmetry, to the detriment of ILO interventions in this region.

Next, **final evaluation reports were preferred to mid-term evaluations**, as they tend to comprise more robust information on results. A total of 26 evaluation reports were retrieved. Finally, the geographical and thematic distributions were balanced by deleting overrepresented reports (Asia, informal economy, OSH and working conditions) on the basis of relevance to the synthesis review. A base list of 20 evaluation reports was established.

Seven evaluation reports were added to the base list from the recommendations provided by WORKQUALITY. These included migration, wage and gender equality projects; Better Work projects; and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)-funded programmes covering Outcomes 1 and 8.

The list of evaluation reports was intentionally limited to 27 documents, to include high-level evaluations and publications in the sample documents, as suggested by WORKQUALITY and LABADMIN/OSH in the interviews. Thus, five high-level evaluations and six publications were included according to their relevance to the synthesis review. The final list of 38 selected documents is presented in the annex.

FIGURE 2. SAMPLING PROCESS DIAGRAM



DATA CODING

Documents were uploaded to the content analysis software Atlas.ti, to facilitate data management and analysis. No prior theoretical framework was used, in order to prevent analytical bias, and documents were coded according to the nature of identified labour protection-related content, as follows:

Code	Covered content
Labour standards	Norms
National labour protection background	National realities and needs
Development objectives	ILO transformation agenda
Immediate objectives	
Activities	
Labour protection dimensions	
Products	ILO interventions
Results/impacts	
Lessons	
Vulnerable group	Beneficiaries
World of work socio-economic structure	Multidimensionality of labour protection
Changing world contexts	

DATA SYSTEMATIZATION, ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Data were systematized to establish patterns of relationships between codes and quotes. Metanarratives were then developed from the emerging patterns of relationships to respond to the identified research questions (table 4). Research questions were designed according to the knowledge needs expressed in the terms of reference and by ILO officials in the exploratory interviews.

The final working paper ultimately seeks to identify implicit patterns of intervention from scattered projects. The narrative is intentionally oriented towards actions and expressed in a dynamic manner.

TABLE 4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What are the different national realities and needs in terms of labour protection? ▶ To what extent is the protection of workers affected by the changing world contexts (i.e. migration crisis, armed conflicts, global health, extreme weather events and digitization)? ▶ To what extent are identified vulnerable groups (i.e. internally displaced persons, women, youth, workers with disability, domestic workers, migrant workers, and indigenous and tribal peoples) covered by labour protection? ▶ How does workers' protection evolve with the transformation of the forms of employment (e.g. zero-hour contracts and telework)?
ILO Transformation Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What are the recurrent transformation responses proposed by the ILO in terms of labour protection?

ILO interventions

- ▶ What are the recurrent ILO intervention models regarding labour protection and their underpinned theory of change?
- ▶ To what extent are labour standards applied to field interventions?
- ▶ How effective are ILO intervention models to enhance the protection of workers, including vulnerable workers?
- ▶ How effective are ILO intervention models in tackling changing world contexts (i.e. migration crisis, armed conflicts, global health, extreme weather events and digitization) and promoting the protection of workers?
- ▶ To what extent do ILO interventions support the transition of workers to formality?
- ▶ To what extent do ILO intervention models promote the protection of workers in atypical forms of employment?
- ▶ To what extent do ILO intervention models promote the protection of workers in hazardous sectors?
- ▶ To what extent do ILO intervention models related to labour protection promote social inclusion?
- ▶ To what extent does freedom of association contribute to enhancing the coverage of labour protection?
- ▶ To what extent are the ILO's specific initiatives (e.g., the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, the Equal Pay International Coalition and the Vision Zero Fund) effective in protecting workers?
- ▶ To what extent do ILO intervention models promote synergies and connectedness between labour protection, social protection, and other areas of the ILO's work?
- ▶ To what extent do ILO intervention models build capacities of constituents in terms of labour protection?

LIMITATIONS

The establishment of findings related to the ILO's labour protection interventions has been limited by the logic and content of evaluation reports. These are not produced to contribute to the organizational learning and provide effective guidance to the constituents by responding to the research questions on labour protection. **Rather, the evaluation reports present results of projects via the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) evaluation framework and are imprecise regarding relevant information on reasonings underpinning labour protection interventions.**

Thus, evaluation reports may lack information on development and immediate objectives. They may have superficial descriptions of activities implemented and results achieved. They may not provide contextualized information. Systematic information has often not been provided which, for instance, could prevent the establishment of the transformation mechanism underpinning activities. Constant reinterpretation of information is therefore needed to fill in the blanks and establish a solid narrative.

▶ 1. Overview of the protection of workers for the period 2015–22

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted the major global crisis of the period, with pernicious impacts for the world of work.

The generalized protection of workers at the national and workplace levels may be limited by a lack of knowledge on labour standards and relevant legal frameworks by sectoral and industrial agents, such as those reported in the banana export industry of the Dominican Republic (DOM/14/01/UND). In that case, **the absence of information and sensitization on labour rights among banana producers hamper the promotion of labour norms to protect banana workers and strengthen the productivity of an export-oriented slowdown industry.**

The Dominican Republic is the main exporter of organic bananas to Europe, and this industry has been experiencing a steady decrease in income. For instance, the export of bananas lost 17 per cent of its value in 2016 and 2017.

Certainly, the competitiveness of the banana industry in the Dominican Republic has also been affected by extreme weather events. Floods in the north-western banana production region generated significant losses in harvests and a consequent reduction in banana exports. Natural disasters contribute to disrupting economies and undeniably weaken the protection of workers.

This relation may be amplified in countries marked by pre-existing multidimensional crises, such as Haiti (HAI/12/52/USA). The country is the poorest in the Western Hemisphere, with 80 per cent of the population below the poverty line. The earthquake of 2010 further deteriorated the fragilized economic, political, social and environmental national situation, with 200,000+ fatalities, 1.5 million persons internally displaced, and immense infrastructure destruction. Years later, the effects of the earthquake continue to be felt in Haitian society, which is caught in the grip of precariousness.

Thus, the Haitian labour protection scenario is still characterized by the non-compliance of national legal frameworks with international labour standards, even those ratified by Haiti. Haitian labour laws restrict the rights of freedom of association. Governmental authorization is required to form unions, and workers are limited in their right to strike. Compulsory arbitration at the request of only one party to halt a strike is legal, and numerous inconsistencies can be found in labour legislation, which creates confusion and conflicting rules.

Conversely, labour protection deficiencies may also trigger disasters, both individual and collective. **Deficits in the safety and health of workers, in particular, may provoke major accidents**, as illustrated by the 2012 garment factory fires in Pakistan (PAK/15/01/NET). The world of work is negatively characterized by the annual average of almost 3 million occupational fatalities (work-related accidents and diseases) and over 350 million workers suffering from non-fatal occupational accidents. In Pakistan, the tragedy helped to raise awareness about labour protection in garment factories, in which measures to ensure the safety of workers were meagre.

Integration into global supply chains does not necessarily result in the application of international labour standards by supplier factories. The implicit expectation that economic relationships with multinational corporations would promote compliance with international labour standards within the entire value chain has been revealed to be flawed and even counterproductive in terms of the safety and health of workers. **It may instead lead to further pressure in immediate price competitiveness, to the detriment of the protection of workers**, such as was reported in Bangladesh (BGD/15/05/DEU).

The country is an attractive sourcing destination of global brands. The ready-made garment industry is the main driver of its economic growth, supported by the cheap labour of female workers. This economic scenario resulted from a rapid industrialization of Bangladesh fed by severe price competitiveness. The national and international competition to survive in the global supply chain of the garment industry provoked an intense downward pressure on negotiable prices, and little cooperation between national manufacturers. Occupational accidents have been regularly increasing, with emblematic disasters, such as the 2012 fire at the Tazreen Fashions garment factory.

This situation may enlighten newcomers to the garment industry global supply chain, such as Ethiopia (ETH/15/02/SID), which expects this industry to pave the way for national industrialization and contribute to the country's pro-poor development goals.

The Ethiopian garment industry is already characterized by underpaid young women workers from rural areas.

All in all, the practices of the global garment supply chains tend to contribute to unsatisfactory working conditions in supplier countries. Minimum wages are generally not fixed in consultation with workers' organizations, and do not sufficiently cover the needs of workers and their families. Freedom of association is not widespread, and collective bargaining is relatively rare, especially in the lower tiers of the value chain, where there is a high degree of informality. **Women tend to be the most affected group**, as they represent the majority of the workforce in the garment supply industry (RAS/17/50/DEU). Even when they theoretically benefit from labour protection, their rights are not necessarily ensured at the factory level, such as with access to maternity leave (VIE/12/06/MUL).

Men and women have unequal access to labour protection. The finding is not limited to the sphere of the global garment supply chain. In Mexico (MEX/16/01/RBS), for instance, the informal retail sector is dominated by female workers subject to low wages and precarious working conditions. Poverty, inequality and vulnerability typically characterize informality, and although men constitute the majority of informal workers globally, **women are dominant in the activities most vulnerable to exploitation**, such as domestic work.

Women represent the vast majority of domestic workers worldwide.

Although more laws now regulate the sector – with visible advancements in terms of working time, minimum wage, maternity leave and social security (ILO statistics show a decrease of 16.3 percentage points in the number of domestic workers completely excluded from legal labour protection) – domestic work is still predominantly informal, with diminished access to social and labour protections.

Domestic work, whether formal or informal, was one of the categories most severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Loss of employment, reduction in working hours and cuts in wages were more commonly experienced in the domestic work industry than in other sectors. Certainly, **the COVID-19 pandemic constituted the major global crisis of the period, with pernicious impacts for the world of work.** Workers' rights to safe and decent work conditions were severely threatened, as illustrated by the observed downward pressure on the levels or growth rates of average wages globally. The pandemic disproportionately affected vulnerable workers and sectors.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified pre-existing socio-economic gaps, including those related to labour protection. It exposed the lack of protection for workers who were not part of the formal sector, as they were excluded from the social and emergency governmental measures, and it stimulated the proliferation of precarious platform work. It increased wage inequalities, revealed digital gaps with the multiplication of teleworking, and exposed women to the double burden of work and family care responsibilities.

Migrant workers were also among the most vulnerable groups exposed to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis exacerbated the various forms of exploitation to which migrant workers are often subjected. They are likely to experience exploitation, abuse, threats, and physical and sexual violence, especially in occupations dominated by female workers (such as domestic work, the care economy and the cleaning sector), as reported in the GLO/15/41/EUR evaluation, or in situations of irregularity. Although irregular migration has increased over the past few decades to become an integral part of the global economy, irregularity increases workers' vulnerability to violations of human rights, such as human trafficking and unacceptable forms of work.

The main drivers of irregular migration are found in systemic crises, whether economic, environmental, or political.

The adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation, unequal access to economic and social rights – including health care, decent work, food, land, and water – unequal opportunities, gender inequality and gender-based violence can all be compelling reasons for people to move through irregular migration channels. Among these reasons, **armed conflicts stood out in the period under review.**

The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (RAB/18/01/FOR), for instance, has caused a refugee crisis with the displacement of millions of people. It is the world's largest known refugee and displacement crisis, and is challenging host communities, such as in Jordan and Lebanon. Both of these countries face financial pressure and deteriorating socio-economic conditions. Most refugees are therefore exposed to vulnerable economic situations of unemployment and informality.

Finally, **the period was also marked by the remnants of the effects of the subprime financial crisis.** Greece (GRC/15/01/EUR), among other countries, experienced a major rise in the unemployment rate, which stimulated informality and underdeclared work. Nonetheless, despite the negative impacts in terms of labour protection, informality and underdeclared work cannot be ignored as forms of resilience to crisis in a world of work confronted by multidimensional tensions and mutations.

▶ 2. Labour standards: The base of ILO interventions in labour protection

The establishment of labour standards permits the ILO to develop interventions with a rights-based approach.

Rapid world transformations are stimulating socio-economic structures in the world of work that challenge the general protection of workers by failing to ensure adequate minimum wages, maximum limits on working time, and safety and health at work. The informal economy and non-standard forms of employment are growing asymmetrically, impacting vulnerable groups that tend to be more excluded from the formal economy.

The ILO's first response to these challenges is to promote labour standards supporting the application of relevant international instruments related to decent work.

The rationale is that an enhanced national legal framework is foundational for the development of guidance and tools to adapt the protection of workers to fast-moving realities. Therefore, **several projects were oriented to sensitizing national governments and other stakeholders on the ratification and implementation of the ILO Conventions.**

For instance, the SIDA–ILO Partnership on Outcome 8 protecting workers from unacceptable forms of work led to the development, promotion, ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions through activities of advocacy, dialogue and capacity-building. In Bangladesh, it enhanced the application of the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). In Senegal, as in Costa Rica, it supported assessments to promote the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156). In Cameroon, it boosted progress on the ratification of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), mostly to protect domestic workers from violence and harassment.

Globally, domestic workers tend to sit at the confluence of precariousness and vulnerability. They are mostly female workers, belonging to disadvantaged groups, who are simultaneously and disproportionately exposed to exploitation related to their conditions of work and to the effects of conjunctural crises. Most of these workers are informal, thereby subject to losing their jobs or experiencing critical drops in their working hours and wages, without compensation, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In any case, violence and harassment exceed the sphere of domestic work and represent a serious threat to the health and safety of all workers. **The period 2015–22 of ILO interventions on labour protection marked a win in that sense, with the adoption of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), and the accompanying Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206), at the Centenary International Labour Conference.** The issue of violence and harassment in the world of work was included for the first time in international labour standards with a critical contribution from the SIDA–ILO Partnership on Outcome 8, through tripartite consultations and the dissemination of the Convention in different languages.

All in all, the SIDA–ILO Partnership on Outcome 8 promoted and enhanced the ratification and application of different international labour standards, including:

- ▶ Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87);
- ▶ Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100);
- ▶ Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107);
- ▶ Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111);
- ▶ Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156);
- ▶ Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169);
- ▶ Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183);
- ▶ Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189); and
- ▶ Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

The establishment of labour standards permits the ILO to develop interventions with a rights-based approach. The ILO Conventions and other instruments tend to act as a compass, providing interventions with directions.

Therefore, several projects are explicitly guided by international labour standards instruments, such as PAK/15/01/NET in Pakistan. The project endeavoured to promote labour norms for safer workplaces through the strengthening of the labour inspection system in a country traumatized by the 2012 garment factory inferno in Karachi. It found the relevant instruments on which to base its training activities (more than 400 labour inspectors trained), toolkit development and awareness-raising related to labour inspection in the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129), and the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150).

All in all, almost 70 per cent of the evaluation reports connected the described interventions with specific international labour standards. More than 20 Conventions and Recommendations were explicitly mentioned as directly contributing to projects. These instruments relate to themes of the multidimensionality of labour protection, the most cited of which are reproduced in figure 3.

FIGURE 3. INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS MOST CITED THEMES



The instruments related to freedom of association, collective bargaining and industrial relations were the most cited in the evaluation reports.

The Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98) and the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) principally seem to have directed a significant proportion of the sample projects.

The comparative advantage of the ILO in social dialogue over other development actors is recognized by many evaluators. It is the only intergovernmental organization based on tripartite governance that legitimizes its mediation role between governments and social partners. Social dialogue advances labour rights and improves the livelihood of workers, but its effectiveness depends greatly on the strength of freedom of association for collective bargaining.



▶ 3. Advancing freedom of association to strengthen collective bargaining for labour protection

Workers' organizations depend on securing funds to ensure their continuity.

Labour protection provides workers with decent conditions of work related to its economic, temporal and physical facets. It reflects the progress on labour rights, which mostly results from governments and social partners engaging in collective bargaining. However, effective collective bargaining relies on the existence of strong workers' and employers' organizations, for which freedom of association is a prerequisite. The absence of this freedom produces atomized economic actors, with limited possibilities for collective mobilization for common social interests.

Thus, **labour protection projects target the advancement of freedom of association to strengthen collective bargaining, with a view to enhancing the protection of workers.** These projects deploy a range of complementary activities to raise awareness of the benefits of collective mobilizations; advocate in favour of freedom of association; develop the knowledge base relating working conditions to productivity; and build the capacities of workers' organizations, with a view to ultimately establishing trade unions and developing collective bargaining, as in Ethiopia. The ETH/15/02/SID evaluation reports the enhancement of bipartite discussions to improve industrial relations for decent work in garment industries, as a consequence of the establishment of trade unions in Ethiopian factories.

GLO/14/66/SID provides another example of ILO interventions towards freedom of association. The evaluation relates to Outcome 14 promoting the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, jointly supported by Norway and Sweden. The intervention was conceived for the realization in law and practice of the fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining at both the global and country levels. Activities were planned to increase knowledge, support advocacy and develop action models, with a view to providing technical assistance to harmonize national laws, develop policies and build capacities of stakeholders in 13 countries: Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, China, Jordan, Malawi, Morocco, Niger, the Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam and Zambia.

The Outcome 14 intervention opted for a holistic approach that was built on previous partnerships to pool resources under larger ILO programmes. It led to the development and support for the implementation of national sectoral action plans on freedom of association and collective bargaining, the creation of tripartite social dialogue forums, and the preparation of guidelines and advocacy products addressed to judges and attorneys involved in labour rights. The intervention contributed, for instance, to the establishment of tripartite social dialogue bodies and new labour legislation in Zambia, or the renewal of collective bargaining agreements and new regulations related to migrant workers in Jordan.

The establishment of workers' organizations to develop collective bargaining may nonetheless be challenging in less structured or formal sectors, such as the digital gig economy or street vending. Workers in these sectors are generally atomized and operate independently from each other. Paradoxically, these sectors are the most in need of the enhancement of labour protection due to the context of precariousness and subordination to which the workers are subjected. Additionally, they are highly vulnerable to the effects of conjunctural crises that generally tend to exacerbate preexisting inequality gaps and vulnerabilities.

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, self-employed women of the informal economy were exposed to this reality, as portrayed in the BOL/20/50/UND evaluation report. The project aimed at mitigating the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on their employment and income.

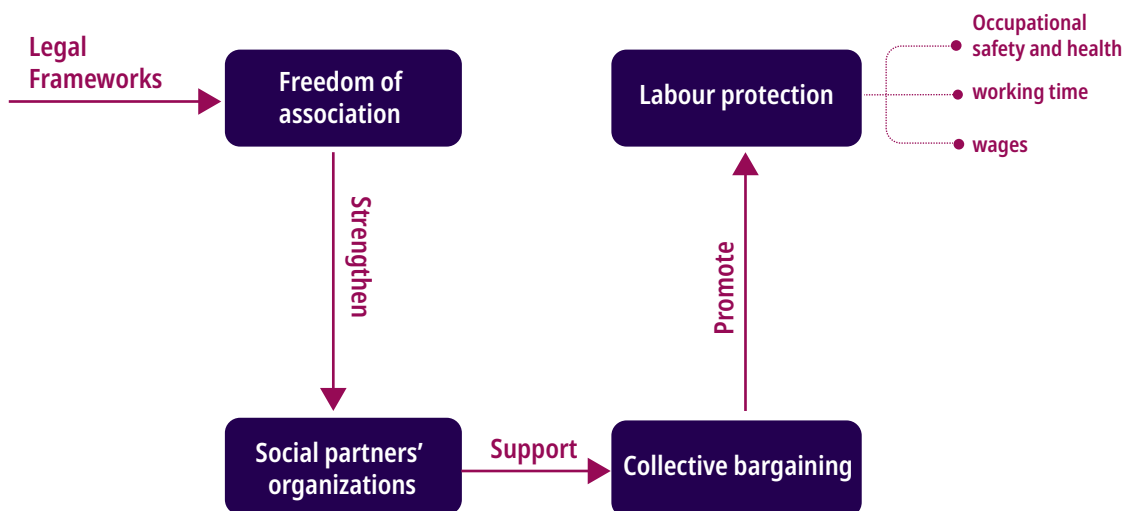
Self-employed women in the informal economy crystalize multidimensional inequalities; they are at the intersection of gender, social and economic vulnerabilities. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, they represent over 30 per cent of the female labour force. The majority of these women are from indigenous populations with low levels of education. Their salary gap with regard to the average female population is 20 per cent lower, and their activities are split between commerce and domestic responsibilities.

The restrictions imposed by COVID-19 generated enormous economic and social pressure on these women. They had to coordinate family care and outside remunerated work that exposed them to contamination and penalties for breaking confinement. The situation implied emotional costs, overloading of responsibilities and financial fragility.

The model of intervention in BOL/20/50/UND to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on self-employed women in the informal economy included building the capacities of their professional organizations, with a view to influencing policies and programmes to promote the enhancement of labour conditions in the sector. The capacity-building activities were centred on the construction of a shared agenda related to their needs and creating advocacy spaces to advance this agenda in municipal public policies. Self-employed women's organizations were able to develop their strategic agenda and present it to local authorities. They gained visibility and recognition as interlocutors in local social dialogue processes.

The sustainability of these workers' organizations is nonetheless fragile, which constitutes a limitation of these intervention models. **Workers' organizations depend, for instance, on securing funds to ensure their continuity**, but workers are not always familiar with the need for personal contributions or do not have sufficient financial capacities. ILO projects on advancing freedom of association to strengthen collective bargaining for labour protection would then work further towards securing long-term funding and raising workers' awareness of the importance of personal financial contributions.

FIGURE 4. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION INTERVENTION MODEL FOR LABOUR PROTECTION



▶ 4. Promoting safer workplaces for protected workers

The promotion of safer workplaces for protected workers acts at the prevention and reaction levels.

The strength of workers' organizations for collective bargaining is particularly critical in hazardous sectors such as agriculture, construction or mining. Employment in these sectors is used to combine dirtiness, difficulty and dangerous facets that put workers at risk. **Collective negotiations towards further labour protection may then often focus on issues related to occupational safety and health**, as in the Bolivian intervention under the SIDA-ILO Partnership on Outcome 8.

The evaluation report related activities of awareness-raising and capacity-building on occupational safety and health that triggered the creation of a women's construction workers' organization from informal networks.

The Association of Women Builders of Bolivia emerged to collectively advocate for workplaces free from violence and harassment, in addition to demands for equal pay from the general gender equality agenda.

The promotion of safer workplaces for protected workers is a dominant theme in labour protection projects (table 2). They usually act at the **prevention** and/or **reaction** levels to (a) secure workplaces and (b) compensate victims. The underpinning rationale is that **the improvement of occupational safety and health enhances productivity and workers' quality of life**.

SECURING WORKPLACES: THE PREVENTIVE FACET

Occupational safety and health are commonly **advanced through the development and application of norms at the global, national and factory levels**, with activities of advocacy, technical assistance, capacity-building, or research and knowledge dissemination. The adoption of the previously mentioned Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) is an appropriate illustration of the ILO's mobilization to produce instruments of international labour standards at the global level, which tend to extend into relevant legal frameworks at the national level, such as in the Plurinational State of Bolivia (BOL/18/01/RBS) and Viet Nam (VIE/12/06/MUL).

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the project targeted the proposal of laws and policies oriented towards occupational safety and health and productive development. It was mainly aimed to deploy activities of technical assistance aimed at the ratification and translation into national legal and policy frameworks of the Safety and Health in Mines Convention, 1995 (No. 176), as well as the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), the Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161), and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187). The project was nonetheless hit by COVID-19 and reformulated to build the capacities of the constituents to face the pandemic and promote safer and healthier working conditions. **The Regular Budget Supplementary Account (RBSA) fund modalities provided the needed flexibility to revise the project.**

In Viet Nam, the approach was more bottom-up, but also aimed at influencing national frameworks. It was built on pilot experiences at the factory level to create advocacy products towards government, as well as employers' and workers' organizations. **Interventions at the factory level are often related to the enhancement of labour inspection systems** through the training of labour inspectors or awareness-raising on safety norms directed to employers and workers.

The embedded theory of change is that improving capacities to conduct effective inspections results in higher compliance with norms. Interventions on labour inspection then target the training and professionalization of inspectors with pay grades and professional career paths, as the progress in Haiti shows (HAI/12/52/USA), as well as the development of enhanced inspection protocols. All in all, the results show that this intervention model impacts the safety of workplaces positively, including for vulnerable communities. Women workers, for instance, may experience a significant decrease in violence and harassment situations.

PROTECTING WORKERS: THE REACTIVE ASPECT

Conversely, feeble labour inspection systems may lead to defective compliance with occupational safety and health norms at the factory level. The consequences materialize in the form of higher rates of occupational accidents, injuries, illnesses and deaths. **Systems that protect workers and families with compensation schemes are therefore important, as no workplace, unfortunately, is free from occupational accidents.**

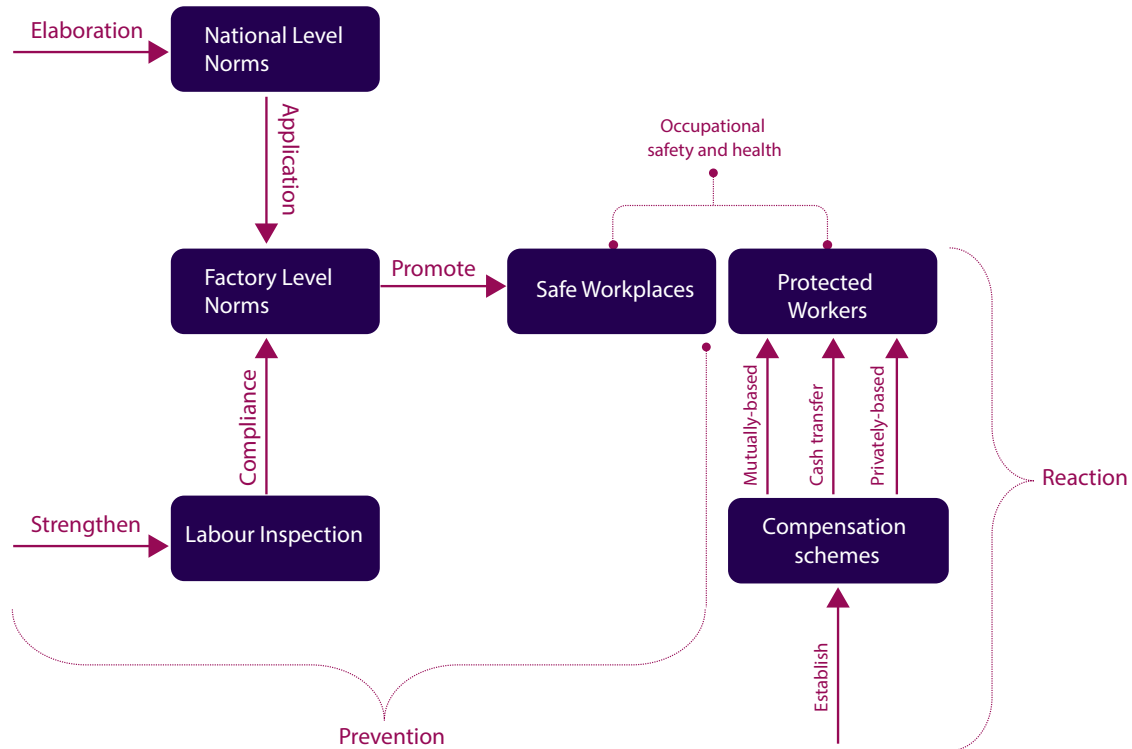
Compensation schemes may build on private insurance systems with products to cover different types of accidents, including death. These schemes are well spread in developed economies but tend to be limited in others. The original business model of the insurance industry is not oriented towards the coverage of low-income households, as described in Uganda (UGA/18/01/FSD). The ILO intervenes then to promote the development of inclusive insurance solutions for low-income households with national insurance professionals. Activities of capacity-building are implemented to reorient insurers to the needs and capabilities of low-income markets. The results in terms of insurance coverage are nonetheless mixed, and private-based compensation schemes remain residual in lesser developed countries.

The alternative to protect workers and their families in cases of accidents seems to reside in mutually based tripartite compensation schemes.

They **distribute the responsibility of compensation between all stakeholders**, not only to individuals, as in private-based insurance models. In Bangladesh, for instance, the ILO intervened to favour the establishment of the National Employment Injury Insurance Scheme (BGD/15/05/DEU). The country is an emergent exporter of ready-made garments, and the rates of injuries and deaths have been steadily increasing along with national industrial growth. The industrial sector faces regular accidents, such as the fire at the Tazreen Fashions garment factory (2012) and the collapse of the Rana Plaza building (2013), which became iconic.

The project aimed at protecting industrial workers from the loss of livelihood due to occupational accidents. It implemented interrelated activities to build the capacities of the Ministry of Labour and Employment and social partner organizations, provide technical assistance to design the injury scheme based on relevant preliminary surveys and studies, and develop a related legal framework. The project has managed to develop national and local capacities and create commitment among tripartite partners towards the injury scheme. At the time of the evaluation, however, the National Employment Injury Insurance Scheme was not yet operational. A disagreement remained between employers and workers on the contribution calculations to finance the scheme.

FIGURE 5. OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH INTERVENTION MODEL



Another example is provided in the PAK/16/06/DEU evaluation report. Pakistan benefitted from a private emergency compensation package to indemnify the victims and families affected by the 2012 Ali Enterprises fire in Karachi, which resulted in the deaths of over 250 workers in addition to 50 injured. The ILO was commissioned to provide technical assistance and support the overall management of the compensation system. It developed and implemented a successful cash transfer system to respond to the immediate needs of victim workers and their families. Monthly payments were made, on the basis of a robust survey of the victims, and individual counselling was provided to reduce the risks of misappropriation and misuse of funds. **The success story of this cash transfer system can also be seen as good practice and an endorsement of the Office's entry into the emergency and humanitarian sectors.**

▶ 5. Instituting minimum wages

Minimum wages are proven to protect workers and reduce inequalities without prejudice to competitiveness.

Cash transfer intervention models undeniably contribute to the immediate relief of issues relating to health, education, income and poverty. They provide beneficiaries with liquidity to counterbalance redistribution inequalities, and cope with immediate individual and family needs. Cash transfers do not, however, transform socio-economic structures to break the cycle of poverty and dependence. People require regular incomes to ensure adequate living standards. For workers, wages are their main source of income. Wages are a major subject of collective bargaining, with a view to ensuring a just share of the fruits of progress.

The protection of living standards provided by wages is, unfortunately, not equal. Severe disparities are found between countries, sectors, population origins, social classes, age groups, physical features and genders, all of which produce pay gaps and unfair distribution of incomes.

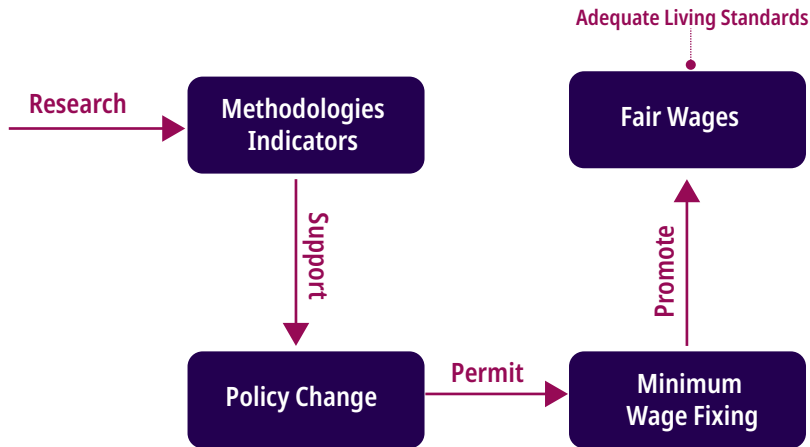
These disparities also tend to be emphasized during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing distress situations among vulnerable populations. The pandemic, for instance, pressured wages down; women and lower-paid workers were disproportionately affected. It has reinforced consciousness of the need to continue advocating for fair wages and ensure effective protection of workers.

The ILO is committed to promoting fair wages to protect workers. The foundation of its interventions is revealed in the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, which calls for an adequate minimum wage, whether statutory or negotiated. Minimum wages are proven to protect workers and reduce inequalities, without prejudice to competitiveness. The intervention model of the ILO is therefore to advocate in favour of the institution of minimum wages, mainly through activities of research, awareness-raising and technical assistance.

The GLO/18/23/NLD evaluation reports on a research project to establish indicators and methodologies for global wage-setting. The project is an attempt to implement the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131) by taking into consideration both the needs of workers and their families, as well as economic factors. The project produced studies to enhance the evidence base in that sense, and also built capacities on indicators and methods for adequate wage-fixing. Thus, a guidance document on how to estimate the needs of workers and their families was published, along with studies applying a minimum wage methodology in Costa Rica, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, and Viet Nam. Trainings were also delivered to constituents in these countries on how to use and adapt wage indicators.

The project managed to disseminate knowledge and enhance constituents' access to better indicators and methods of wage-fixing. It supported a shift in the consumer price index of Costa Rica, one of the five pilot countries, and triggered interest in the Governments of Malaysia, Maldives, Namibia, and Qatar to extend this wage-setting approach to their countries.

FIGURE 6. MINIMUM WAGE INTERVENTION MODEL



The development of international labour standards and research instruments legitimizes the ILO's direct interventions with governments in wage-fixing policies. The ETH/15/02/SID evaluation reports how the project supported the institution of a minimum wage in Ethiopia with activities of awareness-raising and technical assistance. The project built the intervention on a baseline study to evaluate working conditions and industrial relations from a sample of selected factories in the garment and textile sector. Salary increases would only be possible from high-level policy changes. The project then contributed to the revitalization of the minimum wage discussion, which led to a positive change in labour legislation with the adoption of a legal framework for minimum wage-fixing.

▶ 6. Transitioning to formality

Formalization implies higher expenditures, and the opportunity cost for informal workers and entrepreneurs may not be attractive.

The access to adequate living standards for workers seems to be correlated with the existence of fair wages. The latter tends to derive directly from statutory legal frameworks on wage-fixing and/or dynamic collective bargaining, both linked to the formal economy. Consequently, the absence of formality creates contexts more conducive to the deficient protection of workers and higher incidence of poverty. Thus, for the ILO, the transition to formalization represents the condition to ensure labour protection for informal workers. This conviction is translated into the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204).

ILO interventions target the formalization of workers by enhancing their employability or building their entrepreneurial capacities, mainly through activities of capacity-building and awareness-raising, but also through knowledge production and dissemination, although the latter is more directed towards governments and social partners. In Mexico, the retail sector is characterized by high informality and precarious working conditions.

The ILO intervention MEX/16/01/RBSA targeted the production of studies on informality in the retail sector, to inform the preparation of a federal strategy for the formalization of retailers. It also built the capacities of social partners.

The intervention in Mexico contributed to building knowledge about the specificities of informality in the retail sector and developing capabilities in implementing policies and strategies towards formalization.

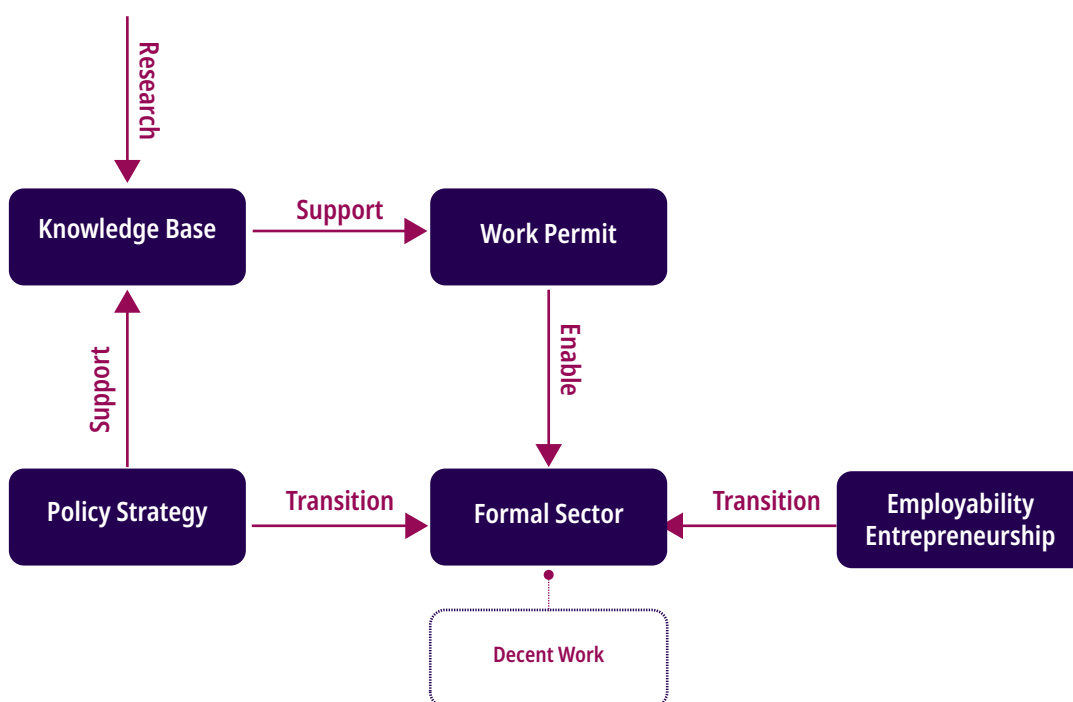
Research, studies and assessments are planned to support governments and social partners in their efforts to cope with informality. In Mexico, the MEX/16/01/RBSA project also included a field component to assist more than 100 informal retailers in transitioning their microbusinesses to formality. The activity nonetheless failed; it only included awareness-raising on formalization, but not training, to improve capacities. The weak capacities of informal workers and entrepreneurs may compromise their formalization, as they lack the competencies to ensure employability or competitiveness that favour the transition to formality. Formalization implies higher expenditures, and the opportunity cost for informal workers and entrepreneurs may not be attractive.

Training activities are thus opportunistic, and the ILO has at its disposal different toolkits and methodologies to increase the competencies of informal workers. Get Ahead, for instance, was used in the already-mentioned Bolivian project BOL/20/50/UND to empower self-employed women with entrepreneurial capacities for the formal sector. They benefited from training that developed capacities in tools for information and communication technology, digital marketing, inventory management, control of expenses and income, time and resource management, soft skills and knowledge of the financial system. Self-employed women in the informal economy confirmed having acquired new entrepreneurial and digital skills, and the training programme was absorbed by relevant training entities to be replicated.

Undeniably, access to the formal sector may also be prevented by formal issues apart from individual capabilities, such as for migrant workers dispossessed of work permits. Migrant workers have several vulnerabilities, principally when forcibly displaced because of armed conflicts. The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, for instance, triggered a refugee crisis that put pressure on host country economies such as Jordan and Lebanon. Jordan received over 650,000 and Lebanon almost 850,00 Syrian refugees, respectively, which created further vulnerabilities and informality in the already fragilized countries.

The ability of the ILO to connect migrants to the labour market is recognized. The Organization's valued labour migration expertise led to the development of interventions in both Jordan and Lebanon to enhance knowledge of the labour market and employment conditions of Syrian refugees (RAB/18/01/FOR). Lebanon was missing statistics and evidence on the employment and working conditions of the refugees, while Jordan needed updated evidence-based research to better understand the impact of work permits on fostering decent work. Jordan benefited from a previous project that led to the issuance of work permits to Syrian refugees. The project filled knowledge gaps on informality and vulnerability among refugees in Lebanon, while in Jordan, it revealed the positive effects of work permits towards decent work.

FIGURE 7. TRANSITION TO FORMALITY INTERVENTION MODEL



▶ 7. Transformation mechanics

Activities are derived from a system of intervention based on the development of capacities, the advice on policies, and the production and dissemination of knowledge.

The presented intervention models of the ILO on labour protection are built on a range of activities and instruments. Regional workshops may be organized to advocate for international labour standards (GLO/18/63/SWE); policy guides may be developed to strengthen collective bargaining (GLO/14/66/SID); labour inspectors may be trained to ensure workplace compliance with labour norms (RAF/16/53/FRA); benefits may be disbursed to compensate workers who are victims of occupational accidents (PAK/16/06/DEU); studies on the needs of workers and their families, and economic factors, may be produced to demonstrate the effectiveness of wage-setting indicator methodologies (GLO/18/23/NLD); or women may be trained with Get Ahead to develop their entrepreneurial skills for the formal sector (BOL/20/50/UND). **Activities implemented are therefore numerous** and normally oriented to produce the desired changes in terms of labour protection.

However, this diversity of activities does not reflect a random choice of actions. Whether related to the advocacy of international labour standards, the advancement of freedom of association, the promotion of safe workplaces, the institution of minimum wages or the transition to formality, these **activities are derived from a system of intervention based on three core types of actions:** (a) development of capacities, (b) advice on policies, and (c) the production and dissemination of knowledge.

The development of capacities aims at building and maintaining the capabilities of individuals and organizations to ensure effective labour protection. It mainly comprises the design and implementation of:

- ▶ trainings, such as the preparation of the Green Business Better Work Training Toolkit (RAS/14/05/JPN);
- ▶ information systems (for example, portals, platforms and databases), such as the proposal to develop a human resources management system adapted to the needs of banana producer associations in the Dominican Republic (DOM/14/01/UND);
- ▶ forums (for example, meetings and discussions), such as the organization of the high-level global tripartite meeting of experts on defining recruitment fees and related costs (GLO/15/41/EUR); and
- ▶ recruitment and career systems, such as the elaboration of comprehensive job profiles with career paths for labour inspectors in Haiti (HAI/12/52/USA).

Capacity development refers, then, to functional and technical activities oriented towards increasing skills and competencies of individuals, as well as supporting organizations in fulfilling their missions.

The advice on policies aims at supporting improvements in legal and regulatory frameworks related to the protection of workers. It mainly comprises advice on the design and implementation of:

- ▶ plans and strategies, such as the preparation and adoption of an integrated action plan to tackle undeclared and underdeclared work in Greece (GRC/15/01/EUR);
- ▶ norms, such as the design of an employment injury insurance scheme in Bangladesh (BGD/15/05/DEU); and
- ▶ laws and policies, such as promoting the discussion on new labour protective regulations for industrial parks in Ethiopia (ETH/15/02/SID).

Thus, policy advice refers to advisory and technical activities oriented towards supporting constituents in promoting an enabling institutional environment, as aligned as possible with international labour standards.

The production and dissemination of knowledge are aimed at enhancing global and individual knowledge related to labour protection topics. It mainly comprises the design and preparation of:

- ▶ studies, methodologies, and publications, such as publishing a global report on drivers and constraints for occupational safety and health improvement (GLO/15/39/EUR);
- ▶ assessments, such as assessing the labour administration system of Greece in the light of international labour standards (GRC/16/02/EUR); and
- ▶ informative and promotional materials, such as the release of informative television and social media videos on COVID-19 prevention in workplaces (BOL/18/01/RBS).

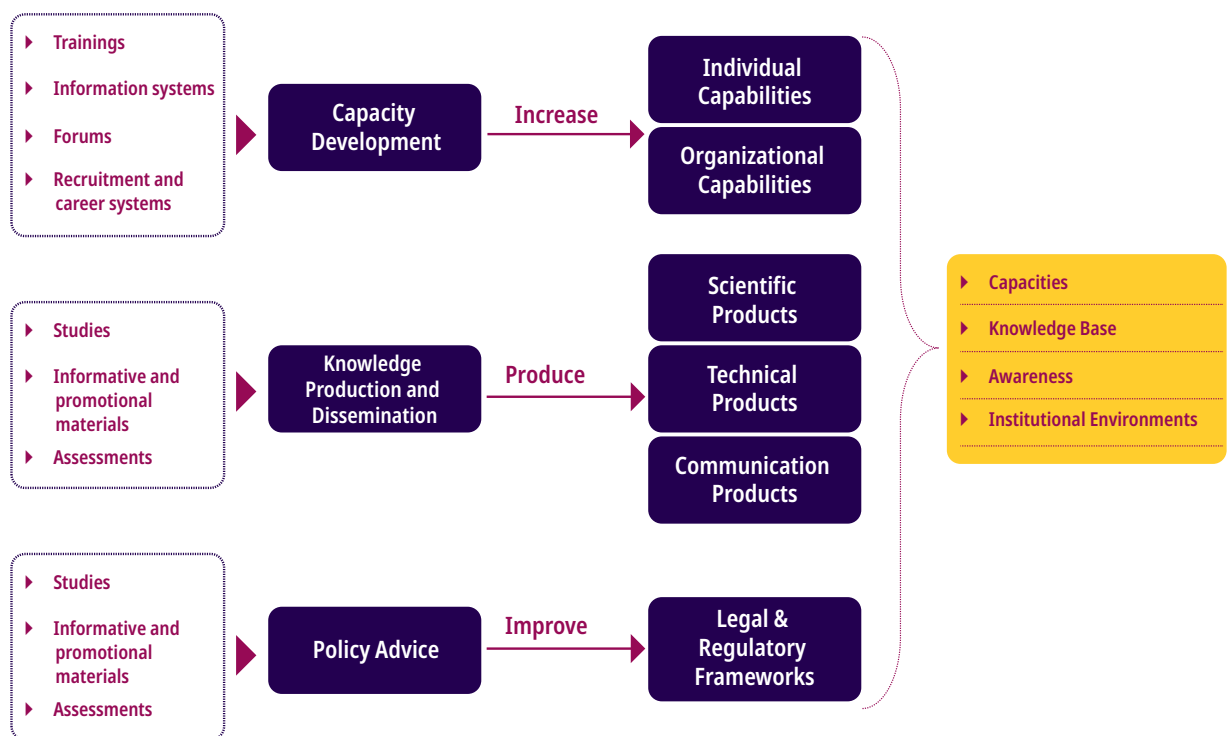
Knowledge production and dissemination refer, then, to research, analysis and communication activities oriented towards creating scientific, technical, informative, and promotional products.

The evaluation reports do not permit a clear identification of the contributions of specific activities to the desired changes in terms of labour protection within this system of intervention. The descriptions of the activities tend to be imprecise, hindering the establishment of mechanics transforming inputs into outputs and then outcomes. Nonetheless, a more comprehensive reading of evaluation reports uncovered an intertwined system of intervention that works together to increase individual, collective, and institutional knowledge bases, capacities and awareness, as well as to improve legal environments. Thus, a unique activity may contribute to different changes, while a unique change may be produced by a set of activities.

Training officials from the Ministry of Labour and Economy on minimum wage-setting methodologies, for instance, would ipso facto increase the individual capacities of the trainees. However, it would also enlarge their technical knowledge on these methodologies and raise their awareness on minimum wage benefits, in addition to enhancing the institutional capacity of the Ministry on minimum wage-setting and favouring the advancement of a legal environment that comprises a minimum wage adequate to the needs of workers and their families. Conversely, a legal environment that promotes safe workplaces, for instance, would be produced by policy advice to develop national/sectoral occupational safety and health norms, the training of labour inspectors on norm compliance, and the production of communication materials on norm compliance directed to managers and workers.

In the light of the effectiveness and impacts observed in the evaluation reports, the successful projects tended mostly to be those that understood change through this lens of interdependence and proposed a balanced mix of targeted activities. The DOM/14/01/UND evaluation report, for instance, provided an understanding that trainings may produce ineffective results if they are not built on previous advocacy activities. Thus, it seems imperative to have strong project designs, based on clear intervention logic, to avoid (a) the implementation of projects that are fund-driven rather than needs-driven (GLO/18/63/SWE), or product-based rather than results-based (MEX/16/01/RBSA); and (b) a cluster of erratic isolated activities (RAF/16/53/FRA) with limited impacts due to the absence of a precise theory of change (PAK/15/01/NET).

FIGURE 8. SYSTEM OF INTERVENTION DIAGRAM



Conclusion: What works, for whom and why?

Successful projects advanced social inclusion by promoting labour rights, and fostering capacity development and the formalization of workers, including those from more vulnerable groups.

Labour protection is critical. It helps to ensure fair wages, adequate working time and safe workplaces in a world of work challenged by social, economic, political, technological, and environmental crises. The ILO develops projects oriented towards advancing labour protection, regardless of the employment and contractual statuses of workers. This working paper drew a pattern of interventions based on rights that are grounded in international labour standards related to decent work. These interventions aim mainly at:¹⁵

- ▶ advancing freedom of association to strengthen collective bargaining for the defence of labour rights;
- ▶ securing workplaces and compensating workers who are victims of occupational accidents;
- ▶ instituting minimum wages that take into consideration both the needs of the workers and their families, and the economic factors; and
- ▶ formalizing workers to ensure access to legal frameworks for labour protection.

To achieve their objectives, projects have at their disposal a choice of activities – from a three-headed system of intervention based on the development of capacities, the advice on policies, and the production and dissemination of knowledge – as well as previously developed initiatives and instruments.

Among these instruments, the synthesis review spotted the role of the Vision Zero Fund in supporting the ILO/Korea Partnership to develop a sense of ownership among all constituents and engagement towards better occupational safety and health policies and norms in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Myanmar (RAS/17/51/KOR). It also identified the contribution of some projects to these instruments, such as the operationalization of the Equal Pay International Coalition by the SIDA–ILO Partnership on Outcome 8 (GLO/18/63/SWE), or the strengthening of the Vision Zero Fund with a methodological toolkit ready to be replicated (GLO/15/39/EUR).

The incorporation of these instruments, though, is not systematic, and many evaluation reports do not mention any relationships with specific initiatives. This situation may prevent the establishment of further synergies and undermine the potential for social transformation of the ILO’s development cooperation programmes and projects. As a matter of fact, connectedness with social protection, for instance, was found in few projects related to occupational safety and health in which social protection coverage was extended by new employment injury insurance schemes, such as in Bangladesh (BGD/15/05/DEU) or Pakistan (PAK/16/06/DEU). Stronger project designs can probably help to strengthen multiple connectedness for further impacts. Robust logical frameworks favour projects oriented towards fulfilling needs under a diagnosis of possibilities, which includes the potential synergies.

15 Although no specific pattern of intervention related to “working time” was identified, it seems that this core dimension of labour protection is transversally addressed through the advancement of labour rights and formalization. Cameroon, for instance, made advancements in drafting legislation on working hours and wages in domestic work (GLO/18/63/SWE). Nonetheless, “working time” does not seem to constitute a common outcome of the interventions on labour protection, and just a few isolated and not well detailed achievements have been reported on this topic.

Undeniably, the successful projects advanced social inclusion by promoting labour rights and fostering capacity development and the formalization of workers, including those from more vulnerable groups, as previously reported. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, self-employed indigenous women in the informal economy increased their entrepreneurial skills and strengthened their voices through better representation (BOL/20/50/UND), while in Jordan Syrian refugees benefitted from new labour regulations (RAB/18/01/FOR), among others. The ILO model of intervention, nonetheless, is being challenged by the rapid transformations of the world of work and is striving to reach a significant portion of vulnerable workers.

Interventions to enhance and expand labour protection are based on the rights of the formal economy, advanced through collective bargaining and legal frameworks. However, the transformations of the world of work are intensifying the volume and needs of workers who are distant from formality and collective association. Natural disasters and armed conflicts are pushing entire communities to cross borders and become refugees or migrants, with limited access to the formal labour markets in the host countries. Global health crises, such as COVID-19, are leaving informal workers behind in terms of governmental aid, to compensate for decreases in income and loss of activities, as well as of protection measures to secure workplaces. Furthermore, these global health crises are also promoting the digital economy and its share of atypical forms of employment.

Atypical forms of employment relate to a set of professional activities that diverge from the traditional full-time, open-ended employment with regular hours based on a working contract. They may refer to telework, part-time and on-call work, disguised employment, temporary employment, or digital gig jobs. Although the forces behind atypical forms of employment are varied, the rise of the digital economy has intensified the demand for them, mostly driven by the technological advances of digital labour platforms and the on-demand economy. Atypical workers are generally atomized and operate independently from each other. Atomized workers are fragmented, individualized, and isolated. They are disconnected from each other and lack the ability to organize themselves to pursue their interests collectively.

The evaluation reports did not permit the full understanding of the pathways to promote the protection of informal and atypical workers, as the ILO tripartite intervention model relies on norms, collective bargaining, and formalization. What works are intervention projects oriented towards the needs of workers in the formal economy, moulded by traditional tripartite governance.

How should we respond to the needs of workers who are distant from formality? How do we include sectors of the world of work that are barely unionized? What will be the adequate intervention models to advance labour protection for all workers in a fast-changing economy? The responses are not yet ready, and discussions on such topics as minimum income schemes and inclusive private insurance systems will most likely gain importance in the public debate over the coming years. Thus, the challenge to advance labour protection for all workers is a critical societal issue that the ILO has the mandate to address.

Annex: Working sample

1. EVALUATION REPORTS

Evaluation Title	Region	Country	Theme	Completion Date	Funding Source	TC Symbol
Implementation of the national employment injury insurance scheme of Bangladesh - Final Independent Evaluation	Asia	Bangladesh	Social protection Employment policy Occupational safety and health	01/12/2019	Germany, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	BGD/15/05/DEU
Desarrollo regional productivo, sostenible y con mejores condiciones de seguridad y salud en el trabajo en la mineración y manufactura de Bolivia - Evaluación Final Independiente	Latin America	Bolivia	Mining Occupational safety and health Manufacturing, sweat shops	01/12/2021	ILO Internal Customer	BOL/18/01/RBS
Mitigando el impacto socioeconómico del COVID-19 sobre el empleo y los ingresos de mujeres trabajadoras por cuenta propia de la economía informal en Bolivia - Evaluación Conjunta Final Independiente	Latin America	Bolivia	Gender equality Informal economy 19	01/06/2022	ILO Internal Customer	BOL/20/50/UND
Mejoramiento de las condiciones laborales y la productividad de la cadena de valor del banano - Evaluación final interna	Latin America	Dominican Republic	Decent work Working conditions Agriculture	01/11/2018	United Nations Development Programme	DOM/14/01/UND
Joint ILO-EU project to improve knowledge base and safety and health in global supply chains to support G20 work on safer workplaces - Final evaluation	Interregional	Interregional	Organizational learning Occupational safety and health	01/05/2018	European Commission, Central Finance and Contracts Unit	GLO/15/39/EUR
Supporting the transition from informal to formal economy and addressing undeclared work in Greece: identifying drivers and ensuring effective compliance - Final evaluation	Europe	Greece	Informal economy	01/04/2018	European Commission, DGDEV	GRC/15/01/EUR
Strengthening the Labour Administration system and improving its delivery capacity - Final evaluation	Europe	Greece	Occupational safety and health Labour administration	01/06/2018	European Commission Structural Reform Support Service	GRC/16/02/EUR

Soporte técnico en formalización en México - Evaluación final independiente	Latin America	Mexico	Informal economy	01/07/2019	Regular Budget Supplementary Account	MEX/16/01/RBS
Strengthening Labour Inspection system for Promoting Labour Standards and ensuring workplace compliance in Pakistan - Final evaluation	Asia	Pakistan	Occupational safety and health Labour inspection Labour standards	01/10/2019	Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	PAK/15/01/NET
Implementation of the Agreement concerning additional employment injury benefits to the victims of the Ali Enterprises fire and strengthening... - Final evaluation	Asia	Pakistan	Social protection Occupational safety and health	01/03/2021	Germany, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GMBH	PAK/16/06/DEU
Towards Improved Knowledge on Labour Market and Employment Conditions of Syrian Refugees and Host Communities in Jordan and Lebanon - Final evaluation	Arab States	Arab States	Working conditions Conditions of employment Vulnerable groups	01/01/2022	Ford Foundation	RAB/18/01/FOR
Améliorer la gouvernance du travail dans les TPE/PME et aider à la sortie de l'économie informelle en Afrique - Final évaluation	Africa	Africa regional	Informal economy Small or micro-enterprises Labour inspection Occupational safety and health	01/04/2021	France, Ministère du travail, de l'emploi et du dialogue social, Ministère des affaires sociales	RAF/16/53/FRA
Workplaces and industries for sustainable and inclusive growth through tripartite dialogue and practical knowledge - Final evaluation	Asia	Indonesia	Social dialogue Labour relations Green Jobs Tripartism and constituent partnerships	01/02/2019	Japan, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare	RAS/14/05/JPN
Labour Standards in Global Supply Chains " Programme of Action for Asia and the Garment Sector	Asia	Asian Regional	Labour relations Social dialogue Global supply/value chains Textile industry Clothing industry Working conditions	01/03/2019	Germany, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	RAS/17/50/DEU
2018-2020 ILO/ Korea Partnership Programme funded projects in ASEAN, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam - Final evaluation	Asia	Asian Regional	Occupational safety and health Skills Development	01/09/2020	Republic of Korea	RAS/17/51/KOR
Mainstreaming Inclusive Insurance in Uganda - Final Evaluation	Africa	Uganda	Occupational safety and health	01/12/2020	ILO Internal Customer	UGA/18/01/FSD
Enhancing the labour administration capacity to improve working conditions and tackle undeclared work - Final evaluation	Europe	Ukraine	Labour administration Informal economy Working conditions Occupational safety and health	01/02/2020	Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine	UKR/16/03/EUR

Addressing Decent Work Deficits in the Tobacco Sector of Zambia and Tanzania Projects (DWIT) - Final cluster evaluation	Africa	Tanzania, United Rep. of	Child labour Occupational safety and health 19 Tobacco industry Vulnerable groups	01/12/2020	ILO Internal Customer	ZMB/18/02/RBS
Global action to improve the recruitment framework of labour migration - Midterm Evaluation	Africa	Kenya	Migration	01/07/2019	European Union, Europe Aid	GLO/15/41/EUR
Indicators and methodologies for wage setting - Final evaluation	Interregional	Interregional	Data Collection and Analysis	01/06/2022	Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	GLO/18/23/NLD
More and better jobs for women: women's empowerment through decent work in Turkey - Final Evaluation	Europe	Turkey	Gender equality	01/05/2018	Sweden, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	TUR/13/02/SID
Improving industrial relations for decent work and sustainable development of textile and garment industries in Ethiopia - Final Cluster Evaluation	Africa	Ethiopia	Textile industry Labour relations Social dialogue	01/09/2019	Sweden, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	ETH/15/02/SID
Promoting the Right to Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining – Outcome 14 - Final Evaluation	Interregional	Interregional	Freedom of association	01/06/2016	Norway	GLO/14/66/SID
Clustered Evaluation of the SIDA-Funded Interventions under Outcome 1 (2018-2019), Phase I ILO-SIDA Partnership Programme, 2018-2021 - Final evaluation	Interregional	Interregional	Skills Development Youth employment Social dialogue	01/04/2020	SIDA DFID GTZ Multi Donor	- Not available -
Better Work Haiti - USDOL - Final external evaluation	Latin America	Haiti	Labour standards Clothing industry Social protection Textile industry Productivity Working conditions	01/06/2017	USA, United States Department of Labor	HAI/12/52/USA
Better Work Vietnam (Phase II) and Better Work Indonesia (Phase II) - Final cluster evaluation	Asia	Viet-Nam	Clothing industry Working conditions Productivity Social dialogue Occupational safety and health Labour relations Labour administration Labour inspection	01/03/2017	Switzerland, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs	VIE/12/06/MUL
Clustered Evaluation of Policy Outcome 8: Protecting workers from unacceptable forms of work and Cross-cutting policy driver: Gender equality and non-discrimination - Final clustered evaluation	Interregional	Interregional	Government: Capacity Building Workers' organization: Capacity Building Gender equality Employers: Capacity Building Discrimination	01/05/2020	Sweden, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	GLO/18/63/SWE

2. HIGH-LEVEL EVALUATIONS

Reference	Themes	Proposed by
High-level independent evaluation of ILO's covid-19 response, 2020-2022. International labour organization 2022	Covid-19	WORKQUALITY
High-level independent evaluation of ILO's strategy and action for promoting fair and effective labour migration policies, 2016-20. International labour organization 2021	Migration	WORKQUALITY
Independent high-level evaluation: ILO's strategy and actions towards the formalization of the informal economy, 2014-18. International labour organization 2019	Informal economy	WORKQUALITY
High-level independent evaluation of ILO's gender equality and mainstreaming efforts, 2016-21. International labour organization 2021	Gender	WORKQUALITY
High-level independent evaluation of ILO's research and knowledge management strategies and approaches 2010-2019. International labour organization 2020	Organizational learning	WORKQUALITY

3. ILO PUBLICATION

Reference	Themes	Proposed By
Making decent work a reality for domestic workers: Progress and prospects ten years after the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2021	domestic worker / domestic work / decent work / working conditions /labour statistics / social protection / labour legislation / ILO Convention	WORKQUALITY
Global Wage Report 2020-21: Wages and minimum wages in the time of COVID-19. International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2020	wages / COVID-19 / wage differential / minimum wage / wage policy / gender equality	WORKQUALITY
Protecting the rights of migrant workers in irregular situations and addressing irregular labour migration: A compendium. International Labour Organization 2021	Migration	WORKQUALITY
VZF Annual Progress Report 2020-2021	Occupational safety and health	OSH
Safety + Health for All. An ILO Flagship Programme: Key facts and figures (2016-2020). International Labour Organization 2020.	Occupational safety and health	OSH
Building a culture of workplace compliance through development cooperation: Compendium of good practices. International Labour Organization 2021	Labour inspection Occupational safety and health	OSH

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