



Governing Body

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Programme, Financial and Administrative Section

PFA

Programme, Financial and Administrative Segment

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ILO Strategy on knowledge and innovation across the Organization

Purpose of the document

This document provides information on the development of the ILO strategy on knowledge and innovation. The Governing Body is invited to provide comments and guidance for the finalization of the strategy (see the draft decision in paragraph 28).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Main relevant outcome: Enabling outcomes A: Authoritative knowledge and high-impact partnerships for promoting decent work and C: Efficient support services and effective use of ILO resources.

Policy implications: Enabling actions will support innovation in the development of policy solutions and improvements in knowledge management.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None.

Follow-up action required: The Innovation and Knowledge Management Unit will operationalize the strategy.

Author unit: Office of the Deputy Director-General for Management and Reform (DDG/MR).

Related documents: [GB.341/PFA/1](#); [GB.335/INS/9](#).

▶ Introduction

1. The Programme and Budget for the biennium 2022–23 approved by the International Labour Conference at its 109th Session (2021) makes provision for the establishment of a new ILO Innovation and Knowledge Management Unit (IKMU), located in the Management and Reform Portfolio.
2. The programme and budget makes it clear that the purpose of the new unit is to drive knowledge and innovation across the Office, prioritizing:
 - fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation
 - leading improved data and content management
 - spearheading knowledge-sharing
 - developing institutional capacities, and
 - facilitating the formulation and implementation of innovative policies, products and services.
3. In response to questions during discussion of his programme and budget proposals at the 341st Session (March 2021) of the Governing Body, the Director-General underlined three objectives behind the proposed unit:
 - (i) To respond to the strong demands generated by the Future of Work Centenary Initiative that the ILO address key emerging issues presented by transformative changes at work in new and innovative ways.
 - (ii) To adopt the best practices identified in the multilateral system, including by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, by the UN Joint Inspection Unit and in the 2020 High-level independent evaluation of (the) ILO's research and knowledge management strategies and approaches.
 - (iii) To build on the achievements of the ILO reform process launched in 2012, and particularly of the Business Innovation Unit (BIU) set up in 2015, through which some US\$80 million have been redeployed to frontline service delivery.
4. The Governing Body was also informed that the new unit would consolidate existing capacities of the BIU and of the Knowledge Management Team (KMT) and be composed of one P5 and four P4 staff.
5. The work of the unit would be relevant to all Office activities and would be aligned fully to the enabling outcomes on: improved operational strategies systems and approaches to increase value for money; enhanced policies and systems to develop a highly performing, motivated and diverse workforce; and enhanced organizational capacity for change, innovation and continuous improvement.

▶ Elements of the ILO strategy on knowledge and innovation across the organization

6. The Programme and Budget for the biennium 2022–23 sets the parameters within which the Office is now developing the Strategy on knowledge and innovation. The process of recruitment to the unit itself is under way and is expected to be completed by the end of March 2022.
7. The development of the strategy is based on the premise that innovation at the ILO should be the implementation of positive changes in actions and methodologies that enable it to achieve or exceed objectives set by constituents. The Organization should collect, generate, analyse, and share knowledge and data so as to advance its mandate on the basis of the strongest possible basis of evidence.
8. These broad definitions imply that the success of the strategy will depend heavily on the involvement of a wide range of departments and staff. The IKMU will be a dedicated internal resource which all ILO management and staff are able to call upon in pursuit of improvements. Rather than “owning” innovation and knowledge management in the organization it will provide support and expertise to convert ideas into concrete improvements. All ILO staff, regardless of function, grade or location, have a potential role in initiating, developing and implementing improvements.
9. In this regard, the IKMU will need to work particularly closely with the research, statistics, and communications departments of the ILO in developing the Organization’s knowledge management functions, and with the Human Resources Development Department to ensure management practices which enable and reward cooperation and teamwork. The Senior Management Team will be responsible for ensuring the coordination of the unit with departments in the policy and the field and partnership portfolios and through the latter with ILO offices in the different regions which have a key role to play in innovation and knowledge management.
10. The development of the strategy, which is in its early stages, is informed by the following considerations in respect of the priority areas set out in the programme and budget and would benefit from the further guidance of the Governing Body.

A culture of collaboration and innovation

11. Work to date under the Business Process Review has shown that ILO staff have many ideas for innovative problem-solving and improvements in service delivery and efficiency. An enabling environment in which staff are encouraged and empowered to bring forward ideas and proposals is required to realize this potential. With appropriate safeguards, staff should have space and opportunity to pursue innovation. Best results will not come from isolated, one-time initiatives, but from continuous engagement to create a supportive ecosystem for innovation and improvement.
12. This can be promoted by human resource policies and practices which encourage and reward innovation. Job descriptions could make clear the expectation that staff should seek to initiate or assist in such effort. Equally, performance management should recognize these contributions and avoid discouraging reasonable risk-taking by penalizing perceived failure.
13. Appropriate internal communications mechanisms which showcase positive experiences, facilitate networking and promote and underpin communities of practice, can also help

generalize the culture of collaboration and innovation across the Organization. Experience with the “ILO One Connect month” in February 2022 and subsequently the three Staff Conversations in February and March 2022 have already pointed to the potential for action in this area.

Improved data and content management

14. In the past ten years, several global projects have changed the way ILO staff engage with data. Dedicated platforms and data sources have been put in place or updated, on a wide range of topics. These include notably international labour standards, legislation, statistics, employment protection, working conditions, labour inspection, industrial relations, social protection, and forced labour, among many others. Along with these, additional, cross-cutting platforms such as the ILO’s LABORDOC, Knowledge Gateway, Development Cooperation, *i-eval* Discovery and Decent Work Results have responded to recurrent needs, expressed by constituents, staff, partners and the public, for rapid friendly access to information and data to inform quality and evidence-based data analysis. These data and content portals have increased the uptake of ILO knowledge and, through their implementation, defined good practices and guidelines for data management sustainability.
15. Data and content management needs, technologies, and processes are constantly evolving and new demands are arising. Improving data and content management between headquarters and field specialists is also a persistent need. To meet these demands, further development and implementation of ILO-wide standards for data and content management is needed.
16. The current environment of complexity and uncertainty also calls for us to make use of data and content in new and innovative ways, beyond extrapolating from existing data that may not be a reliable guide to the future anymore. We need to rapidly understand “why things happen” and “what may happen next” in order to prepare “how to respond now”. Responses now must take into account not just our current situation but possible impacts of future challenges in the world of work. This realization is embedded in the UN Secretary-General’s report *Our Common Agenda*, expressed as renewing solidarity between peoples and future generations. It acknowledges the role of foresight in giving voice to the future, so that we can make better future-ready, just and resilient decisions today. The Office has been developing resources to equip staff with futures and foresight methods. These methods will help all of us understand the practical implications of the human-centred agenda and to help shape the future world of work that we want.

Knowledge-sharing

17. Knowledge-sharing is a long-recognized fundamental activity of the ILO, as recognized in its Constitution. Nonetheless it requires attention to integrate knowledge-sharing into different levels of activity: from day-to-day work; to workshops and events; to projects and on the larger programmatic level. Different knowledge-sharing techniques are targeted at these different levels and where appropriate can be supported by a range of technology solutions.
18. The informal dimension of knowledge-sharing is also critical to the effectiveness of the ILO. Whether through Governing Body meetings and the International Labour Conference or the “coffee culture” of working in common spaces, care and attention is necessary to ensure formal and informal knowledge-sharing activities work together.

19. Benefits of enhanced sharing and use of knowledge are to reduce duplication of effort, while simultaneously capitalizing on relevant prior experience; jump-starting new projects, product and service development, consideration of new ideas and approaches, innovation and other initiatives; driving participation and engagement with ILO activities and the ILO agenda through active exchanges of knowledge; capturing and sustaining media attention through knowledge-sharing at events, especially those linked to product and service launches, dedicated annual days, and other events; better positioning of ILO policy advice vis-à-vis competitors with different priorities; increasing research uptake through knowledge-sharing and thereby increase the influence of ILO policy advice, agenda, positions and core values on world of work issues.
20. An emerging need is for ILO staff to sustain and upgrade mechanisms for sharing knowledge, particularly in remote or hybrid working environments. Sharing information and knowledge by email or through platforms can be overwhelming and meetings can be very time consuming. Alternative solutions, based on new ways of working through networks and working together collaboratively, are present in the ILO. However, these need to be further elaborated, scaled more widely, and adapted to different contexts. The COVID-19 pandemic has also given an important impulse to ILO constituents and other relevant actors to engage more through digital tools and platforms. With considered measures, this increased engagement by constituents could also result in improved knowledge-sharing.

Institutional capacities

21. The ILO-wide strategy for institutional capacity development adopted by the Governing Body in March 2019 underlines the role of innovation in driving capacity development of constituents and also of ILO staff. This can be applied in the use of new technologies, new analytical perspectives, and new methodologies in learning techniques.
22. To this end, considerable progress has already been made at the Turin Centre which has invested heavily in its learning Innovation Programme which offers cutting-edge learning solutions for constituents and staff. These efforts have been given greater impetus by the Centre's adaptation to the shift from residential to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and will be central to the ongoing reform process in Turin.
23. The strategy will be able to benefit from these developments and will need to be supported by on-the-job training and coaching on design and planning methods, problem-solving and team development. In the field of knowledge management, training, mentoring, and coaching could be applied to enhance collaboration through networks and communities of practice and to apply foresight techniques to anticipate and prepare for future changes.
24. In addition to nurturing its own institutional capacities, the ILO will need to develop and strengthen external partnerships, including with innovation teams and networks now developing in the United Nations system. The experience of working with outside consultants in the early phases of the Business Improvement Programme enabled the ILO to develop its own in-house capacities is an example of how such partnerships can benefit the Organization.

Innovative policies, products and services

25. The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work creates strong expectations for the ILO to use its statistical, research, knowledge-management capacities and expertise for further strengthening its evidence-based policy advice. In the context of rapid, transformative change at work, this implies a need for innovative thinking and adaptation in existing approaches, both

in respect of content and method of delivery so as to deliver relevant, robust and scalable services to constituents.

26. Increasing the ILO's policy and delivery capacities to respond to these expectations will require that the IKMU support all relevant departments along the production chain of services – from research to policy to the delivery of training and advocacy. This further underlines the need for the unit's activities to be integrated firmly in all aspects of the work of the ILO.

▶ Next steps

27. On the basis of the guidance received from the Governing Body, and ongoing internal consultation, the Office will continue to develop and implement the ILO Strategy on knowledge and innovation across the Organization. A progress report could be presented to the Governing Body at its 346th Session (November 2022).

▶ Draft decision

28. **The Governing Body took note of the development of the strategy and requested the Director General to:**
 - (a) **take into account the views expressed by the Governing Body in its finalization; and**
 - (b) **present a progress report to its 346th Session (November 2022).**