



International
Labour
Organization

Evaluation Office

▶ ILO's response to the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work: Evaluative lessons on how to build a better future of work after the pandemic

A synthesis review of evaluative evidence

Phase II: December 2021
(Phase I: August 2021)



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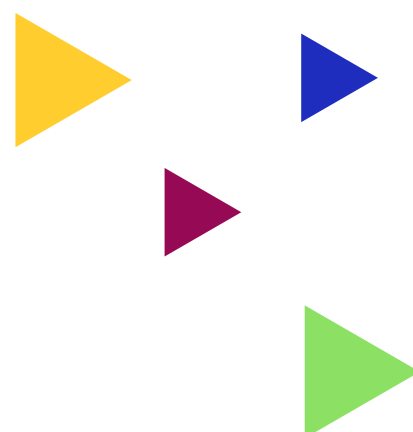
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► Preface

This report was prepared as an advance input for the high-level evaluation of the ILO's response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), to be undertaken in 2022 and discussed by the Governing Body at its October–November 2022 session. The International Labour Organization's (ILO's) Evaluation Office (EVAL) conducted this synthesis review in response to the Governing Body's request for a strategic review of the ILO's work to tackle the effects of the pandemic on the world of work. The study was prepared by Tony Powers and Eamonn Powers, independent international evaluation consultants; and managed by Patricia Vidal Hurtado, Evaluation Officer, and Janette Murawski, Communications and Knowledge Management Officer, at EVAL. Guy Thijs, Director of EVAL, provided inputs and oversight to ensure the quality and independence of the study. The report presents results from two purposive samples of evaluation reports in which various ILO responses to the pandemic crisis were considered.

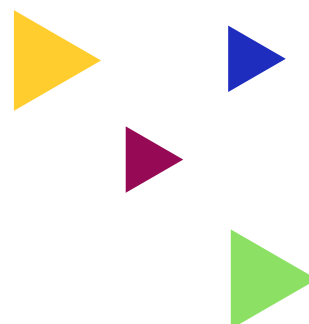
We hope that this report provides useful insights that can inform the International Labour Office and our constituents as they continue a robust response to the effects of the pandemic on the world of work.

Any errors and omissions are the responsibility of EVAL.



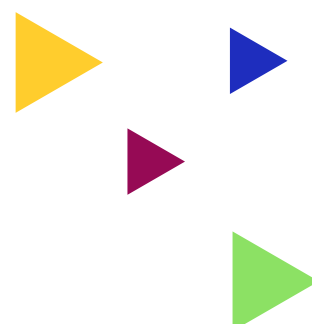
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► Abbreviations

EMPLOYMENT	ILO Employment Policy Department
ENTERPRISES	ILO Enterprises Department
EVAL	ILO Evaluation Office
FUNDAMENTALS	ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch
GOVERNANCE	ILO Governance and Tripartism Department
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOE	International Organization of Employers
LABADMIN/OSH	ILO Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health Branch
NORMES	ILO International Labour Standards Department
SCORE	Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIYB	Start and Improve Your Business
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SOCPRO	ILO Social Protection Department
UN	United Nations
VZF	Vision Zero Fund
WORKQUALITY	ILO Conditions of Work and Equality Department



► Executive summary

In 2020, the ILO's Evaluation Office (EVAL) established a framework and protocol¹ to ensure that high-level and decentralized evaluations conducted in this period collected relevant data about how the Organization was responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the effectiveness of its actions. Such evaluations provide valuable lessons on how the needs and priorities of constituents might have changed, what issues are emerging that require urgent attention, and whether the ILO is well positioned to respond to them.

This synthesis review provides an overview of key findings and lessons from the evaluations conducted from 2020 to 2021. It was carried out in two stages. The first stage reviewed an initial sample of 22 evaluation reports completed in 2020–21 and covered the ILO's immediate response at the outbreak of the pandemic. An interim report of findings² was completed in June 2021. The second stage³ reviewed another 19 evaluation reports, which were completed from April to October 2021. This final report combines the findings of both stages to shed light on the effectiveness of the ILO's targeted response to the devastating effects of the pandemic on the world of work.

Methodology

Throughout 2020, decentralized independent and internal evaluations were designed to include questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic response following ILO EVAL's protocol on collecting evaluative evidence on the ILO's COVID-19 response measures.⁴ These focused on two dimensions – the ILO's policy action at national, regional and global levels, and its institutional readiness and capacity to deliver timely support in a responsive manner. The review analysed a purposive sample of 41 evaluation reports to identify findings related to the aforementioned subareas of analysis. To this end, the review used EVAL's synthesis review methodology,⁵ which has been developed and applied to diverse topics over the past seven years, both in support of high-level evaluations and recurrent discussions by the ILO's constituents.⁶

Key findings and lessons learned

The initiatives evaluated by the reports considered for this synthesis review covered a range of areas related to the four-pillar policy framework of the ILO's response to the pandemic: stimulating the economy and employment; supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes; protecting workers in the workplace; and relying on social dialogue for solutions. The review of ILO projects revealed various conditions that promoted the progress and success of the ILO's immediate response to the urgent need for action in the outbreak of the pandemic crisis. These are summarized below.

1 ILO, [Protocol on collecting evaluative evidence on the ILO's COVID-19 response measures through project and programme evaluations](#), 9 October 2020.

2 ILO, [ILO's response to the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work: Evaluative lessons on how to build a better future of work after the pandemic](#), 19 August 2021.

3 ILO, [ILO's response to the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work: Evaluative lessons on how to build a better future of work after the pandemic: Synthesis review – Phase I](#), 25 October 2021.

4 ILO, [Protocol on collecting evaluative evidence on the ILO's COVID-19 response measures through project and programme evaluations](#), 9 October 2020.

5 ILO, [Synthesis reviews and meta-studies](#).

6 Ibid.

A. What is working, for whom and why?

► The ILO's institutional readiness and crisis response

Finding 1: ILO strategies and actions remain broadly relevant in the context of the pandemic, and can make an important contribution to a human-centred recovery, as envisaged in the Centenary Declaration⁷ and the International Labour Conference resolution on a global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient.⁸

The intervention types that proved most relevant and effective in the period examined by the reports were those related to protecting workers in the workplace. This was to be expected given that the health emergency that was taking place at the time suddenly elevated the importance of many of the policy areas these projects addressed, such as occupational safety and health, the situation of migrant workers, and the needs of workers in global supply chains. Interventions related to growing jobs and incomes, and improving access to these, did not perform as well at the height of the pandemic, due to the terrible economic conditions at that time. However, as economies and labour markets recover, such interventions will become increasingly important and require further analysis concerning their potential longer-term effectiveness and impact.

The deterioration of economic conditions and loss of jobs and livelihoods during the crisis were also seen as creating a climate where progress in some areas of fundamental principles and rights at work may be in the process of being reversed (for example, eliminating child labour and protecting workers' rights, especially among vulnerable groups). A renewed focus on these areas will be needed to identify and address the new factors behind these trends.

Lack of social protection systems in some countries was exposed in the situation of migrant workers returning to their home countries, and for those who found themselves stranded, jobless and without any social protection in destination countries. The vulnerability of migrant workers in the crisis reinforced the need for the ILO to renew and enhance its policy and programme responses, engaging with both origin and destination countries to grow decent work opportunities, improve skills recognition processes and enhance social protection.

Finding 2: Those conducting ILO interventions were forced to adapt to the unexpected restrictions imposed by the pandemic. They experienced implementation delays and were often unable to implement activities as planned. Despite these challenges, and to varying degrees, those leading the projects were able to adjust their planned activities to ensure they remained relevant to the suddenly changed circumstances, and to the changing needs and priorities of constituents during the crisis.

Not all the reviewed interventions could have their directions significantly changed in response to the shock brought about by the pandemic. Yet those that could showed that the ILO was quick to respond to the crisis, could be agile in developing highly relevant activities and resources that met stakeholder needs, and could overcome barriers to internal collaboration to unlock latent synergies and capacity to innovate. In general, projects were quickly adapted to their new circumstances through the use of new remote delivery methods, training content, and conducting research into the pandemic's effects. For some projects, more extensive changes were made, and new strategies and services were introduced to directly respond to the crisis.

⁷ ILO, *ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, 2019*, 1 June 2019.

⁸ ILO, *Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient*, 17 June 2021.

Finding 3: The one project in the two samples that was developed and implemented in direct response to the pandemic aligned with the call to action's commitment to universal social protection and social dialogue but, in terms of relevance, poses questions about what types of interventions the ILO should implement in the medium-to-long term, and how "hands-on" its approach should be beyond emergency situations.

This project, providing emergency assistance which included cash transfers, was relevant in that it provided an immediate response to an important employment-related problem. Its provision of social protection and its strong adherence to the principle of social dialogue were clearly aligned with the intent of the call to action. But the ILO may need to "develop a formal position on future emergency cash transfers as part of a broader social protection approach".

► **Operational efficiency in responding to the health crisis**

Finding 4: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to strengthened internal collaboration and has improved communication in some programmes. The ILO showed that, when faced with a crisis, it could overcome its tendency to "work in silos". This needs to be maintained in the post-COVID-19 world.

Evaluation reports commented on how the pandemic provided a new imperative for the ILO to work as one and to overcome a tendency to work in a fragmented, even internally competitive way. This focus on collaboration needs to be maintained. There is plenty of room for further improvement, and the risk remains – when the crisis subsides – of the ILO reverting to its old, more fragmented habits.

Finding 5: The use of cost-effective virtual/remote delivery methods in ILO interventions greatly increased during the pandemic, overcoming a past hesitancy to use these methods. Their continued use in the post-pandemic recovery phase is likely, and this may have an enduring and positive effect on the ILO's efficiency.

The use of virtual/remote delivery methods during the pandemic was greatly expanded, often increasing participation, as these were applied to activities such as training, provision of expert support and awareness-raising. These offered significant efficiencies in delivery. Greater familiarity may have helped ILO staff to overcome an entrenched preference for conventional face-to-face methods. While this has opened the door for their more widespread use after the pandemic, the review found some stakeholders warning that not all support could be effectively delivered remotely, that some institutions and communities were not well placed to use virtual technology, and that some vulnerable people could be frozen out.

► **Research and knowledge management capacities in times of crisis**

Finding 6: In terms of the visibility of the ILO's work in response to the pandemic, its research and knowledge management capabilities were especially effective. This was evident through various publications and policy guides developed by the reviewed projects in response to the pandemic, but especially through the ILO Monitor serial publication.

Many of the reviewed evaluation reports adjusted their work plans either to include research on COVID-19 effects on individuals and enterprises, or to develop new information/awareness on products and policy guidelines. The global reach of the serial

publication *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work*⁹ was a particular highlight – it was reported to have a very high profile as a source of high-level analysis on the impact of the pandemic on the labour market.

B. What has changed and why?

Finding 7: The ILO’s work in the period aligned with global, regional and national development strategies and priorities in place at the time. New priorities are now emerging in the wake of the pandemic, and the ILO will need to maintain an ability to adapt its approach to ensure that it coheres with plans and strategies as they evolve. Tripartite mechanisms and strategic partnerships need to be maintained to advance progress towards achieving the Decent Work Agenda and the Centenary Declaration goals.

With the ILO’s approved Programme and Budget for the 2022–23 biennium, it should use tripartite mechanisms to maximize the alignment of the ILO’s work with national and global priorities as they develop. The ILO should also work with other United Nations (UN) agencies and the development community to ensure that the Decent Work Agenda and Centenary Declaration goals form part of revised strategies to put the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) back on track. Some reports highlighted opportunities for more collaboration with other UN agencies in the recovery phase (for example, via the ILO-chaired UN Inter-agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy).

Most recurrent priorities for future action under the ILO’s post-COVID-19 strategy include reversing the effects of the pandemic’s destruction of jobs; reviewing the focus of the work of different ILO departments and units away from product-centred approaches and towards more localized solutions; and focusing on resilience at all levels to improve capacity to respond to future shocks.

Finding 8: The challenges posed by the pandemic will lead some countries and constituents to change their priorities, and this may have implications for the ILO’s work, including its commitments to sustainable development, social inclusion, international labour standards and social dialogue. While the ILO needs to be responsive to these changing priorities, it should continue to be a strong advocate for a human-centred approach in shaping a future of decent work for all.

Reports highlighted how shifting priorities during the pandemic were affecting the operating environment of the ILO’s work – for example, labour inspectorates being more tolerant of breaching of labour standards, and environmental standards and green jobs dropping in the hierarchy of needs. Some of this may be transitory, but there is a risk, as countries try to rebuild their labour markets, that they focus less on these work quality issues. In responding to constituent needs, the ILO needs to ensure that standards are maintained or improved and that “build back better” covers both quantity and quality of employment.

9 Available at www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS_767028/lang-en/index.htm.

C. What is next?

Finding 9: The reports provide valuable operational insights into some of the new priorities and drivers of change that the ILO will need to consider going forward to maximize its relevance. An overview is provided below.

► **Inclusive economic growth and employment:**

- elevated priority of “work quantity and quality” due to the widespread destruction of jobs and the possibility that job-generating global supply chains may be changed;
- even greater global challenges in youth employment in the years ahead;
- the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on women, which will require the ILO's renewed and refocused attention to gender equality;
- increased challenges faced by informal sector workers, people with disability, and other vulnerable groups and minorities in securing work in a highly competitive labour market;
- the fragility of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in adapting to any reconfiguration of global supply chains, the need to build the resilience of enterprises in responding to future shocks, and the potential for green jobs to create new opportunities in place of the jobs that have been lost.

► **Protection of all workers:**

- the reversal of progress towards eliminating child and forced labour in the aftermath of the pandemic, and the heightened vulnerability of migrant workers and refugees;
- the lifted profile given to occupational safety and health, which became the highest priority during the pandemic.

► **Universal social protection and social dialogue:**

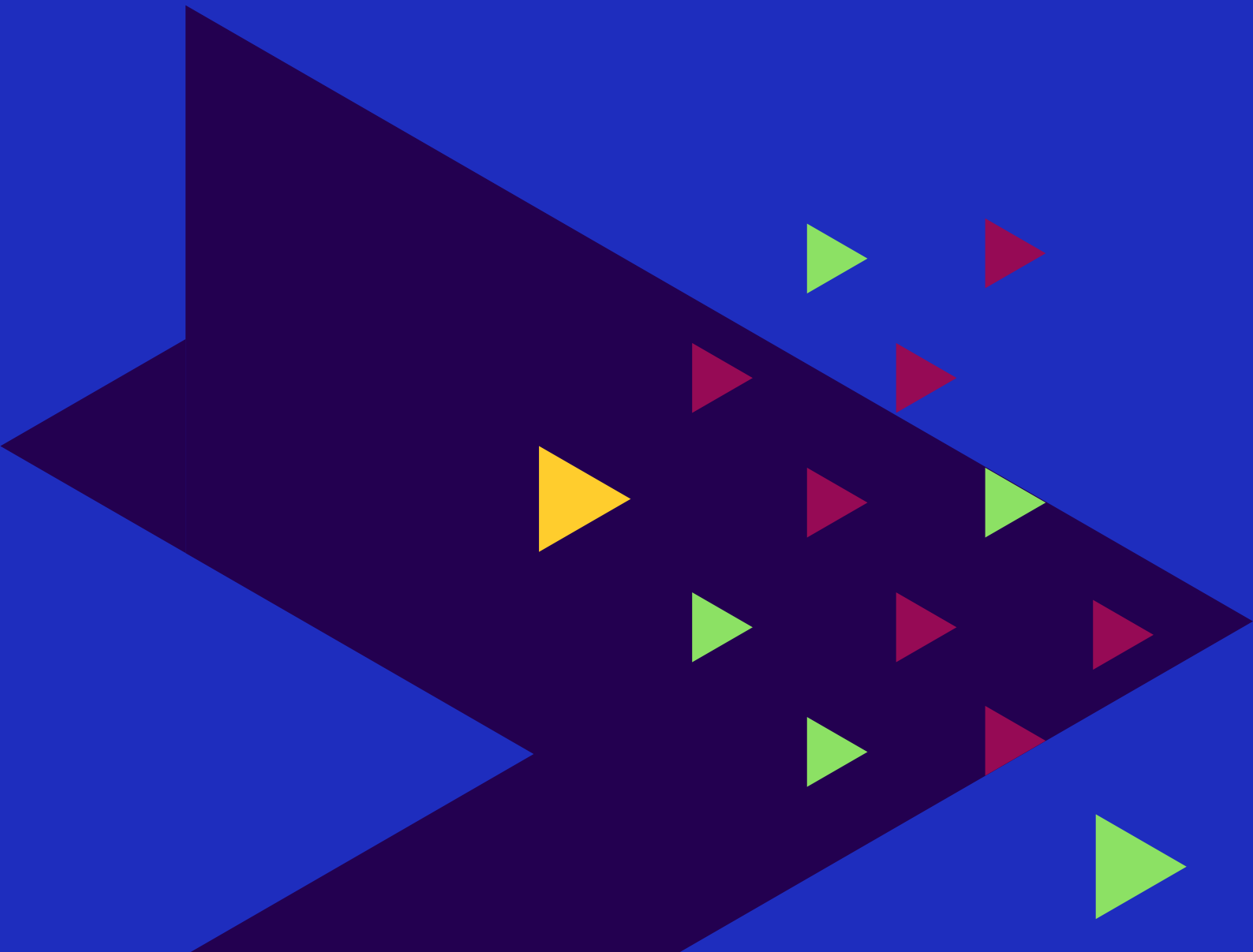
- the lack of social protection systems in some countries and the ongoing relevance of the ILO's work in guiding improvements in national policy frameworks and social protection systems.
- the fragility of social dialogue systems in some locations, which are vitally important if the right balance in the development of national post-pandemic strategies is to be achieved.

Finding 10: Considering the radically changed circumstances in which the reviewed projects found themselves as a result of the pandemic, the evaluation reports offered a number of insights into the sustainability of the ILO's work and its possible future directions.

Sustaining results of the ILO's work in response to the pandemic will require targeted actions, such as promoting regulatory reforms that encourage business diversification and resilience; expanding online training, collaboration, consultation and information-sharing; doing more for small and medium-sized factories in global supply chains; and revising strategies and programmes to ensure they support women in a changed post-COVID-19 world.



1 Introduction



► 1. Introduction

Background

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ILO faces significant changes in its operating environment, and new challenges in addressing decent work deficits. Since the crisis began, the ILO has had to rapidly adapt its programme tools, intervention models and development cooperation projects to ensure they remain relevant and effective. Moving forward, the pandemic will have an enduring impact on the ILO's work, and the Organization will need to continue to adapt its strategy and actions in this way.

Since 2020, the ILO's Governing Body has given the highest priority to the question of how the Organization can best contribute to the global recovery, and has structured its key policy messages for response to the crisis around four pillars – stimulating the economy and employment; supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes; protecting workers in the workplace; and relying on social dialogue for solutions. The June 2021 International Labour Conference has since adopted a global call to action outlining measures to create a human-centred recovery from the pandemic to avoid long-term scarring of economies and societies, building on the Centenary Declaration and its human-centred approach to the future of work. The Governing Body has also approved a high-level evaluation of the ILO's response to COVID-19, to be conducted in 2022, and the recommendation to develop an evaluative framework for the ILO's strategic response to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world of work.

Recognizing the importance of evaluating the ILO's work during the pandemic, and of identifying lessons that might guide future action, EVAL in 2020 established a framework and protocol¹⁰ to ensure that high-level and decentralized evaluations conducted in this period collected relevant data about how the Organization was responding to new challenges, and the effectiveness of its actions. Evaluations of projects and areas of work conducted at this time can provide valuable lessons on how the needs and priorities of constituents might have changed, what issues are emerging that require urgent attention, and whether the ILO is well positioned to respond.

EVAL launched this synthesis review (October 2021) to capture key findings from the evaluations conducted in 2020 and 2021. It follows the ILO's established methodology for such reviews and was carried out in two stages. The first stage reviewed an initial sample of 22 evaluation reports completed in 2020–21 and covered the ILO's immediate response at the outbreak of the pandemic. An interim report of findings was completed in June 2021. The second stage reviewed an additional purposive sample of 19 evaluation reports which were completed from April to October 2021. These were intended to yield additional insights into the ILO's response to the pandemic – both in policy areas and locations not covered in the first sample, and in terms of how the ILO's responses had evolved more than a year after the crisis had begun. The synthesis review will also serve as an important input into the high-level evaluation to be conducted in 2022.

¹⁰ ILO, [Protocol on collecting evaluative evidence on the ILO's COVID-19 response measures through project and programme evaluations](#), 9 October 2020.

Objective

The objective of the synthesis review is to analyse the performance and emerging lessons of the Office's response to COVID-19 at the outbreak of the pandemic, based on findings and conclusions in evaluation reports from 2020–21. Overall, the review is intended to contribute to the understanding of the Office of:

- ▶ changes in the environment and the drivers of change the ILO needs to be aware of and work with;
- ▶ different delivery models and points of intersection of existing projects to tackle the effects of the pandemic on the world of work;
- ▶ ways to extend the reach and scope of the ILO's work through its interventions;
- ▶ lessons learned from the ILO's current approach to the crisis and future areas of work to ensure a resilient recovery; and
- ▶ any early evidence of effectiveness and orientation towards impact.

Methodology

Since 2020, decentralized independent and internal evaluations have included questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic response and followed ILO EVAL's protocol on collecting evaluative evidence on the ILO's COVID-19 response measures.¹¹ These focused on two dimensions – the ILO's policy action at national, regional and global levels, and its institutional readiness and capacity to deliver timely support in a responsive manner. Specific sub-areas of analysis were defined within these dimensions, as shown in table 1.

▶ **Table 1. Evaluative dimensions and sub-areas of analysis**

Evaluative dimension	Sub-areas of analysis
Institutional readiness and capacity to deliver timely support in a responsive manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Strategic planning and monitoring ▶ Interdepartmental coordinated response approach ▶ Consultation and continuous engagement with constituents ▶ Response adaptability and timeliness ▶ Resources ▶ Implementation management ▶ Strategic use of knowledge and partnerships for promoting decent work ▶ Visibility and communication
The ILO's policy action at national, regional and global levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Outcomes/impact of the ILO's response (as per relevant Programme and Budget outcomes), focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Inclusive economic growth and employment ▶ Protection of all workers ▶ Universal social protection ▶ Social dialogue

This synthesis review used EVAL's synthesis review methodology,¹² which has been developed and applied to diverse topics over the past seven years. EVAL's public i-eval Discovery database¹³ was used to extract all evaluation reports for the period 2020–21. Two purposive samples of evaluation reports were then identified based on an in-depth qualitative content

11 ILO, *Protocol on collecting evaluative evidence on the ILO's COVID-19 response measures through project and programme evaluations*, 9 October 2020.

12 ILO, *Synthesis reviews and meta-studies*.

13 Available at www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#bd57f6r.

analysis targeting the dimensions and areas of analysis identified in table 1. In total, the sample was composed of 41 evaluation reports, including 35 independent and internal evaluations (midterm and final evaluations of projects and project “clusters”) and six high-level evaluations. Reports in the two samples have been numbered 1 to 41 for referencing purposes in this document (see table 5).¹⁴

The evaluation reports of the synthesis review included projects linked to a range of Programme and Budget outcomes that were selected based on the degree of information on COVID-19 response (some linked to more than one). Table 2 provides a summary of the thematic coverage of the reports reviewed. (Note that this is a simplified view of the interventions covered in these reports – there were many examples where multiple policy goals were addressed.) As the overall sample size of 41 reports covers many different intervention types and policy areas, it is not possible to draw conclusions with any confidence about their relevance as specific models for future actions (or “what works”) to support the post-pandemic recovery – especially since almost none were designed with this in mind. Regardless, the evaluation reports do offer some valuable operational insights into the new world in which the ILO will be operating, the factors that are driving change, what existing problems are getting worse, what new problems are emerging, and the types of interventions that may be considered.

► **Table 2. Thematic coverage of reviewed interventions**

Area of intervention	ILO policy area ¹⁵ /sub-area	Number of reports
Inclusive economic growth and employment	Employment Policy Department (EMPLOYMENT): skills and employability (3); youth employment (3); women (1); employment-intensive investment (1)	13
	Enterprises Department (ENTERPRISE): high-level evaluation (1); Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises (SCORE) programme (1); business development services (1)	
	Conditions of Work and Equality Department (WORKQUALITY): gender equality, diversity and inclusion (2)	
Protection of all workers	Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch (FUNDAMENTALS): child labour (5)	22
	Governance and Tripartism Department (GOVERNANCE): Better Work (3)	
	ENTERPRISE: Global Employment Injury Protection Programme (1); multinational enterprises (1)	
	Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health Branch (LABADMIN/OSH): Vision Zero Fund (VZF) (1); other occupational safety and health (1)	
	International Labour Standards Department (NORMES): international labour standards (1)	
	WORKQUALITY: migration (9)	
Social protection	Social Protection Department (SOCPRO): Social Protection Flagship Programme (1); cash transfers for garment sector (plus occupational safety and health) (1)	2
Social dialogue	<i>Not the direct subject of any of the project interventions, but addressed to varying degrees in all evaluation reports.</i>	0
Various	Decent Work Country Programmes: regional high-level evaluations (2); research and knowledge management: high-level evaluation (1);	4
	ENTERPRISE: market system development (1)	
TOTAL		41

14 The second sample of reports was based exclusively on the extent to which the reports were relevant to the following words/terms: “COVID-19 & inclusive economic growth and employment”; “COVID-19 & protection of all workers”; “COVID-19 & social protection”; “COVID-19 & social dialogue”.

15 Technical backstopping of these projects was not necessarily provided by the ILO departments listed here. Categorization is based on apparent “best fit”. Similarly, a number of initiatives include policy areas and activities that relate to the work of other departments.

The review has grouped the findings of this analysis under the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development evaluation criteria – relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Furthermore, this report presents key evidence around the following questions included in the review's terms of reference (see Annex 2 for further details):

- What's working, for whom and why? Includes the timeliness, relevance and effectiveness of the response; whether some groups benefit more than others; the different effects, sustainability and cohesiveness of the ILO's work in addressing pandemic-related decent work deficits and whether cross-cutting policy issues are being advanced; synergies with other efforts; and factors, mechanisms and circumstances affecting success.
- What's changed and why? Includes drivers of change; changing roles in addressing decent work deficits; and the nature, characteristics, continuing relevance and adaptability of the ILO's response.
- What's next? Includes how the reach and scope of the ILO's work can be extended and sustained in this new environment, and what good practices have been identified.

Limitations

Only one of the evaluations included in this review covered a project that was conceived as a direct response to COVID-19 (report 25, *Protecting garment sector workers: Occupational safety and health and income support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic*). The other 40 reports focused on interventions that were designed to respond to the needs and circumstances in place before the pandemic began. They responded to the pandemic through ad hoc changes to planned activities, rather than as part of a carefully designed response strategy.¹⁶

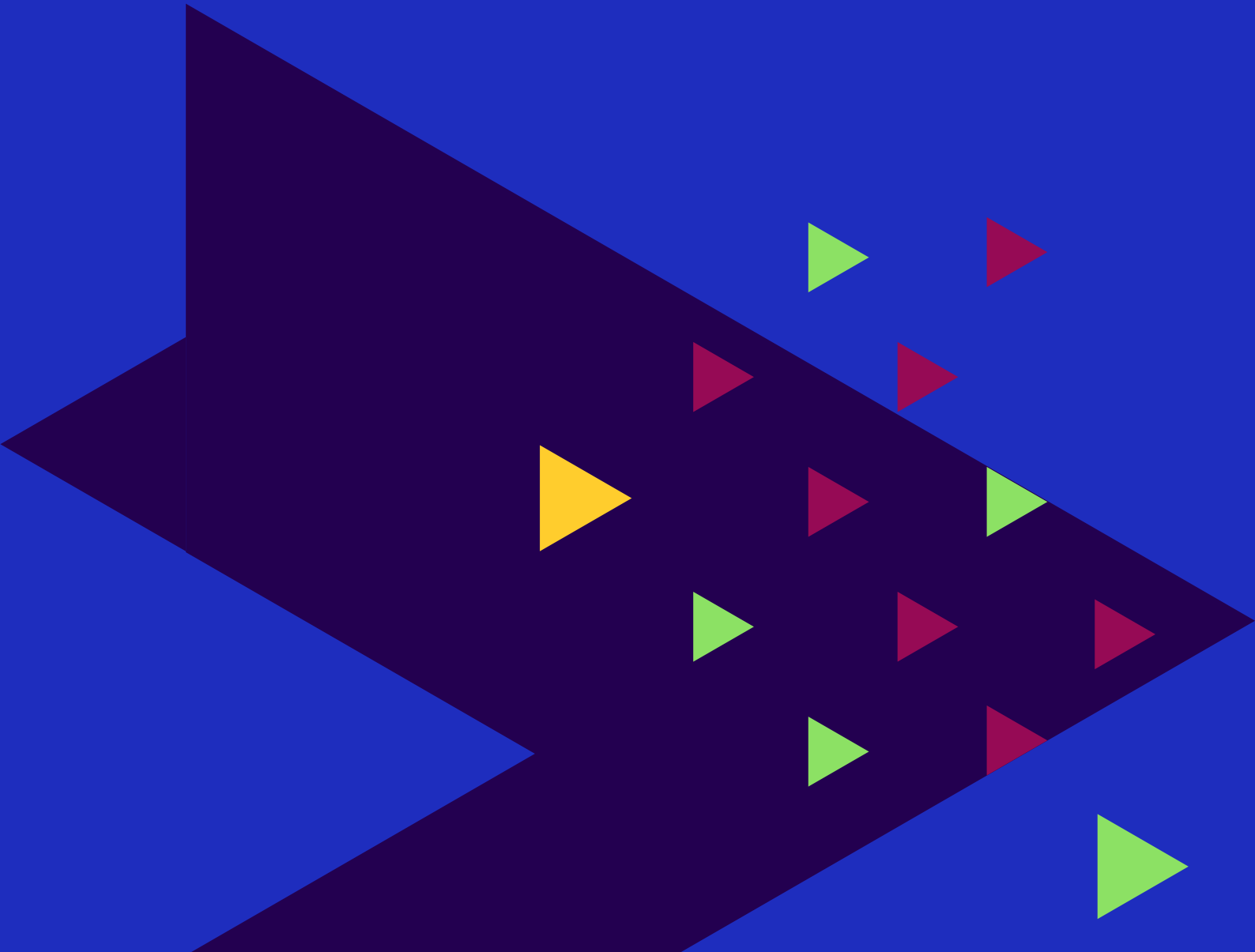
Many of the stage 1 reports were completed quite early in the pandemic. At this time, some projects were literally in "crisis management mode" and perhaps not well placed to consider the longer-term implications of the events that were unfolding. These were included in the synthesis review to explore the ILO's immediate response. In contrast, the stage 2 evaluation reports were all completed more than a year after the pandemic began. This allowed more time for some of these projects to adapt to their new circumstances – after the "dust had settled" – and to adjust activities to target the pandemic's effects.

It also needs to be noted that what might work in the context of the global recovery is very different from what worked – or in many cases did not work – in the middle of the pandemic. For example, projects aimed at achieving employment outcomes for people during 2020 were facing an impossibly difficult challenge, and their results were often poor – but that does not necessarily mean their intervention models would be ineffective in the recovery phase.

While some thematic, geographic and intervention type gaps identified in the first sample were filled in the second, a comprehensive picture of what works or is likely to work remains elusive. Despite this, many of the emerging themes and changes in the ILO's operating environment that were identified as findings in stage 1 were reinforced in the reports reviewed in stage 2, and may provide useful insights into future ILO activities to support the global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

¹⁶ More projects developed in direct response to the pandemic commenced in late 2020 and 2021 and are expected to reach the midterm evaluation stage in the near future.

▶ 2 Findings



► 2. Findings

Relevance of the ILO's COVID-19 response actions, and drivers of change

ILO strategies and actions outlined in the evaluation reports remain broadly relevant in the context of the pandemic and can make an important contribution to the human-centred recovery envisaged in the call to action and in the Centenary Declaration. To varying degrees, the projects and areas of work covered by the review were able to have their planned activities adjusted to ensure they remained relevant to the suddenly changed circumstances, and to the changing needs and priorities of constituents during the crisis.

All but one of the projects and areas of work evaluated in the two samples were conceived as responses to the pandemic and the effects it has had on the world of work. To maintain relevance, these projects needed to go beyond the lockstep implementation of project work plans and respond as best they could to new and unexpected circumstances. This often meant finding alternative mechanisms for delivering planned activities. Switching to virtual delivery modes for training and providing support to individuals and enterprises was the most common response. Many also adjusted the content of training or advice they were offering to directly reflect pandemic-related needs. Others found scope to add to the ILO's understanding of its new operating environment by conducting research into the pandemic's effects. A few were able to make more extensive changes to programme strategy and services, redefine beneficiary targets, extend their geographic coverage or develop completely new products and services. Some played a role in directly meeting infection control needs by producing personal protective equipment as part of project implementation. One diverted 20 per cent of its US\$3.5 million budget from high-level policy and governance activities to emergency humanitarian assistance, providing food, medicine and shelter to over 1,000 stranded migrant workers. Table 3 summarizes the types of adjustments that were described in the reports to maintain or enhance relevance.

While the ILO's historic mandate and activities in advancing both the Decent Work Agenda and the SDGs will remain highly relevant in the post-pandemic world, some of the reviewed evaluation reports stressed the importance of maintaining enough flexibility in its strategy to respond to the short- and medium-term challenges faced by Member States in what will be radically changed circumstances. They stressed the need for the ILO to position itself as a thought leader in employment policy to "build back better".¹⁷ As one report put it:

►► "The ILO must define an agenda, processes and management structures that enable it to confront short- and medium-term challenges... The ILO must position itself adequately in the forums where policies and programmes are discussed and negotiated (national forums and within the United Nations (UN) framework), at the same time that it takes on sustained processes of technical assistance to respond to the countries' contexts and needs" (R6,¹⁸ p. 85).

¹⁷ The ILO has already moved quickly to do this, including in the new Strategic Plan 2022–25, which builds on the Centenary Declaration's tripartite perspective on a better future of work and stresses the importance of "asserting the leadership role of the ILO in world of work issues".

¹⁸ Evaluation report 6 (see table 5).

► **Table 3. Types of adjustments made to enhance relevance in the pandemic**

Type	Evaluation report references	No./% in reviewed projects
Virtualization of delivery modes (for example, Zoom, online, social media)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 41	24 (56%)
Adjusted content of training/advice to reflect pandemic-related needs	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41	22 (54%)
Research on COVID-19 effects on individuals and enterprises	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 23, 24, 27, 33, 37, 38, 41	16 (39%)
Developed new information/awareness products and guidelines, among others	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 14, 23, 24, 25, 26, 39, 40	13 (32%)
Extended/changed strategy and activities to include new sectors/regions/target groups	1, 4, 8, 10, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 30, 34, 38, 41	13 (32%)
Supported development of COVID-19 related national policies/protocols	4, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38	13 (32%)
Sourced additional donor funds to address COVID-19 crisis	3, 4, 8, 24, 29, 32	3 (15%)
Supported factory/workplace initiatives to produce personal protective equipment to meet national demand during COVID-19 pandemic	2, 16, 28, 34	4 (10%)
Diverted funds to provide emergency humanitarian support	24, 25, 35	3 (7%)
Supported cash transfers to people affected by pandemic	4, 25, 26	1 (7%)
Support new global policy initiatives (such as the call to action for the garment industry)	3	1 (2%)
Conducted COVID-19-related mental health workshops	29	1 (2%)

The reports expressed various ideas about the priorities for future action under the ILO's post-COVID-19 strategy including reversing the effects of the pandemic's destruction of jobs, reviewing the focus of the work of different ILO departments and units away from product-centred approaches and towards more localised solutions, and focusing on resilience at all levels to improve capacity to respond to future shocks. The deterioration of economic conditions and loss of jobs and livelihoods were also seen as creating a climate where progress in some fundamental areas of the ILO's work may be reversing (including eliminating child labour/trafficking and gender-based discrimination and violence). A renewed focus on these areas will be needed to identify and address the new factors behind these trends in different regions and countries:

►► “There will be a need to rethink interventions on the assumption that the constraints imposed by COVID to some extent will remain permanent... Issues such as localized solutions, and protection of human and natural resources will most likely become integral to future interventions, and will need to be elaborated also at the level of project management” (R9, p. 38).

- ✔✔ "The ILO could assume a significant role mitigating the destruction of employment and the challenges that workers, employers and governments face. There is an opportunity for the ILO to sit down with its constituents to review its programming and adjust the menu of offerings to better satisfy their needs. This would also allow the ILO to better position itself and reorient the focus of its relationships with national and international donors/development partners" (R6, p. 85).

- ✔✔ "Child Labour can be increased not only in municipalities with higher risk... but also in those with lower risk due to the possible effects of the pandemic due to the closure of companies, loss of employment, fall in labour income and loss of social protection coverage, putting pressure on families to incorporate children and adolescents into work activities... Child Labour could increase between 1 to 3 percentage points, which means that in these countries between 109 to 326 thousand children and adolescents could enter the labour market" (R27, p. 31).

- ✔✔ "Governments want to make their economies more resilient. This requires more than simply planning for pandemics or other disasters... It requires that governments think through the regulatory regime that will make it easier for firms to diversify, make it easy for firms to be flexible and make it easier for firms to do business, so that they can indeed build reserves. This will require close cooperation with the employers' and other business representative organizations, and with workers' representative organizations. It should not dilute the ideals of decent work, but it may lead to fresh thinking about what firms do in times of crisis and how they do it, since at present often the easiest route is simply to shed labour" (R5, p. 87).

The one project in the two samples that was developed and implemented in direct response to the pandemic aligned with the call to action's commitment to universal social protection and to social dialogue but, in terms of relevance, poses questions about what types of interventions the ILO should implement in the medium-to-long term, how "hands-on" its approach should be beyond emergency situations, and how this can best contribute to sustainable policy outcomes.

Evaluation report 25, *Project protecting garment sector workers: Occupational safety and health and income support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic*, was the only project in the sample of 42 projects that was developed after the pandemic began. Operating in seven countries, this one-year, €14.5 million project, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, includes a component designed to strengthen occupational safety and health in the garment sector, as well as a component to provide wage subsidies and other cash transfers directly to beneficiaries to maintain their relationship with employers until normal conditions are restored.

As the report points out, while "emergency assistance and emergency cash transfers are not the 'core business' of the ILO", the project was relevant in that it provided an immediate response to an important employment-related problem. Its provision of social protection and its strong adherence to the principle of social dialogue were clearly aligned with the intent of the call to action. But the report suggested that the ILO may need to "develop a formal position on future emergency cash transfers as part of a broader social protection approach" (p. 47). Other agencies (such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme) may seem to have more established systems to support the rapid implementation of cash transfers; but on the other hand, the ILO's long experience in this field and adherence to the principles of tripartism and social dialogue may ensure better targeting of beneficiaries:

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- ✔✔ "A considerable amount of time has been invested to verify workers and ensure workers that receive support meet relevant selection criteria. Despite the delays, the application of principles is a key result and sets the ILO approach apart from other emergency responses. The initial delays have led to a more effective system as there is greater confidence in the system and targeted workers have been identified, verified and checked" (R25, p. 41).

- ▶ ILO's response to the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work: Evaluative lessons on how to build a better future of work after the pandemic

- ✔✔ "If part of a broader strategy, cash transfers may be useful and appropriate, but without a clear strategy or position the risk is that such interventions are based on donor needs rather than beneficiary needs" (R25, p. 48).
- ✔✔ "ILO needs a shared vision, particularly at headquarters, on how to position and implement emergency cash transfers while following and meeting ILO standards and expectations" (R25, p. 41).

The pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on the work situation of women. To maximize the relevance of its work in its aftermath, the ILO therefore needs to give renewed and refocused attention to gender equality.

Gender equality is an established cross-cutting policy focus, and the ILO has already signalled its intention to give "special attention to groups for whom the road to a better future at work could be harder",¹⁹ including women. The reviewed evaluation reports reinforce the need to do this and to update existing strategies to ensure they understand and respond to the changed circumstances and challenges of women. The high-level evaluation of gender equality initiatives in the ILO observed that the empowering effects of online work demonstrated during the pandemic could be applied to improving opportunities for staff to contribute to ILO gender equality development and delivery, and to bring more innovation to this work:

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- ✔✔ "The experience of ILO staff, in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and mobility and social distancing restrictions by moving significant work online, is a useful point of reflection in what more ambition, greater staff empowerment and information and communication technologies (ICT) support could make possible, if applied to GEM (gender equality and mainstreaming strategy and efforts going forward" (R36, p. 72).
 - ✔✔ "It would be desirable to identify the specific vulnerabilities and needs of women (as... women have a much lower employment rate than men and a rate of unemployment that almost doubles that of men) and, based on this, propose strategies to address the restrictions that women face for employability, being one of the most important that they are usually almost solely responsible for domestic tasks and care of household members" (R1, p. 55).
 - ✔✔ "Better Work donors look forward to receiving continued reporting on the implementation of the gender strategy, including how the strategy will be adapted during and post-COVID-19. The view expressed that reporting at the outcome level should be improved by establishing gender equality outcome indicators and targets at the Better Work Global level" (R3, p. 25).
 - ✔✔ "Much has since been learned about 'what works' in this field [i.e. women's entrepreneurship], and to ensure continuing relevance, it may be timely to update and relaunch this strategy in the light of these findings and the challenges posed by the post-pandemic world" (R5, p. 34).
 - ✔✔ "Women's access to finance represents a real challenge, not least because of the need for support after COVID" (R9, p. 18).

The reports provide valuable operational insights into current drivers of change, the overall relevance of the ILO's work in the face of these, and the shifting priorities of constituents that the ILO will need to navigate to maximize its relevance.

¹⁹ ILO, *The Director-General's Programme and Budget Proposals for 2022–23*, p.12.

Inclusive economic growth and employment

Employment – Young people, women, informal sector, vulnerable groups

The devastating impact of the pandemic on employment and livelihoods was noted by many of the evaluation reports and represents the biggest driver of change for the ILO's work. While this is being felt across all policy areas and creates new challenges in areas related to work quality and enforcing labour standards, the widespread destruction of jobs and the possibility that job-generating global supply chains may be changed forever elevates "work quantity" as a major priority.

The reports highlighted that some groups had felt the impact of this job destruction more acutely. Youth employment has been a global challenge for many years, and the evaluation reports suggest that this challenge is likely to be an order of magnitude higher in the years ahead. Women have also been disproportionately affected – not only has their employment been concentrated in sectors hit hard by the pandemic, but also because their capacity to work in paid employment was further constrained during the pandemic due to additional demands often placed on them to perform unpaid domestic and caring roles. Informal sector workers, people with disability, and other vulnerable groups and minorities all face huge challenges in securing work in a highly competitive labour market, making ILO work to support these groups more relevant in the future. Some observations from the reports include:

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- ✔✔ "The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are currently having a tragic effect on young people across the world; most notably those in precarious situations, working in the informal sector, and also women and people with disabilities. The current situation... is likely to bring youth employment as a top priority in the global agenda, thus reinforcing the relevance of the Initiative in future years" (R17, p. 42).
 - ✔✔ "Young people with less or no labour market experience will have even more difficulties in entering the labour market as many experienced and skilled workers will be available on the market" (R12, p. 11).
 - ✔✔ "In terms of employment, the most vulnerable workers such as young people, women, and the informal ones (who are the vast majority in the agricultural sector) will need special support for their labour reinsertion since they will be particularly affected by the effects of the pandemic" (R1, p.35).
 - ✔✔ "Youth unemployment is already on the rise and its consequences will most likely be more dramatic than any other economic crisis since World War II. The impact of the pandemic on unemployment has been particularly hard on young women, younger youth and youth in lower-income countries. It is not only destroying their jobs and employment prospects, but also disrupting their education and training and having a serious impact on their mental well-being" (R17, p. 3).

Employment-intensive investment

Facilitating employment-intensive investment is an established ILO strategy to respond to crises of different types, including natural disasters and economic shocks where people suddenly lose their jobs and livelihoods. Increased fiscal spending by countries on infrastructure and public works, emergency employment schemes and "cash for work" programmes can all help generate employment opportunities for the people affected by these crises. Led by the ILO's Employment Intensive Investment Programme, such responses can be an important part of the recovery from the pandemic. One report (39) in the second sample focused on this area via an evaluation of a project conceived in 2017 to support Syrian refugees in Jordan.

Although not developed as a specific response to COVID-19, the project did demonstrate the broader relevance of this type of intervention as part of the recovery. The early phases of

the project aimed to have all works completed by Syrian refugees, but this was relaxed over time to include equal representation of Syrian and Jordanian workers. When the pandemic began, participation shifted even more in favour of Jordanian workers (70 to 30 per cent), with the Government seeing the project as a response to increasing poverty, vulnerability and unemployment among Jordanians. Overall job creation results from the project were affected by lockdowns, restrictions and worker absences, but these can be expected to be better in projects operating in a post-COVID-19 world. Similarly, concerns expressed in the report about the short-term nature of the jobs created may be lessened in post-COVID-19 projects, where such jobs might serve as a bridge to new opportunities that arise as part of economic recovery:

►► “The programme remains relevant to address the needs of supporting Syrian refugees. Relevance has also been heightened with the outbreak of COVID-19, which affects not only Syrian refugees but the broader Jordanian population as well. Lockdowns and subsequent economic contraction have left both Jordanian and Syrian populations vulnerable and the importance of Cash for Work (CfW) and other employment initiatives (e.g. Employment Intensive Infrastructure Programme) are more relevant than ever” (R33, p. 5).

Public employment services

Although not widely canvassed in either sample of reports, the role that can be played by public employment services in coordinating and delivering interventions to support labour market recovery was explored in one report on a youth employment project in the Commonwealth of Independent States.²⁰ Aiming to improve the effectiveness of policies and programmes promoting decent jobs for young people in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States through interventions at the regional, national and subnational levels, the project supported a subregional cooperation network on youth employment, and explored how public employment services could deliver more effective responses to the COVID-19 economic crisis, both in the short term (during the crisis) and in the transition to sustainable economic and job recovery. It also sought to enhance the coordination between employment and social protection policies to improve the coverage and outreach of women and youth, and what managerial skills, institutional arrangements and procedures might be required for a more effective crisis response:

►► “Representative of governments, employers and trade unions [gathered] to exchange practical experiences on how social dialogue was facilitating targeted response to vulnerable groups, including youth. Examples ranged from new federal laws and regulations for teleworking, or agreeing on regional and district employment support priorities (Russian Federation), to enhancing active labour market programmes, such as public work and youth entrepreneurship (Uzbekistan) or scaling up new modalities of job retention and wage subsidies programmes (Azerbaijan)” (R38, p. 67).

Sustainable enterprises

The ILO's work in promoting sustainable enterprises is an important element of its efforts to grow decent work and, as such, will likely be crucial to the ILO's post-pandemic recovery work. As the ILO Director-General said on International Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Day in 2020, enterprises are the “engines of inclusive economic recovery”. Evaluation reports included a high-level evaluation of the ILO's diverse activities in the ENTERPRISES portfolio, a project in Latin America encouraging responsible business conduct by multinational enterprises, two projects covering SME programmes (SCORE and Start and Improve Your

²⁰ Report 37, an evaluation of a project in Ethiopia on “Addressing the Root Causes of Migration”, also worked on enhancement of public employment services, but did not explore its potential role in the context of the pandemic or in the recovery phase.

Business (SIYB)), and a policy and knowledge generation project that covered multiple areas of intervention.²¹

These reports highlighted the drivers of change that the ILO's sustainable enterprises work will need to consider going forward. At a strategic level, these included the challenges that SMEs might face in adapting to any reconfiguration of global supply chains, the need to build the resilience of enterprises in responding to future shocks, and the potential for green jobs to create new opportunities in place of the jobs that have been lost. The ILO's work promoting the *Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy*²² was highlighted in one report (32), but this project's capacity to respond to the crisis was limited. The high-level evaluation on sustainable enterprises also stressed the importance of basing future strategy and actions on a careful analysis of post-pandemic needs, and cautioned against an approach that was driven by available programme tools. At an operational level, some ILO enterprise development tools that rely on cultivating markets for business development services may face sustainability issues when business users have less capacity to pay, despite there potentially being more people starting their own businesses because they have no other livelihood option. Some observations from the reports include:

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- ✔✔ "A research brief... highlighted the potentially damaging effects of a possible reconfiguration of Global Supply Chains in certain industries that might involve re-shoring and/or near-shoring, and increased automation. It details how SMEs may struggle to cope with these changes, and to manage supply and staffing shortages and reductions in productivity" (R5, p. 85).
 - ✔✔ "The SCORE programme has helped to improve worker empowerment and is drawing attention to occupational safety and health through COVID-19" (R10, p. 19).
 - ✔✔ "The ILO's approach is very much driven by its available tools, while the current situation requires specific policy discussions and recommendations based on an in-depth analysis of the impact of the pandemic" (stakeholder quote, R5, p. 87).
 - ✔✔ "Several SIYB trainers informed the evaluation that they had been charging low prices during COVID-19... 34 per cent of sessions were provided free of charge. It is likely that the number of trainers who make a full-time income from SIYB training and SCORE is small. This may increase the likelihood of trainer attrition" (R10, p. 35).
 - ✔✔ "Multiple key stakeholders underlined that due to its nature, design, objectives, and mandates, Responsible Business Conduct in Latin America and the Caribbean Project (RBCLAC) cannot be used as a COVID-19 emergency-response project... Nevertheless, the financial support from the RBCLAC Fund has also provided a creative opportunity to include COVID-19 aspects" (R32, p. 46).

Protection of all workers

Child labour, child trafficking and forced labour

As economic conditions have deteriorated and individuals and families have lost income, progress in eliminating child labour was reported as being under threat. An evaluation of a project in the Dominican Republic noted that:

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- ✔✔ "Strategies and actions aimed at preventing and/or eradicating child labour become more important since some families (especially the most vulnerable) will turn to their underage children to work, and in this way try to reverse the situation of job losses and income reductions" (R1, p. 34).

21 Another related to the Global Employment Injury Protection Programme is considered under the worker protection in this review.

22 Available at www.ilo.org/empent/areas/mne-declaration/lang--en/index.htm.

An evaluation of a child trafficking project in Peru observed that, as well as creating circumstances that elevate the risks of child trafficking, lockdowns and increased use of technologies during pandemic may actually have led to new opportunities for perpetrators:

►► “On the one hand, the health crisis – and the consequent economic crisis – has exacerbated systemic economic and social inequalities, that is, the structural risk factors of human trafficking. On the other, measures to flatten the infection curve (forced quarantines, curfews, travel restrictions, limitations on economic activities and public life) could be contributing to make the crime more clandestine, to the development of new ways of attracting victims through the use of new technologies as the identification of victims more difficult” (R29, p. 28).

Another evaluation, focusing on decent work deficits in the tobacco sector in Zambia and the United Republic of Tanzania, noted how school closures during the pandemic also had a negative effect on eliminating child labour:

►► “The COVID-19 measures greatly affected livelihoods and the closed schools created room for children’s involvement in tobacco production. This in a way appeared to be undoing the achievements of the project regarding prevention of child labour” (R15, p. 45).

The high-level evaluation of the ILO’s work in Andean countries and the youth employment project in a highly vulnerable area in Haiti echoed these concerns and also noted that the same drivers were likely to work against the ILO’s efforts to eliminate other forms of exploitative and forced labour, and to work in fragile settings:

►► “If, as a result of the pandemic, children temporarily stop going to school, they could start working. At the same time, those who are vulnerable to labour exploitation and forced labour are now much more so as a result of their reduced incomes” (R6, p. 83).

►► “The emergence of the COVID-19 crisis has further weakened the response capacity of the State and households which have historically been in vulnerable situations. Young people are becoming more exposed to the attraction and threats of armed gangs. Young girls are more exposed to gender-based violence and the attractions of bandits... Food insecurity and health problems have worsened. The provision of existing social services, historically... inadequate long before COVID-19, unsurprisingly saw itself worsened... Recurrent armed conflicts have often weakened the strategies developed” (R31, p. 28).

Migrant workers and refugees

The pandemic brought into sharp relief the vulnerability of migrant workers and the ongoing relevance of the ILO’s work in supporting this group, and in guiding improvements in national policy frameworks and social protection systems. Closed international borders, large-scale repatriation of migrant workers, and loss of income and capacity to send foreign remittances all caused huge problems in workers’ home and destination countries. Overall, there were nine projects in the two evaluation report samples that included a focus on migrant worker issues (including a high-level evaluation on the ILO’s strategy and actions in labour migration), and the pandemic significantly changed the circumstances and nature of this work.

Moving forward, the relevance of the ILO’s work in this area will be high, and it will need to maintain its current agility to adapt to emerging challenges and develop new approaches tailored to current circumstances. The situation of refugees in a deteriorating economy needs special attention – the three projects that targeted this group in Turkey were all reported to be unlikely to achieve the intended results because of the current economic conditions. The concentration of their work in the informal economy, which was badly affected by the crisis,

posed an existential threat to their livelihoods. Lack of social protection systems in some countries was also highlighted, both in the situation of migrant workers returning to their home countries and for those who found themselves stranded, jobless and without any social protection in destination countries. The vulnerability of migrant workers in the crisis reinforced the need for the ILO to renew and enhance its policy and programme responses, engaging with *both origin and destination* countries to grow decent work opportunities, improve skills recognition processes, and enhance social protection (see below). Hostility towards migrant workers was reported to have increased during the pandemic (for example, in Latin America, they were being portrayed as “job stealers” when native workers lost their jobs), highlighting a need for the ILO to combat such stereotypes and to emphasize the contributions made by migrants (such as working in frontline healthcare roles during the pandemic). Some observations from the evaluation reports:

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- ✔✔ “The working conditions of migrant workers may have improved over time, but the COVID-19 crisis has once again drawn attention to their vulnerability. Supporting migrant workers in the destination countries remains a key issue... The ILO is considered by all parties as the only organization capable of improving the situation of migrant workers and further support is needed and expected, in particular on the ground” (R8, p. 34).
 - ✔✔ “The topic of returnee migrants has increased in importance for the ILO during the pandemic. In India alone, an estimated 5 million labour migrants returned to the country during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. In response, the ILO tried to design approaches for integrating returnees back into their home countries’ labour markets. A key challenge here is that not all countries perceive returnees as a specific target group for support measures” (R23, p. 39).
 - ✔✔ “The situation in Myanmar and Lao’s People’s Democratic Republic is no different, as thousands of migrant workers, mainly agriculture and construction workers, have returned from abroad and are now left without any revenue or social protection. Supporting the development of Social Protection has become more relevant than ever” (R20, p. 39).
 - ✔✔ “It has to be said that migrant workers and social protection are not on the top of the list of priorities of these social partners, although several of them mentioned that COVID-19 has opened their eyes in this respect” (R13, p. 10).
 - ✔✔ “In the context of COVID-19 the lockdown measures, the decrease in consumer demand for goods and services, limitations of travel and other restrictions on mobility reduce the economic opportunities for informal enterprises and workers and pose an existential threat to their livelihood. Therefore, the pandemic has resulted in a higher proportion of job and income losses especially in the informal economy as well as for women and youth in Turkey” (R28, p.27).
 - ✔✔ “The need for providing comprehensive livelihoods support involving refugees and host communities becomes even more relevant in the light of COVID-19’s adverse implications for productive capacities” (R16, p.42).
 - ✔✔ “The pandemic-induced economic decline (and large-scale job losses), together with distrust of migrants (who may be perceived to have brought the virus), may have undone some of the progress made by the ILO on awareness-raising and the sensitization of stakeholders to the benefits of labour migration” (R23, pp. 102–103).

Social protection systems

In addition to the interventions described above to enhance social protection for migrant workers, the pandemic brought into sharp focus the importance of the ILO’s work in supporting countries to develop social protection systems more broadly. The evaluation of the ILO’s flagship programme on building social protection floors highlighted its work in supporting

countries' social protection responses to COVID-19. This included its role in repurposing development cooperation projects, advocating for more domestic resource mobilization for social protection, and developing tools to assist policymakers and stakeholders to assess policy options for the extension of coverage of existing schemes to new beneficiaries. At country level, through a European Union-funded project, the programme supported impact assessments with a focus on the informal economy (in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Togo and Uganda), and advised on options for the recovery phase of the pandemic (in Togo, Myanmar, Ecuador and Peru) and on the cash transfer programme for workers in the garment sector (covered in report 25 – see below).

The high-level evaluation of Decent Work Country Programmes in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan gave examples of advances made in the wake of the pandemic. The emergency cash transfers provided for garment sector workers in another project (report 25) represented a novel area of work for the ILO, but were seen as offering potential to advance its work in building national social protection systems:

►► “Sri Lanka accelerated plans to work on income security focused on tourism workers, which will serve as a pilot for other sectors... In Nepal... government officials lauded the ILO's support for establishing and building the capacity of the Social Security Fund. The fund expanded and reinforced workers' social protection, relieving pressure on traditional social safety net programmes designed to serve Nepal's poorest of the poor... ILO Pakistan's focus on extending social protection coverage to informal workers has become even more relevant in the context of the pandemic... The ILO is also working towards the design of Pakistan's first unemployment insurance programme” (R24, p.36).

►► “Emergency cash transfers and income support are not normally the core mandate of the ILO. There have been a variety of opinions as to what and how the ILO should engage and promote the concept... The project should also be viewed as an opportunity to continue working with partner governments to introduce new concepts of unemployment insurance and overall reforms to social protection more generally” (R25, p. 31).

►► “Evaluation informants pointed out that the COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of social protection in the context of countries with highly informal economies, which according to some staff stresses the need to consider the response to COVID-19 within the Decent Work Agenda as well as to integrate it into a long-term approach” (R26, p. 38).

Occupational safety and health

Health and safety in the workplace became the highest priority during the pandemic, and there has never been a time when the ILO's work in this policy area has been as relevant. The evaluation of the ILO's global Vision Zero Fund (VZF) initiative highlighted the importance of this work during the pandemic and the extent to which the project adjusted its work in global supply chains to maximize its impact and relevance. Eyes have been opened and the ongoing relevance of such work post-pandemic has been given new impetus and meaning. As one informant in VZF evaluation put it:

►► “COVID-19 has put occupational safety and health at the centre of every intervention; before, the VZF used to argue that occupational safety and health was a cost-saving initiative, but now the argument is that occupational safety and health saves lives” (R4, p. 27).

Relevant activities addressing occupational safety and health were also important elements of other evaluated interventions covered by the review. Better Work activities in the garment sector have always included a focus on workplace safety, and the two evaluation reports related to this programme gave examples of its responsiveness to the new occupational safety

and health drivers (such as developing COVID-19-specific occupational safety and health guidelines and awareness-raising materials to mitigate spread in factories, and supporting factory initiatives to produce personal protective equipment – report 2, p. 20). Similarly, work in the area of SMEs, including business development services and programmes such as SCORE, harnessed unused trainer capacity to develop and deliver COVID-19 occupational safety and health courses for SMEs (for example, in Myanmar – report 10, p. 35). Other projects also noted how the pandemic has elevated the importance of occupational safety and health and how this will influence the ILO's work moving forward. The evaluation of the ILO/Republic of Korea Partnership Programme in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries noted:

►► “The need for better occupational safety and health also ‘benefits’ from the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular for the ‘H’ part of OSH. While safety (‘S’) has always been the focus of labour ministries and labour inspectors, the health issue has now gained momentum with ministries of health reaching out to ministries of labour for a better coordination” (R20, p. 39).

Better Work

A “flagship programme” of the ILO, Better Work is a partnership between the ILO and the International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group. It seeks to improve working conditions in the garment industry and to make the sector more competitive. Two evaluation reports in the stage 1 sample focused on Better Work, including one cluster evaluation that looked at Better Work Bangladesh and three closely related subprojects also running in that country.²³ Better Work operates in the context of global supply chains, and engages with both global brands and local factories to encourage improved working conditions, and helps national stakeholders play a stronger role in governing their labour markets (for example, working with other ILO units to strengthen labour inspection, reforming legislation and social protection systems, among others).

The evaluation reports reaffirmed the continuing relevance of Better Work in the post-pandemic world, but also pointed to some drivers of change that need to be closely monitored. The programme's strategy, including its sectoral focus and country expansion plans, and its operational approach in working with stakeholders may need to be adjusted to maximize relevance. Perhaps accelerating in the aftermath of the pandemic, automation and the disruption and reconfiguration of global supply chains may challenge basic assumptions on which the programme's logic is built – including that the garment industry will continue to be a growth industry that can create and sustain decent jobs. At an operational level, the pandemic has highlighted new challenges that need to be addressed to maintain programme relevance – including difficulties factories may face in accessing finance, greater need of workers for social protection, brands being under increasing financial stress and (perhaps) backing away from their commitments to decent work, and the challenges labour inspectorates have in enforcing regulations and standards in a climate when many factories are near financial collapse. Some relevant quotes from the evaluation reports include:

►► “What has been successful to date may not necessarily be successful in future” (R3, p. 6).

►► “The global garment industry is undergoing a profound change not only because of the COVID-19 pandemic but also because of other fundamental and long-term factors such as the digitalization of the industry, shifting supply routes, near-shoring, changing consumer behaviour and shifting priorities (e.g., climate change)... Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, jobs are at risk. The fundamental assumption of Better Work – the garment industry is a growth industry that can create or sustain decent jobs – may be challenged” (R3, p. 6).

²³ ILO, “Improving Working Conditions in the Ready-Made Garment Sector Programme In Bangladesh (2017–2023)”.

- ▀▀ “The garment industry is faced with massive financial difficulties. It is expected that some brands may go out of business as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which means they will also leave Better Work. It is also expected that some factories, in particular smaller ones, might not survive the current crisis” (R3, p. 18).
- ▀▀ “The national initiative (NI) [participating firms] are some of the weakest factories. COVID-19 will surely negatively impact them and there is the risk of further closures. If their license is withdrawn, the factories will be even more vulnerable. We have to encourage the factories – we should balance employment and safety concerns” (stakeholder quote, R2, p. 31).

Social dialogue

While none of the interventions in the sample focused on enhancing social dialogue as a discrete project outcome, important observations were made about how the pandemic had affected social dialogue. These included a high-level success for the ILO in the form of Better Work's role in development of the COVID-19 call to action for the garment industry.²⁴ This required consultation with global brands, manufacturers, and employers' and workers' organizations.

The one report in the review that covered a project developed in response to the COVID-19 crisis (report 25) highlighted the need for social dialogue to broaden its engagement beyond the core tripartite constituents (such as Ministries of Labour) to include ministries and departments related to health and finance. These exercise significant influence over matters such as lockdowns and mobilizing resources for social protection support. The project resolved this in some countries by establishing complementary consultative structures:

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- ▀▀ “A key lesson from the project to date is for broader engagement with these authorities to ensure alignment to individual country COVID-19 strategies and to raise profile and influence, particularly with the alignment of social protection measures. This is not to suggest Ministries of Labour are replaced, but rather the ILO needs to expand coverage and network, particularly considering pandemic or emergency response initiatives” (R25, p. 39).
 - ▀▀ “In some instances, COVID-19 specific tripartite structures have been established under the umbrella of broader formalized structures. This allows for the introduction of agencies and organizations who may normally sit outside formal tripartite arrangements to be actively involved” (R25, p. 38).

The pandemic may also have had the effect of raising constituent awareness of some issues that they had not previously considered to be a priority for social dialogue. Some may have developed a deeper appreciation of the relevance of these issues and the need to address them as part of the post-pandemic rebuilding phase. For example:

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- ▀▀ “The alignment to the priorities of the employers' and workers' organizations was much less clear, particularly because their involvement with social protection and portability for migrant workers has been at quite a low level, and, as many of them recognized, the same can be said of their capacity in this area. Their participation in the project made them realize the importance of it, and some of these social partners also mentioned that the COVID-19 crisis has further showed them the importance and the urgency of dealing with this issue” (R13, p. 8).

Improved involvement of constituents in some established ILO programmes was also recommended. At the apex international level, the evaluation of Better Work's global programme suggested an enhanced role for the International Organization of Employers (IOE), in addition to existing participation of the International Trade Union Confederation

²⁴ ILO, “COVID-19: Call to action in the garment industry”, 22 April 2020.

(ITUC) in the Better Work management group. A cluster evaluation of Better Factories in Cambodia, and Better Work in Indonesia and Viet Nam (report 30) gave the example of how factory-level social dialogue triggered by the pandemic had highlighted stakeholder concerns in one country about constituent involvement and unequal treatment in the programme:

►► “Better Work global dialogue with brands should involve... IOE much more. IOE is the advocate for the brands and can say things the brands cannot” (R3, p. 27).

►► “The COVID-19 pandemic provided a catalyst for factories to take a lead in social dialogue, and an opportunity for [Better Work Indonesia] to see the effectiveness of the training and technical guidance on promoting social dialogue... These stakeholder groups feel they are not treated equally within the programme. For instance compliance is not only for factories but there is a certain responsibility on buyers, and trade unions feel they are not fully engaged during the assessment process” (R30, p. 88).

Serious failures were also noted that exposed the fragility of social dialogue systems in some locations. These will need to be addressed if the relevance of social dialogue is to be understood in developing solutions for the post-pandemic world. The high-level evaluation of the ILO's work in Andean countries linked the pandemic to a serious deterioration in social dialogue. This went beyond merely the practical difficulties described in some of the evaluation reports (such as engaging with constituents during lockdown), but seems instead to suggest a systemic breakdown during the crisis. For example, the report quoted representatives of workers' organizations in the Plurinational State of Bolivia:

►► “With the pandemic, businesses are reducing personnel at a national level. They are banning us from work because of our health status, because of our age and because they like to blacklist us. The problem is that the Government has not ratified some of the labour stability Conventions. They fire all those who are vulnerable, even though the Government says it guarantees employment. We have no recourse. We don't have a legal space that the companies respect. We don't know what to do. Some companies have reduced their workforce by 50 per cent. Companies are taking advantage of the fact that, due to the pandemic, we cannot protest or hold meetings. That's where we need the ILO's help” (R6, p. 81).

The report noted a similar deterioration of social dialogue in Ecuador:

►► “One of the principal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a greater deterioration in social dialogue. After the October conflict, there were signs that an agreement to get the National Council on Work and Salaries up and running again was at hand. Since the pandemic and as a result of the measures taken with regard to labour legislation, however, the social fabric is fraying and workers and employers have taken antagonistic positions” (R6, p. 82).

Without all constituent voices being heard, achieving the right balance in the development of national post-pandemic strategies may become more difficult – an important lesson on the relevance of social dialogue, as countries move beyond the crisis phase. In Peru, the report indicated that the focus on public safety had led to the abandonment of other priorities, threatening to reverse recent advances in meeting labour standards. The report noted that Peru had:

►► “...suspended operations on important issues such as forced labour and trafficking. The business sector, workers and the Government should join forces to agree on guidelines and measures to soften the impact of the crisis and promote reactivation. The ILO is called to play a significant role in reaching a consensus to make it possible” (R6, p. 83).

The challenges posed by the pandemic will lead some countries and constituents to change their priorities, and this may have implications for the ILO's work, including its commitments to sustainable development, social inclusion, international labour standards and social dialogue. While the ILO needs to be responsive to these changing priorities, it should continue to be a strong advocate for these core principles.

Reports in both samples highlighted how shifting priorities during the pandemic were affecting the operating environment of the ILO's work. Examples were given of labour inspectorates being more tolerant of the breaching of labour standards, of environmental standards and green jobs dropping in the hierarchy of needs, and of factories participating in ILO projects losing interest in some project goals as they struggled for survival. Government implementation partners were often called upon to quickly change their priorities, and the ILO had to find ways to maintain their engagement by redesigning activities to better align with these. Quotes from the reports include:

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- “Despite their importance, in the medium term some of the ILO's core labour standards may become less of a priority for donors and governments” (R6, p.5).
 - “Taking into account that the project works with frontline institutions (for example, the Ministerio de Salud (MINSa) and Policía Nacional del Perú (PNP) it was necessary to recognize the change in priorities of these, rethinking activities and prioritizing joint actions so that the Project responds correctly to the needs of these institutions without generating greater rejection or distracting them from their responsibilities in the face of the emergency” (R29, p. 87).
 - “Project managers as well as enterprise level respondents suggested some beneficiary factories were 'struggling for survival' and were therefore less interested in making immediate investments in factory upgrades to increase water and energy efficiency or invest in workplace cooperation projects” (R11, p. 15).
 - “While green jobs are important, there also needs to be an appreciation that enterprises have a hierarchy of needs, and investments in this area are not the highest priority in the current COVID19 context. This recognition should be reflected in the work ENTERPRISES does” (stakeholder quote, R5, p. 41).
 - “The need to respond to the immediate consequence of the pandemic has resulted in a reformulation of priorities for constituents, placing the development of longer-term policies on the backburner” (R32, p. 42).

Some of the factors that drove these changes may be transitory and a product of the crisis being faced at the time of the evaluations. However, others may be more enduring, especially as countries turn to the massive task of rebuilding labour markets after millions of jobs have been destroyed. In this environment, the ILO needs to strike a balance in its dealings with constituents to ensure that standards are maintained or improved. “Build back better” is the current mantra, and should be understood as covering both quantity and quality of employment.

Coherence of the ILO's crisis response with national strategies and emerging priorities

The ILO's work in the period aligned with global, regional and national development strategies and priorities in place at the time, and there were examples of synergies formed with the work of other development actors. New priorities are now emerging in the wake of the pandemic, and the ILO will need to maintain an ability to adapt its approach to ensure that it coheres with plans and strategies as they evolve.

Overall preparedness for the pandemic was low and – as global, regional and national plans and strategies failed to consider such risks – their capacity to respond to unanticipated

changes was limited. ILO interventions were designed to align with these plans and strategies, so most of the evaluated projects found themselves having to adapt to radically changed circumstances. Coherence with these plans and strategies remained important where this was possible, but so was a willingness and capacity to make changes on the run.²⁵

With the ILO's approved Programme and Budget for the 2022–23 biennium, the task ahead will be to use tripartite mechanisms to maximize the alignment of the ILO's work with national and global priorities, which are currently in a state of flux. As the Strategic Plan for 2022–25 put it: "Past experience has highlighted both the importance and the challenges of ensuring full alignment of country-level activities with the global policies and priorities established for this Organization" (p. 12).

Working with other development partners may also require some realignment as these organizations also adjust their priorities. Progress towards the SDGs has been greatly affected by the pandemic, and the ILO will need to work with other UN agencies and the broader development community to ensure that the Decent Work Agenda and Centenary Declaration goals form part of revised strategies to put the SDGs back on track. Some reports also highlighted opportunities for more collaboration with other UN agencies in the recovery phase (such as via the ILO-chaired UN Inter-agency Task Force on the Social and Solidarity Economy (report 5, p. 85)).

But continuity of effort should also be expected and strongly pursued in some critical areas. The ILO's work with the multilateral Regional Initiative: Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour was highlighted in one report (report 27) as being well placed to mobilize resources to address new challenges in the elimination of child labour brought about by COVID-19, and to mitigate the risks of progress in this area being reversed:

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- ▀▀ "There is an opportunity for the ILO to sit down with its constituents, review its programming, and adjust its menu of interventions to suit the needs of the present moment and the needs of the constituents. This would put it in a better position and reorient its relationships with national and international donors and social partners" (R6, p. 81).
 - ▀▀ "Within the context of COVID-19, we have a lot of risks that affect the whole sector – already you can see factories closing down. I am not comfortable with 'delayed activities' because that assumes things will go back to normal. I think we have to revise our logframe to be more realistic" (stakeholder quote, R2, p. 20).
 - ▀▀ "Although it is estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic will increase child labour (CL) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and affect the budget of governments and international cooperation funds destined to combat CL, there are also internal and external conditions that can be taken advantage of and powered by [regional initiative] to provide a relevant, timely and effective response in the fight against CL. As for the former, the [regional initiative] is an institution with the capacity for political advocacy and mobilization of resources from international cooperation. Regarding the latter, it is worth noting... the concern of donors not to backtrack on the achievements made in reducing CL in the region." (R27, p. 90).

Effectiveness of the ILO's COVID-19 response actions and operational agility

ILO interventions were forced to adapt to the unexpected restrictions imposed by the pandemic. They experienced implementation delays and were often unable to implement activities as planned. Despite these challenges, the Organization showed a good capacity to innovate and to use technology to deliver project outputs, though reaching vulnerable groups through these approaches sometimes proved to be more difficult.

²⁵ This agility and adaptability are discussed below under "Effectiveness".

The crisis led to significant implementation delays in many of the projects, and some of the more task-focused evaluations concentrated their analyses of the impact of COVID-19 on these practical considerations. Some pointed out that implementation delays were not always caused by social distancing restrictions and communication difficulties (though these, of course, often had a significant impact). Some reports instead described the delays caused when implementation partners suddenly found themselves preoccupied with new responsibilities, roles and priorities.

Some of the larger projects and global programmes (including Better Work, VZF, SCORE and migration projects) may have been less tied down to narrowly defined outputs and so were able to adjust their activities with more agility and speed. They benefited from having programme specialists at headquarters and in the field who were focused on the continuous development of their established products and services, and on adjustments to programme strategy. In some cases, in response to new demands brought on by the crisis, they were able to attract additional funds and change the direction of the work (for example, meeting the needs of migrant workers forced to return to their home countries because of the pandemic, and switching the focus of interventions to different industries or sectors or locations, or to the informal economy). One redirected more than 20 per cent of its budget to the humanitarian support of migrant workers in the Middle East who found themselves jobless and unable to return home – an important and much-needed use of funds, even if this did not contribute to the project's envisaged effectiveness:

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- “COVID-19 has meant factories shutting down, project staff being unable to engage with constituents, travel restrictions halting participation in field interventions, and, in some cases, difficulties in establishing virtual connections with country stakeholders. Nonetheless, the VZF secretariat seized the opportunity to address the health crisis triggered by the outbreak... The programme was in a good position to respond to urgent needs in the field and demonstrate its flexibility to take on emergencies” (R4, p. 27).
 - “The [Programme and Budget] allows some level of agility, and it was able to integrate the ILO's response to the COVID-19 crisis... For example, the [research and knowledge management] global deliverables of the Social Dialogue unit workplan (2020–21) were adjusted... [and] three policy briefs were produced within the COVID-19 response framework... Another example is the repurposing of the occupational safety and health flagship programme from its planned [research and knowledge management] outputs on violence and harassment at work to pandemics” (R7, p. 28).
 - “One of the greatest challenges facing all three Programmes was the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic during the first quarter of 2020 and its continuing impact. This situation has highlighted just how effectively the ILO as an organization through the Better Work Global Programme, the Bangkok-based Better Work Global, and the individual Better Work Country Programmes can operate and innovate when necessity dictates” (R30, p. 53).
 - “As the pandemic stalled most of the planned activities, the Migrants Rights and Decent Work Project rearranged the budget and activities to support Nepali migrant workers affected by COVID-19 in major destination countries. Swiss Development Cooperation approved a budget realignment of CHF535,219 to be managed under Outcome 3. Swiss Development Cooperation also approved the COVID-19 response to be implemented in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and United Arab Emirates, which are the top four major destinations for Nepali workers” (R8, p. 23).

Other projects in the review sample adapted delivery in different ways (see table 3) and showed a capacity to deliver training and other support services to beneficiaries via virtual/remote delivery methods. These methods were sometimes noted as increasing participation compared with traditional delivery methods. This suggests that they could become an effective, ongoing tool for delivery beyond the pandemic. Balancing this, however, were warnings that not all support can be effectively delivered remotely, that some institutions and communities are not well placed to use virtual technology, that some projects needed

to find funds for equipment to enable this delivery mode, and that some vulnerable people may be frozen out. Virtual delivery can also blur the lines between personal and work time (including for ILO staff), and this was raised as an issue that may need attention:

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- ✔✔ “International Labour and Environmental Standards project has consulted with SCORE global managers to identify online strategies from elsewhere that have been used to enable activities to continue during the pandemic... although their partners found it initially challenging to use ‘Zoom’ and other tools adopted by the project, some online events have been able to reach larger numbers of participants than previous in-person events” (R11, p. 15).
 - ✔✔ “It should be taken into account that not all institutions have virtual infrastructure and/or ‘virtual culture’ available, which can limit, for example, the coverage of training actions to members of the CDL²⁶ or the vulnerable population who will be the beneficiary of the pilot training programme for job placement” (R1, p. 12).
 - ✔✔ “Due to restrictions of the State of National Emergency, most of the trainings had to be reformulated to be taught virtually and adapted to the new context. The above not only had implications in terms of time, but, in some cases, involved the equipping of internet, televisions and cameras necessary to ensure adequate access. However, certain training programmes, mainly those involving the Police, were not adapted to a specific virtual modality, because they required a face-to-face dynamic” (R29, p. 72).
 - ✔✔ “Better Work Global reacted fast and that support enabled [Better Work] country teams to provide virtual advisory and training services... Fortunately, providing virtual services were already piloted in 2019... While a lot can be done virtually, the [Better Work] global team is of the view that not everything can be done online. There are advantages of being on site. In future a blended model might be followed” (R3, pp. 17–18).
 - ✔✔ “Some reported that negative aspects of ‘going virtual’ were: the exclusion of some stakeholders who did not have access to necessary infrastructure or skills...; the lost benefits of informal, face-to-face relationship-building and networking; and for some, including ILO personnel, an unexpected extension of the workday, with blurred lines between home and work” (R24, p. 60).
 - ✔✔ “The introduction of online delivery raises questions around whether this excludes certain groups. Stakeholders informed the evaluation that online material was often accessed on smartphones rather than computers. This has implications for programming design” (R10, p. 28).

Some of the ILO’s programmes to support sustainable enterprises, including SCORE and SIYB, rely for delivery on the cultivation of a market of business development services that deliver training to SMEs on a fee-for-service basis. While this can be an effective way to sustain interventions, business development services providers can face cash-flow problems in economic downturns when small businesses can no longer afford to pay. During the pandemic, in one reviewed evaluation, the ILO responded to this threat to business development services viability by facilitating the development and marketing of new training products that were in critical demand (that is, COVID-19-related occupational safety and health training). A broader analysis of how ILO products delivered through business development services have fared during the economic downturn is needed to inform future policy action in this important area (the inclusion of additional evaluations in stage 2 could be helpful in this respect):

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- ✔✔ “COVID-19 was dramatically impacting on trainers’ ability to market their training due to SMEs’ reduced ability to pay for training. COVID-19 particularly affects SCORE HoCo trainers due to the collapse of the tourism sector. SCORE trainers were also affected due to the difficulty in delivering the action based coaching style of SCORE training online” (R10, p. 25).

26 Comités Directivos Locales de Lucha contra el Trabajo Infantil (Local Steering Committees for the Fight against Child Labour).

Only one of the interventions covered by the review was conceived to directly address the pandemic's effects, but the others were all able to be adjusted to their new circumstances and many achieved good results, especially those focused on protecting workers. Interventions designed to grow jobs and income were less effective at the height of the pandemic, but will be increasingly important as the world recovers.

Projects designed to grow jobs and income, and improve people's access to these, were placed in an invidious position during the pandemic. As the ILO's research has shown, there were unprecedented global employment losses in 2020 of 114 million jobs relative to 2019. In this context, the prospects of success were bleak for projects in the sample that were focused on growing work. These included interventions focused on employment for youth and women, informal sector workers, skills, SME development and employment access for vulnerable groups. Even if the intervention models underpinning these projects were sound and had good potential for results in normal times (or as part of the ILO's post-pandemic work to stimulate labour market recovery), they were not destined to demonstrate "what works" at the height of the pandemic.

Evaluations of projects working in these policy areas, reported progress towards their original input and output targets sometimes mentioned additional work commissioned to better understand the pandemic's local effects, and highlighted examples where participants had benefited in other ways from project activities. However, as one would expect, none reported any notable successes in increasing employment outcomes in these circumstances. Similarly, the one report covering employment-intensive investment – an intervention type that may be more prominent as countries turn to labour market recovery – indicated that job creation results were lower than expected due to the effects of lockdowns and other factors relating to the pandemic. Again, because of these restrictions, this should not be seen as an indicator that the effectiveness of such interventions in the recovery phase would also be lower:²⁷

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- "The project is successful in reaching out to one of the most vulnerable populations... However, due to the ongoing economic crisis, structural problems and adverse effects of COVID-19, the effectiveness of the project in terms of increasing women's participation into labour market stays quite low, compared to the positive impacts it has created on women's attitudes, perceptions, and personalities" (R16, p. 11).
 - "The project delivered well on its outputs... However, what remains to be vividly seen is the transformation of the delivered outputs into the required transformational changes at higher outcome and impact levels" (R15, p. 44).
 - "The project has launched a study to analyse further the consequences of the COVID crisis among micro and small enterprises led by women in both Egypt and Tunisia" (R9, p. 27).
 - "The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly influenced project results and implementation since March of this year" (R13, p. 19).

The effectiveness of interventions focusing on policy areas related to the protection of workers was sometimes good, and may provide insights for future work in these areas. This was the case with some larger projects and programmes that were able to effectively "reinvent themselves" to respond to the immediate problems at hand, particularly those focused on occupational safety and health and the situation of migrants. Others, working to protect factory workers in the garment sector (for example, Better Work) and the textiles and leather sector, were also reported to have responded well to protecting workers in the context of COVID-19, though these sectors were at the same time facing job losses that these programmes could do little about.

²⁷ Project 38, *Partnership for Youth Employment in the Commonwealth of Independent States*, referred to the effective implementation of a public works fund in Uzbekistan, and suggested that such measures should be considered as part of COVID-19 response strategies.

The global VZF project brings together governments, employers' and workers' organizations, companies and other stakeholders to jointly advance towards the vision of achieving zero severe and fatal work-related accidents, injuries and diseases in global supply chains. Despite its logical connection to the challenges presented by COVID-19, it needed to adjust its established approach and strategy to maximize results as factories closed, staff were unable to engage with constituents, travel restrictions hampered field interventions, and virtual connections were not always available. However, it was able to reallocate resources, find extra funds, and develop and deliver new awareness-raising and training material in response to the new occupational safety and health issues that emerged in global supply chains:

✔✔ “Approximately 3 million workers... are expected to benefit from VZF's work on COVID-19. All in all, the programme has allocated over €2 million to activities related to COVID-19” (R4, p. viii).

Not many of the evaluation reports included in the samples commented on the contribution of social dialogue to project effectiveness. Some noted that the participation of employers' and workers' organizations was not integrated well into project design and planned activities. In others, consultation was planned but was not carried out, due to the difficulties created by COVID-19. Some evaluations recommended that more attention be given to social dialogue to strengthen company compliance with labour laws as they grappled with the economic downturn caused by the pandemic:

✔✔ “Participation of employers' organizations and workers' organizations in the implementation of the Project has been very limited, which is mainly due to the fact that in the Project design, a participation of these actors was hardly contemplated in the first two and fourth intermediate results” (R1, p. 27).

✔✔ “Dialogues among and between different stakeholders in relation to policy issues are largely hampered due to COVID-19-related restrictions; the projects could not undertake many of the planned consultations in relation to developing the monitoring and reporting framework on labour migration-related SDG targets and indicators, and for developing the national strategy for the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration” (R8, p. 35).

✔✔ “Dialogue meetings among social partners reportedly never took place due to COVID-19 restrictions” (R15, p. 38).

The reports revealed a diversity of views on the merits of social dialogue in responding to crises. Some saw its critical importance in engaging stakeholders and developing consensus-based decisions and illustrated examples of these principles being put into effect at different levels – national, sectoral and enterprise. Others suggested that stakeholders sometimes believe the need for speed in decision-making and in implementing response strategies meant that there was no time for social dialogue:

✔✔ “ILO's tripartite structure brings together those directly involved in and affected by policy development and implementation, relevant Ministries and workers and employers through their most representative organizations. Social dialogue leads to strong and consensus-based solutions, particularly in times of crisis” (R25, p. 38).

✔✔ “Social dialogue cannot solve the pandemic: Some key stakeholders emphasized that swift crisis responses and policies will continue to be required to support people, institutions, and companies, will need to be put in place to address its consequences and to work towards a recovery. The traditionally slower processes of social dialogue are not considered the right process to do that” (R32, p. 54).

The VZF project described above did highlight the important role played by social dialogue in that project's successes in all seven of its target countries. This project had always emphasized social dialogue in its operational approach, pursuing an objective of strengthening it to improve the knowledge and awareness of workers and employers of occupational safety and health-related issues. This approach was maintained as the project responded to the new circumstances of the pandemic:

►► “There has been an increased awareness of occupational safety and health issues in all seven countries by informing stakeholders through social dialogue and tripartite discussions, which have led to the participatory development and validation of strategies to address primary, country-specific occupational safety and health issues in [global supply chains]” (R4, p. x).

In terms of the visibility of the ILO's work in response to the pandemic, its research and knowledge management capabilities were especially effective. This was evident through various publications and policy guides developed by the reviewed projects in response to the pandemic, but especially through the ILO Monitor serial publication.

As mentioned earlier, many of the reviewed evaluation reports adjusted their work plans either to include research on COVID-19 effects on individuals and enterprises or to develop new information/awareness products and policy guidelines (see table 3). The extent to which these raised the profile of the ILO's work was not made clear by the reports in many cases, though some were linked to national COVID-19 policy responses and the work of labour inspectorates.

The high-level evaluation of the ILO's research and knowledge management work did highlight the global reach of the serial publication *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work*.²⁸ This publication was reported to have a very high profile as a source of high-level analysis on the impact of the pandemic on the labour market:

►► “The ILO response to the COVID-19 crisis through inter alia the *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work* offers another example of global reach and uptake. The report has been widely quoted by the media (for example, The Financial Times, the BBC, Le Monde) and influenced the UN's global response as well as regional and national policies on multiple topics related to the world of work” (R7, p. 56).

Efficiency in the ILO's delivery

The pandemic caused significant implementation delays for many of the reviewed projects, and some reported that they were unlikely to meet their output targets in the difficult context of the pandemic. Some projects that were in a position to adjust their activities to directly respond to the new context made good use of their resources and were highly productive, despite the disruption.

The reviewed evaluation reports noted the effect of the pandemic on the efficiency of delivery during 2020 and 2021 – as measured by speed of delivery and achieving project milestones – though some projects seem to have achieved targets prior to the onset of the pandemic. The projects described earlier that were able to significantly adapt their activities to meet the new challenges posed by the pandemic seem to have been very productive, producing many new resources and services in quick time. Most of these can be linked to worker protection activities.

28 Available at www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS_767028/lang-en/index.htm.

While the cost-effectiveness of these project outputs is hard to quantify, the agility and responsiveness of these projects in meeting the urgent needs that emerged in the period suggest a high level of efficiency in implementation. The evaluation of the project that redirected 20 per cent of its budget to humanitarian support (such as food and shelter) was unable to assess the cost-effectiveness of this emergency response, as it was outside its scope, but stressed the importance of fully examining the “entire experience” of the project.²⁹ Other projects, especially those that aimed to improve job outcomes and grow incomes, did not ultimately prove to be cost-effective, but the reasons for this were largely outside the ILO’s control:

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- ✔✔ “One of the factors that explains the significant amount of activities that are delayed is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused the postponement or suspension of many activities and not only of the Project but of ILO, the [Ministry of Labour] and the institutions in general” (R1, p. 45).
 - ✔✔ “The pandemic’s repercussions could delay the finalization of some outputs and delay progress on some outcomes. Already, countries have requested (and been granted) project extensions” (R4, p. 49).
 - ✔✔ “COVID broke the momentum of the programme, which was very unfortunate” (stakeholder quote, R12, p.8).
 - ✔✔ “The Lab team adapted well to the COVID-19 pandemic. It did affect progress – putting a halt to the newly developed Coffee and... and preventing staff from travelling – but the team pivoted to use the opportunity for knowledge synthesis and dissemination and have been remarkably productive despite the disruption” (R14, p. 6).
 - ✔✔ “As this development rolled out rapidly and none of the involved parties had experience in similar situations, all decisions on new initiatives were taken ad hoc. Therefore, it would be important to study the entire experience and to draw some lessons learned” (R35, p. 44).

The ILO showed that, when faced by a crisis, it was able to overcome its tendency to “work in silos”, harnessing expertise more effectively at headquarters and in the field, and contributing to innovation. This needs to be maintained in the post-COVID-19 world.

Some evaluation reports commented on how the pandemic provided a new imperative for the ILO to work as one, and to overcome a tendency, sometimes mentioned in past, for the Organization to work in a fragmented, even internally competitive way. Rather than maintain operational silos, reports described the emergence of innovative collaborative approaches, including the establishment of global teams that harnessed the expertise within headquarters and in the field, the creative use of virtual tools and collaborative technology, and closer and more regular engagement with constituents.

Programmes that have worked in the same policy space have not always maximized the potential synergies between them. The evaluation reports reviewed gave some examples where the pandemic had helped overcome this limitation. The VZF project, for example, secured additional funds from a donor to respond to the pandemic and channelled these through Better Work to expand its geographic reach:

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- ✔✔ “[There were] efforts undertaken by the VZF to strengthen collaboration with other ILO programmes and to leverage collaboration with existing projects and ILO departments, especially those dealing with [global supply chains] (e.g. Better Work, SCORE, the Inclusive Labour Markets, Labour Relations and Working Conditions Branch and the Global Programme on Employment Injury Insurance and Protection, all of which target similar populations as the VZF but may not have the same degree of expertise in occupational safety and health)” (R4, p. 23).

²⁹ Report 24 also highlighted an example where the efficiency of such emergency resource reallocations was far from ideal – a US\$20,000 contribution to a UN COVID-19 relief initiative required “15 forms and one month’s work” to accomplish (report 24, p. 69).

►► “The [Better Work] donors have been very flexible, and resources were reallocated in response to the COVID-19 crisis. An example mentioned is the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, which provided additional funding to cope with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding was provided to the ILO Vision Zero Fund, which also channelled some of the resources through Better Work in order to reach more countries” (R3, p. 18).

►► “The flexibility in staff coverage has also improved in a few cases, such as when a staff member was so busy during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic that another staff member stepped in and reportedly gained important information from the field by connecting with the Regional Offices, Decent Work Teams and Country Offices in these meetings” (R7, p. 54).

Staff and stakeholders expressed satisfaction with these new collaborative approaches, and reinforced the need for ILO work to be built on strong institutional relationships rather than the more limited personal connections that characterized collaboration in the past. The role of ILO senior management in bringing the Organization together in this way was also noted – it was “single-minded” in this respect, and the results showed that the ILO had the institutional capacity to be a unified, fast-acting Organization, and to be recognized as such (for example, via the international attention it attracted through its serial publication, *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work*).

Some cautioned that there was still plenty of room to improve internal collaboration, especially between headquarters departments, and worried that the newfound spirit of cooperation may be temporary. They saw a risk that, outside of the crisis and without continuing senior management attention to internal collaboration, the ILO could revert to its old, more fragmented habits:

►► “The COVID-19 crisis has strengthened collaboration between Better Work Global and the country teams. It is seen as a highly innovative period. Still, there is a sense that overall mechanisms to connect the work at global level and the countries could be further strengthened and that support provided could be better based on country realities” (R3, p. 5).

►► “There is a real sense of working together and no longer is Better Work Global instructing the country programmes on ‘what to do’” (R3, p. 31).

►► “There was a good and positive spirit of cooperation and less ‘people working in silos’, which facilitated a prompt response to the pandemic situation” (R4, p. 27).

►► “The ILO’s internal collaboration and teamwork can be harnessed well in unique situations, such as with the [research and knowledge management] dimension of the COVID-19 response. However, the more typical dynamic is limited, with compartmentalization at headquarters and inconsistent engagement between headquarters and the field” (R7, p. 69).

►► “Effective means of ensuring the continued relevance of [research and knowledge management] is senior management’s attention and support. This could lead to a review of the budget and resource allocation and spending to foster collaboration and coordination instead of consolidating silos. The COVID-19 response framework is a unanimous best practice of the relevance of ILO’s [research and knowledge management] to changing needs” (R7, p. 29).

►► “Outside of the [research and knowledge management] dimension of the COVID-19 response, informants described collaboration within ILO compartmentalized and based on personal rather than institutional relationships, often with a lack of clarity and consistency about the extent and quality of articulating and operationalizing [research and knowledge management] strategies and approaches in their work” (R7, p. 37).

The use of cost-effective virtual/remote delivery methods in ILO interventions greatly increased during the pandemic, overcoming a past hesitancy to use these methods. Their continued use in the post-pandemic recovery phase is likely, and this may have an enduring and positive effect on the ILO's efficiency.

The most significant development in efficiency triggered by the pandemic is related to the widespread adoption of virtual/remote delivery methods. More than half of the reports indicated a shift to virtual delivery methods, applying them to activities such as training, provision of expert support, and awareness-raising. These offered efficiencies in many respects, including reduced travel and event-hosting costs, saved time and numbers of participants reached per activity. As the ILO as an institution embraced these approaches more broadly during the pandemic – incorporating them in its internal management and communication arrangements, and in its openness to home-based work – the efficiencies achieved overall may have been even greater.

One evaluation report (report 3, Better Work Global) indicated that the programme was well prepared for this mode of delivery, having recently piloted virtual services, but for most it was something new and evaluation reports suggested that stakeholders were pleasantly surprised by how well it worked. Past hesitancy to incorporate these cost-effective approaches may have reflected a fear of the unknown, which the pandemic has helped to overcome. This point was reinforced in another Better Work evaluation (report 30), which described how the pandemic stimulated innovations such as the conduct of remote factory inspections using hand-held cameras to view and inspect facilities.

Reports also often highlighted the limitations of virtual delivery – for example, not all activities can be effectively delivered remotely; not all communities or institutions are well equipped for it; it may not be suitable for vulnerable cohorts; and, in the case of virtual factory inspections, unannounced visits were difficult to organize:

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- ▶▶ “COVID-19 in effect ‘forced’ some innovative thinking. Better Factories Cambodia piloted a remote factory inspection process involving the use of hand-held cameras/mobile phones to view and inspect the factory. There are limitations to the effectiveness of this approach... [but] while not a substitute for on-site personal visits, a regime that mixes virtual and face-to-face inspections may lead to some efficiency savings without overly diluting the value of the inspection” (R30, p. 58).
 - ▶▶ “The project has responded to COVID-19 by developing new COVID-related training products (occupational safety and health for SMEs and SME factories), developing online modules for Training of Trainer and Training of Enterprise... Notably, the COVID occupational safety and health modules have had strong uptake, with 954 SMEs participating in 2020 alone” (R10, p. 5).
 - ▶▶ “Even though the outbreak of COVID-19 created new difficulties, the ILO worked hard to overcome these challenges by signing a new contract with experts from Genç-İşi Coop. to provide online consultancy services and trainings for SADA Women’s Cooperative while SADA centre was closed due to COVID-19 precautions” (R16, p. 37).
 - ▶▶ “The utilization of Information and Communication Technology in providing online trainings and remote consultancies during the COVID-19 lockdown was well received by the training participants and gave an opportunity for more participants to interact during lockdown” (R17, p. 7).

Sustaining results and next steps

Evaluation reports offered a number of insights into the sustainability of the ILO's work and its possible future directions, including regulatory reforms that encourage business diversification; expansion of online training, collaboration, consultation and

information-sharing; and revising strategies and programmes to ensure they support women in a changed post-COVID-19 world.

Not all the reviewed evaluations focused on longer-term strategy; some instead concentrated on immediate implementation issues. Some in the first sample were completed quite early in the pandemic, when its devastating global impact was not yet clear. Despite this, across both samples, observations and recommendations were made that might help inform thinking on the sustainability of the ILO's work and possible future directions in implementing recovery strategies in line with the call to action. Some relevant quotes from the reports are included below:

Inclusive economic growth and employment

- ✔✔ "Develop a strategic framework for the ILO's work in promoting sustainable enterprises that... repositions this work to respond to the challenges of the post-COVID-19 world" (R5, p. 8).
- ✔✔ "Governments want to make their economies more resilient... It requires that governments think through the regulatory regime that will make it easier for firms to diversify, make it easy for firms to be flexible and make it easier for firms to do business" (R5, p. 87).
- ✔✔ "Elaborate a strategy for response to the COVID 19... Provide data on effects of the COVID crisis on women entrepreneurs, and women in precarious employment... Get Ahead modules can be developed to incorporate these constraints and allow women entrepreneurs to continue operating" (R9, p. 38).
- ✔✔ "The implementation of online training and consultation... needs to be studied in depth and assessed whether it would be a potential tool to maximize benefits and implemented as a low-cost support to local consultants after the project" (R18, p. 10).

Protection of all workers

- ✔✔ "The emergency response has laid the foundation for occupational safety and health activities to progress forward. There is strong demand across all participating countries to continue with occupational safety and health interventions, as revised working standards and approaches will remain for the longer term. This provides a basis for occupational safety and health to focus on both safety and health elements into the long term and to deploy strategies that continue to raise the profile of occupational safety and health in all aspects of employment and social protection measures" (R25, p. 41).
- ✔✔ "In ILO's post-COVID-19 ready-made garment strategy, explore feasibility of programme for small and medium factories that provide holistic assistance to improve safety, compliance with international labour standards and productivity, for example SCORE, Work Improvements in Small Enterprises programme" (R2, p. iv).
- ✔✔ "Consider an alternative country expansion strategy ('[Better Work] second generation') which is nimbler and less resource-intensive and less criteria for countries and factories to participate" (R3, p. 6).
- ✔✔ "The ILO response to COVID-19 has created a benchmark for senior management sponsorship, fast turnaround, risk-taking, quality assurance, cross-departmental teamwork and effective dissemination... it has also shown that online collaboration and virtual tools can be effective in conducting joint work with acknowledged benefits to constituents" (R7, p. 71).
- ✔✔ "Emergency cash transfers are primarily a short-term option that have little to do with the longer-term system and policy changes required to establish and implement a functioning social protection system. However it is noted that emergency cash transfers could be an entry point to

the development of long-term contributory (e.g. unemployment insurance, sickness benefits) or non-contributory social protection systems as well as to extend social security coverage to workers in the informal economy” (R25, p. 38).

- ▀▀ “The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed everybody to look for alternative ways to reach out to target groups... COVID-19 awareness and information materials... were posted in different online media... as well as through Facebook, reaching out to more than 3 million users. This obviously shows the advantage of online dissemination of information as opposed to direct outreach activities” (R8, p. 42).

Relying on social dialogue for solutions

- ▀▀ “Continue and reinforce interventions addressing COVID-19-related challenges facing industry; continue tailoring factory level advisory services to COVID-19 related issues... Consider taking a stronger, more public position on responsible business practices (brands purchasing practices) and continue contributing to effective brand/supplier dialogue” (R2, p. v).

The evaluation reports covered by the review often gave only superficial attention to assessing the impact orientation of the interventions they covered, and generally did not explore the likely effect of the pandemic on future impact.

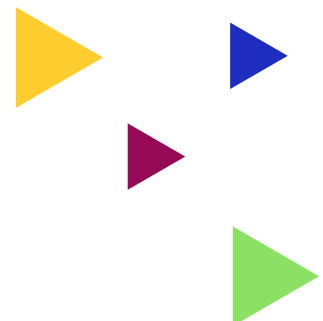
The 41 projects in the two report samples covered a broad range of activities, but the assessment of impact orientation was generally weak. Some projects related to the protection of workers were optimistic that their efforts to strengthen institutional capacity and improve the implementation of labour laws would ultimately have a positive downstream effect on workers.³⁰ But this optimism sometimes ignored the new realities of the pandemic – described elsewhere in these same reports – which threatened such impacts (for example, preoccupation of officials with other roles, limited political will to address some work quality issues in the face of the crisis, and new priorities focused on addressing widespread job destruction). Some painted a grim picture of the significant challenges that now need to be addressed in the wake of COVID-19, and were frank about the lack of evidence of impact so far.

The impact orientation of projects that related to employment growth was covered only superficially in the reviewed evaluation reports, and in some cases this criterion of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development was skipped entirely. As discussed earlier, projects working on increasing employment and incomes during the pandemic faced enormous barriers to success. One measured a fall in participant income (report 19). Others that had already described a lack of short-term employment outcomes were unable to comment on the prospects for longer-term success in the absence of additional follow-up support (reports 16 and 20). Projects designed to improve the employment prospects of refugees mentioned some new pandemic-related constraints on their ability to get results, including pressure from governments to reprioritize in favour of native job seekers (report 33) and the fact that, in such employment crises, refugees are the easiest and fastest to discard (report 34).

The evaluation of the Better Work Global initiative suggested that this programme conceives of its impact in terms of its capacity to expand and reach more countries and participating factories. The report recognized that the post-COVID-19 world would require the programme to rethink its expansion strategy, and this may mean it will operate in a very different way if it is to maximize impact:

³⁰ For example, strengthening the capacity of labour inspectorates to enforce child labour laws (reports 1 and 15) and labour standards (reports 4 and 13); developing implementation guidelines for the enforcement of existing labour laws (report 11) and for the establishment of worker injury compensation schemes (report 21); and improving social protection systems (reports 13, 23, 24, 25 and 26).

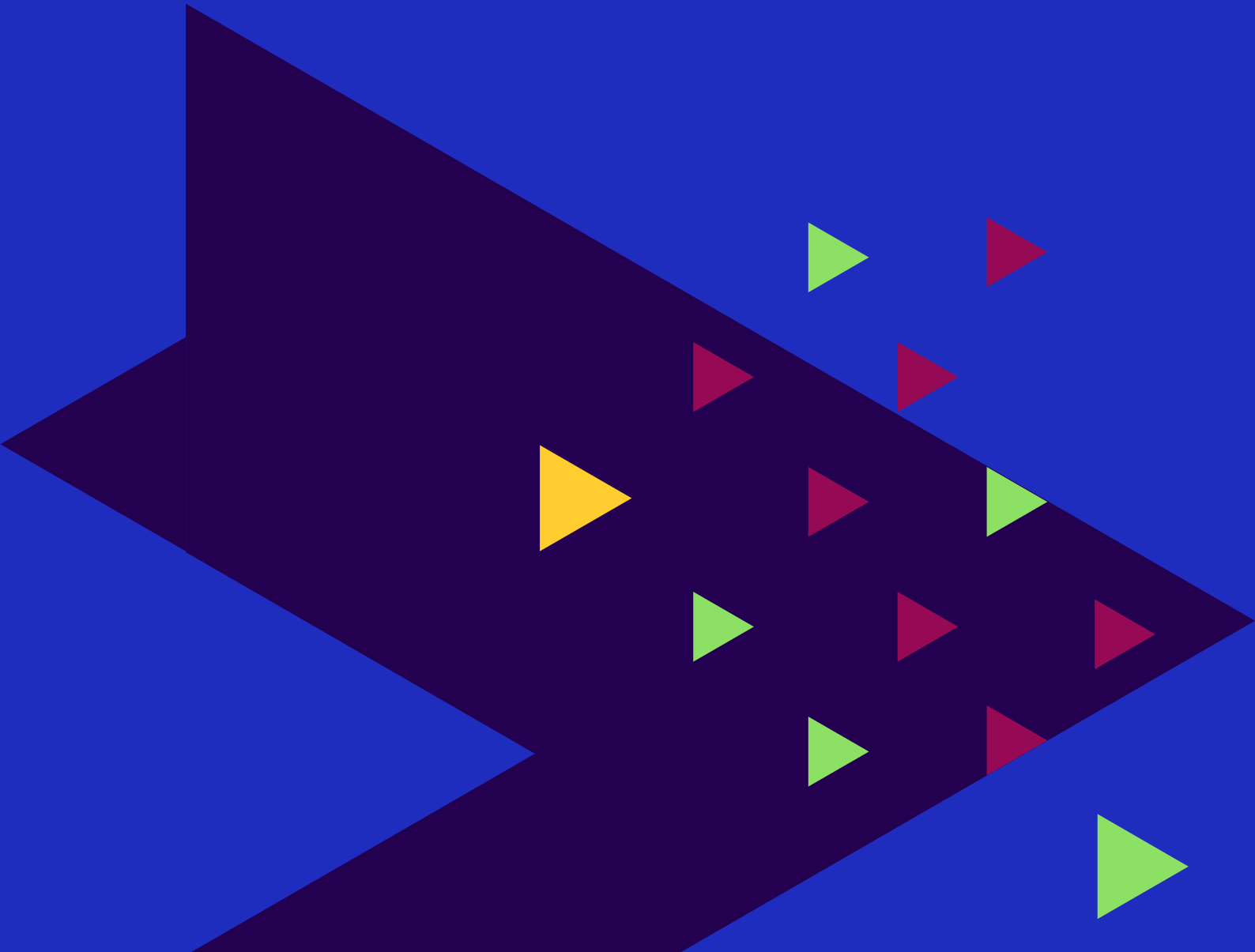
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- ▣▣ “Individual cases of solving grievances and the rescue of migrant victims from abuse and exploitation have been reported but, overall, no systemic change is visible. To a certain extent, this might be because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but realistically it will take some years to change the mindset of migrants and their employers – as well as the authorities in destination countries” (R35, p. 10).
 - ▣▣ “Despite the Ready-Made Garment Sector Programme II’s relatively strong performance achieving outputs, progress on actual national initiative factory remediation has been slower than expected... One donor opined, ‘The biggest challenge is pressing the government on remediation. No one has a clear roadmap’” (R2, p. 30).
 - ▣▣ “The evaluation therefore finds that real income has fallen by an average of approximately 20 per cent: the macroeconomic and crisis situation has been so bad that the project could not be expected to compensate for it” (R19, p. 51).
 - ▣▣ “There is evidence that the Programme has contributed to improve the social protection situation for millions of people. However, impact monitoring is very partial and there is no evidence that the Programme reached its objectives in terms of impact” (R26, p. 44).
 - ▣▣ “The Better Work Global team has already started with consultations for the next strategy which will succeed the current strategy. The consultations show that the COVID-19 crisis will have a significant impact on the new strategy. The crisis has highlighted the vulnerability of the apparel supply chain both in terms of business fragility, and in terms of weaknesses in worker protection, but also the need to ‘build back better’ and bring about a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable sector” (R3, p. 17).
 - ▣▣ “The impact and sustainability issues need to be conceived in a longer-term perspective, particularly because the interventions focus on refugees, which is the group that is the easiest and fastest to be discarded in times of crisis. While all efforts are made to increase the formal employment of the target group, this constitutes a significant shortcoming” (R34, p. 36).





3

Conclusions and lessons



▶ 3. Conclusions and lessons

This synthesis review examined 41 evaluation reports completed in 2020 and 2021 on ILO interventions, to see how the Organization responded to the pandemic, whether these responses were proving effective, what was driving change, and what lessons might be learned for the future. As outlined in the introduction section, the first sample of reports looked at the ILO's immediate response to the urgent need for action in the early months of the pandemic crisis, while the second (all written in 2021) provided an opportunity to verify and expand on these findings. While this second sample was able to fill some of thematic, geographic and intervention type gaps identified in the first sample,³¹ it was still too early to capture from the available evaluation reports information from projects that were conceived as a direct response to the pandemic and which embodied the principles set out in the global call to action.³² Only one such report had been completed. Regardless, this synthesis review provides valuable insights for the forthcoming high-level evaluation of the ILO's COVID-19 response, which should include an examination of more recent projects that have not yet reached the formal project evaluation stage.

Conclusions of the review are summarized below:

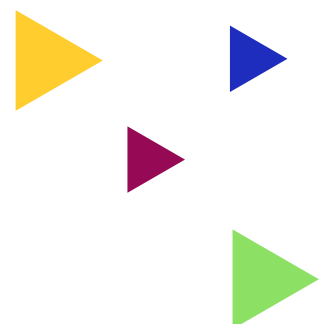
- ▶ Those interventions that were in a position to have their directions significantly changed in response to the shock brought about by the pandemic showed that the ILO could be agile in developing highly relevant activities and resources that meet stakeholder needs, and could overcome barriers to internal collaboration to unlock latent synergies and capacity to innovate. The latter needs to be maintained in the post-COVID-19 world, as the risk remains, when the crisis subsides, of the ILO reverting to its old, more fragmented habits.
- ▶ In some locations (such as Latin America), the deterioration of economic conditions and loss of jobs and livelihoods may be reversing progress in some fundamental areas of the ILO's work, including eliminating child labour/trafficking and gender-based discrimination and violence. The ILO needs to work with donors and regional stakeholders to renew its focus on these areas, and to identify and address the new factors behind these trends in different regions and countries.
- ▶ Repairing the damage caused by the pandemic on labour markets by stimulating economic growth and employment is a priority articulated in the call to action. Although the timing of the projects covered in this review meant they were often unable to demonstrate results (many were operating in the middle of the crisis), important elements of future response strategies were touched upon, including employment-intensive investments in public works, the effective use of public employment services and active labour market programmes, enterprise development and skills initiatives (including to support youth transitions to work and recognise the skills of migrant workers). As momentum for recovery builds, the planned high-level evaluation of the ILO's COVID-19 response should seek to gather more information about these aspects of the ILO's response.
- ▶ The ILO will need to maintain an ability to adapt its approach to ensure that it coheres with strategies as priorities evolve and new ones emerge. Most recurrent priorities for future action in the aftermath of the pandemic that were highlighted in the evaluations included reversing the effects of the pandemic's destruction of jobs; reviewing the focus of the work of different ILO departments and units away from product-centred

31 The first sample included: interventions related to economic growth and employment creation (for example, interventions in the area of employment-intensive investment, such as in report 33); social protection (for example, reports 23, 24, 25 and 26); regions experiencing disproportionately adverse effects from the pandemic (for example, Latin America in reports 29, 27, 31 and 32); and from countries suffering from conflict and fragility (for example, reports 31 and 39).

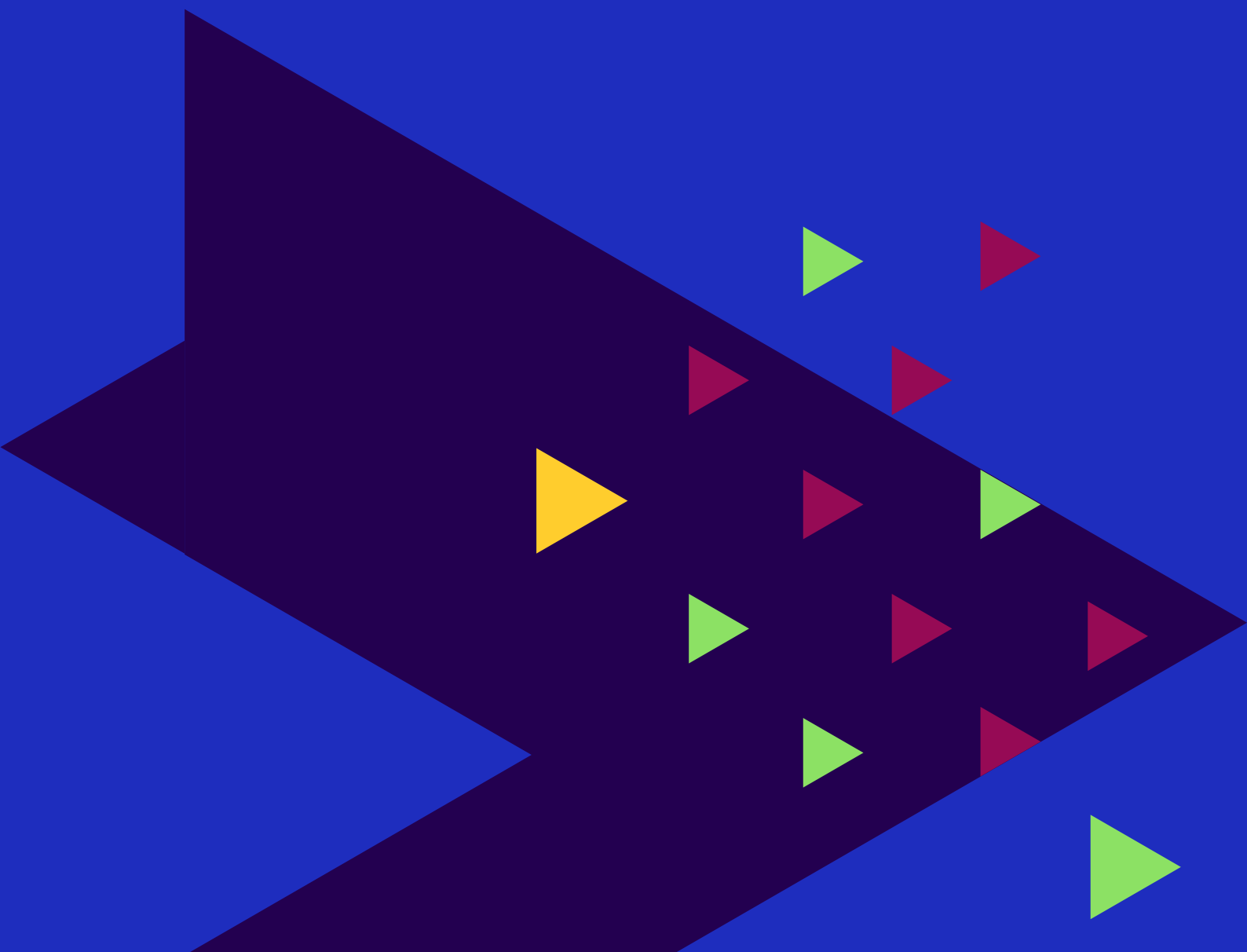
32 ILO, [Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient](#), 17 June 2021.

approaches and towards more localized solutions; and focusing on resilience at all levels to improve capacity to respond to future shocks.

- ▶ The use of virtual/remote delivery methods during the pandemic was greatly expanded, often increasing participation. While this has opened the door for their more widespread use after the pandemic, not all support can be effectively delivered remotely, as some institutions and communities are not well placed to use virtual technology, and some vulnerable people may be frozen out.
- ▶ The intervention types that proved most relevant and effective in the period examined by the reports were those related to “protecting workers in the workplace”. As economies and labour markets recover, interventions related to growing jobs and incomes, and improving access to these, will become increasingly important.
- ▶ The task ahead for the ILO will be to use tripartite mechanisms to maximize the alignment of its work with national and global priorities, which are currently in a state of flux. In addition, strategic partnerships will need to be maintained to advance progress towards achieving the Decent Work Agenda and the Centenary Declaration goals. As the ILO’s Strategic Plan for 2022–25 put it: “Past experience has highlighted both the importance and the challenges of ensuring full alignment of country-level activities with the global policies and priorities established for this Organization”.
- ▶ Sustaining results will include, but not be limited to, regulatory reforms that encourage business diversification; expansion of online training, collaboration, consultation and information-sharing; and revising strategies and programmes to ensure they support women in a changed post-COVID-19 world.



▶ Annexes



► Annex 1. Details of evaluation reports

The evaluation reports varied in terms of the depth of coverage of issues related to COVID-19. The review assessed how “information rich” these reports were (see Table 4) and assigned a rating from A to D as follows:

► **Table 4. Richness of information in report samples - summary**

Rating	Description	No./% of reports with this rating
A	Reports included extensive discussion of the issues including high-level consideration of the changed context of the ILO's work, the policy implications of this and ideas for future program strategy.	14 (34%)
B	Reports included some exploration of the issues, context, and policy/program implications, but in less depth than Group A	10 (24%)
C	Reports included only limited discussion of the issues – their focus was more on operational issues experienced because of COVID (e.g., delays, shift to remote delivery etc.)	11 (27%)
D	Reports had limited useful content related to the COVID response	6 (15%)

The **variable quality of the reports** to some extent reflects the nature of the interventions that were evaluated. Evaluations of major ILO programmes – such as Better Work, the Vision Zero Fund, SCORE and the Flagship Programme on Social Protection floors – offered the deepest insights. These ongoing interventions were all backed by teams of people in HQ and the field, and their evaluations were focused more on strategic issues such as how best to position these programmes to ensure they remain relevant to future conditions. These interventions sometimes also had access to supplementary monetary and human resources that allowed them to quickly change direction in response to COVID and to do new things.

Reports that used **EVAl's new “clustered” approach** – which considered multiple projects and programme activities with similar themes, frameworks and locations – also tended to be more strategic in their focus. Three of the five evaluations of this type were given an “A” rating.

The six **high-level evaluations** included in the samples were also focused on “big picture” strategic issues and most explored in depth the impact and future consequences of COVID-19 for the ILO. Relatively few short-term development cooperation project received an “A” rating with many considering COVID-19 mainly in terms of its disruption to planned activities rather than in terms of its longer-term ramifications for ILO strategy. Some made comments on how they moved to remote delivery of training and support, but not much more.

► Table 5. Samples of evaluation reports

Sample 1

Ref	TC Symbol	Nature	Timing	Type	Synthesis Rating	Region	Title
1	DOM/17/01/USA	Independent	Interim	Project	A	Latin America	Support efforts to combat child labor and improve working conditions in agriculture in Dominican Republic
2	BGD/19/05/MUL	Independent	Interim	Cluster	A	Asia	Cluster Independent Mid-term Evaluation of RMGP II and BWB and its affiliated projects
3	GLO/17/55/MUL	Independent	Interim	Project	A	Inter-Regional	Better Work Global Stage IV
4	GLO/16/50/MUL	Independent	Interim	Cluster	A	Inter-Regional	Vision Zero Fund Collective Action for Safe and Healthy Supply Chains
5	Enterprise HLE	Independent	-	HLE	A	Inter-Regional	High-level independent evaluation of ILO's strategy and action for promoting sustainable enterprises, 2014-19
6	Andean HLE	Independent	-	HLE	A	Latin America	High-level independent evaluation of the ILO's Decent Work Programme in the Andean Countries 2016-2019
7	RSKM HLE	Independent	-	HLE	A	Inter-Regional	High-level independent evaluation of ILO's research and knowledge management strategies and approaches, 2010-2019
8	NPL/18/01/CHE	Internal	Interim	Project	A	Asia	Migrants Rights and Decent Work (MIRIDEW) project combined with labour migration under SEP
9	RAF/17/05/FIN	Independent	Interim	Project	B	Africa	The Way Forward after the Revolution: Decent Work for Women in Egypt and Tunisia (DWW) – Phase II
10	MMR/17/51/MUL	Independent	Interim	Project	B	Asia	Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises (SCORE) phase III Myanmar
11	PAK/16/03/EUR	Independent	Interim	Project	B	Asia	International labour and environmental standards application in Pakistan's SMEs (ILES)
12	EGY/16/02/NOR	Independent	Final	Project	C	Africa	Employment for youth in Egypt (EYE): Working together in Qalyoubia and Menoufia
13	RAF/17/16/ICM	Independent	Final	Project	C	Africa	Extending social protection access and portability to migrant workers and their families through selected RECs in Africa
14	GLO/17/06/CHE	Independent	Final	Project	C	Inter-Regional	Market systems development for Decent Work: the Lab Phase II
15	ZMB/18/02/RBS	Independent	Final	Cluster	C	Africa	Addressing Decent Work Deficits in the Tobacco Sector of Zambia and Tanzania Projects (DWIT)
16	INT/17/03/UNW	Independent	Final	Project	C	Europe	Strengthening the Resilience of Syrian Women and Girls and Host Communities in Turkey
17	GLO/16/17/ESP	Independent	Final	Project	C	Inter-Regional	Support to the preparatory activities of the ILO to launch the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth
18	EGY/17/03/EUR	Internal	Interim	Project	C	Africa	BDS4GROWTH - Support the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency and affiliates
19	HTI/16/01/NOR	Independent	Final	Project	D	Latin America	Addressing Education and Skills Gaps for Vulnerable Youths in Haiti
20	RAS/17/51/KOR	Independent	Final	Project	D	Asia	2018-2020 ILO/Korea Partnership Programme funded projects in ASEAN, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam
21	PAK/16/06/DEU	Independent	Final	Project	D	Asia	Implementation of the Agreement concerning additional employment injury benefits to the victims of the Ali Enterprises fire
22	BRA/17/51/BRA	Internal	Interim	Project	D	Latin America	Promoción de trabajo decente para personas en situación de vulnerabilidad - Evaluación interna intermedia

Sample 2

Ref	TC Symbol	Nature	Timing	Type	Synthesis Rating	Region	Title
23	Migration HLE	Independent		HLE	A	Inter-regional	High-level Evaluation Labour Migration
24	Asia DWCP HLE	Independent		HLE	A	Asia	High-level Evaluation – Decent Work Country Programmes in Asia
25	GLO/20/20/MUL	Internal	Interim	Project	A	Inter-regional	Protecting garment sector workers: occupational safety and health and income support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – Midterm evaluation and evaluability assessment
26	Social Protection	Independent		Flagship	A	Inter-regional	Flagship programme on building social protection floors for all (2016 – 2020)
27	RLA/16/03/ESP	Independent	Final	Cluster	A	Latin America	Projects that support the implementation of the second phase of the regional initiative Latin America and the Caribbean free of child labour – final cluster evaluation (English)
28	TUR/19/03/DEU	Independent	Interim	Project	A	Europe	Promoting Decent Work for Syrians under Temporary Protection and Turkish Citizens – Midterm evaluation
29	PER/17/51/USA	Independent	Interim	Project	B	Latin America	Partnership in Action to End Child Trafficking in Peru - Midterm evaluation
30	Various	Independent	Interim	Cluster	B	Asia	Better Factories Cambodia, Better Work Indonesia, and Better Work Vietnam Programmes – Midterm cluster evaluation
31	HTI/18/01/RBS	Independent	Final	Project	B	Latin America	Creer des emplois décents et respectueux de l'environnement pour les jeunes (CREER), project-drouillard, commune de Cite-soleil - Finale indÃ©pendante
32	RLA/18/04/EUR	Internal	Interim	Project	B	Latin America	Responsible Business Conduct in Latin America and the Caribbean – Midterm evaluation
33	JOR/18/05/DEU	Independent	Final	Project	B	Arab States	Employment through Labour Intensive Infrastructure in Jordan – Cluster evaluation
34	TUR/19/02/USA	Independent	Interim	Project	B	Europe	Decent Work Opportunities for Refugees and Host Communities in Turkey – Midterm evaluation
35	ETH/16/02/GBR	Independent	Final	Project	B	Africa	Improve labour migration governance in Ethiopia to combat irregular migration – Final evaluation
36	HLE GEM	Independent		HLE	C	Inter-regional	High-level Evaluation Gender Equality and Mainstreaming
37	ETH/16/01/EUR	Independent	Final	Project	C	Africa	Addressing the root causes of migration in Ethiopia – Final Evaluation
38	RER/17/01/LUK	Independent	Interim	Project	C	Europe	Partnership for Youth Employment in the CIS II – Midterm evaluation
39	YEM/18/01/USA	Internal	Final	Project	C	Arab States	Protecting children and youth in Yemen from recruitment and use in armed conflict – Final evaluation
40	UKR/19/01/EUR	Internal	Interim	Project	D	Europe	Towards safe, healthy and declared work in Ukraine – Midterm evaluation
41	RAF/18/07/IOM	Independent	Interim	Project	D	Africa	Joint programme on labour migration governance for development and integration in Africa (JLMP) - SIDA (Sweden) funded – Midterm evaluation

Synthesis rating legend

A	Extensive discussion of the issues including high level consideration of the changed context of the ILO's work, the policy implications of this and ideas for program strategy
B	Some exploration of the issues, context and policy/program implications, but not in depth
C	Limited discussion of the issues - focus more on operational issues experienced as a result of COVID (e.g. delays, shift to remote delivery).
D	Very little if any useful content.

► Annex 2. Key questions

New/existing scenario of work

- ▶ What changes have occurred to the environment in which ILO operates as a result of the pandemic and what are the new/existing drivers of change?
- ▶ What role do government, social partners and other key partners at international, regional and country levels play in addressing the decent work deficits that the pandemic has caused?
- ▶ How can the ILO COVID-19 response portfolio be described in terms of its delivery models? Are there specific types of interventions which are more recurrent? How have they worked and under what circumstances?
- ▶ How are ILO response measures relevant to the ILO's programme and policy frameworks (Programme and Budget and Decent Work Country Programmes), and to national, regional and international development frameworks (UNSDCF, SDGs and National Development Strategies)?
- ▶ To what extent has the ILO been adaptive and agile and projects designed or repurposed based on the challenges confronted and results from COVID-19 diagnostics, UN socio-economic assessments and guidance, ILO decent work national diagnostics, CCA, or similar comprehensive tools?

What is working? For whom? And why?

- ▶ To what extent have the projects provided timely, relevant and effective responses to constituents' needs and priorities in the COVID-19 context?
- ▶ Are there certain groups that benefit from the intervention more than others?
- ▶ What are the different effects that projects can have in addressing the decent work deficits caused by the pandemic and what necessary actions are needed to sustain them? Is the ILO providing integrated actions?
- ▶ To what extent have the projects made/are likely to make progress as part of its COVID-19 response in advancing crosscutting issues of standards; social dialogue and tripartism; gender equality and non-discrimination; and environmental sustainability?
- ▶ What are the positive synergies between ILO interventions and between ILO and other partners (constituents, national institutions, IFIs and UN/development Agencies)? Is there evidence of obstacles and challenges in relation to synergies?
- ▶ Which key success factors, mechanisms and circumstances can be identified? Which key inhibiting factors can be identified?

What's next?

- ▶ How can the reach and increase of scope of observed results and early impact be expanded through up scaling, adaptations or complementary interventions?
- ▶ Do the ILO interventions include long-term strategies to ensure up-scaling and sustainability of results for a human-centred future of work?
- ▶ What lessons learned and good practices can be identified to support that ILO's work moving forward?



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