

Quick Facts

► Decent work results and effectiveness: Ex-post meta-analysis of development cooperation evaluations, 2020 and 2021 (partial)

► September 2021

► Introduction

The findings and recommendations that stem from [the meta-analysis](#) are intended to guide the ILO's operational approach to development cooperation interventions. This review is part of a series of meta-analyses of project evaluations commissioned by the Evaluation Office (EVAL) since 2011, as part of its efforts to provide regular feedback to the ILO on its effectiveness in advancing decent work. It includes all independent project evaluations completed in 2020 and a selection of evaluations from 2021. The meta-analysis examines development effectiveness in the delivery of decent work results, by focusing on relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of results; and by providing evidence of results supporting achievement of decent work outcomes.

► Methodology

The meta-analysis uses EVAL's established approach and methodology to rate decent work results. The key question asked is: *"How effective are ILO projects in delivering decent work results?"* The meta-analysis used three principle methods:

► Presentation of sample

The meta-analysis reviewed 48 independent final evaluation reports (35 for 2020 and 13 for 2021).



► Review and scoring process

The ILO's development cooperation performance was assessed through an ex-post performance rating based on findings of evaluation reports. The performance information of development cooperation related to a list of predefined criteria that were categorized under (1) strategic relevance and alignment; (2) effectiveness, sustainability and impact; (3) implementation performance and efficiency of management and resources used. These criteria were then rated according to a four-point scoring system.

Table 1: Four-point scoring system

Unsuccessful	Partly successful	Successful	Highly successful
1	2	3	4
Highly deficient performance	Basic level of performance but stated need for improvement	Adequate level of performance and results	Very good level of performance and results

► Analysis

The data generated was analysed and presented in the form of key summary tables and graphs, to allow for comparison with the results from the [previous Decent Work Effectiveness Reviews](#). Qualitative and quantitative data was used to support and explain the findings, and to deepen the thematic synthesis of trends, lessons learned and good practices from the meta-analysis.

► Findings

The effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic were felt more strongly in the projects evaluated in 2021, and were clearly visible in the level of success related to criteria associated with effectiveness, sustainability and impact, which is usually a category with strong results.

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated certain areas of weakness, yet it has also made constituents and other partners more aware of the significance of the ILO's work and its comparative advantage in promoting decent work through social dialogue, international labour standards and social protection for all groups, including vulnerable workers and their families. Implementing a

solid results-based management approach and realistic, context-sensitive project design, taking into account risks and developing contingency plans, will be essential to improving effectiveness in the coming years.

The historical perspective taken in this study reveals that systemic issues persist, and addressing them becomes even more crucial in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, since evidence shows that challenges to decent work are intensified. Comparing performance between regions and across departments over time can ensure that these systemic issues are better understood and tackled.

Strategic relevance and alignment

Performance in this category was variable, with a majority of projects demonstrating high relevance to **P&B outcomes** and good links to **DWCPs/CPOs**, as well as other strategic frameworks. There were positive yet mixed results for the inclusion of **pro-poor perspectives** in project design and implementation, and targeted specific **vulnerable groups**, with better performance in the 2021 sample. Half of the reports reviewed provided evidence of **gender-sensitive** approaches being implemented, with lower performance in 2021 than in 2020.

Results were mixed regarding **constituent support**, with better performance in 2020 than in 2021. The main weakness in this performance category was related to validity of design, with only just over one third of the projects having good performance in 2020 and one quarter in 2021, due to inconsistencies in strategies and objectives, overambitious scopes, lack of contextual and risk analysis, and limited stakeholder involvement.

Effectiveness, sustainability and impact

Performance was variable in this category in 2020 and 2021. Evidence of the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic was visible, especially in 2021. The most highly scored and fully covered elements were the development of strategic relationships and the appreciation and recognition of the **ILO's expertise**. While **capacity-building and knowledge development** were key areas of strength in 2020, these criteria had heterogeneous performance in 2021. There were missed opportunities to influence policies and to promote **international labour standards**.

The promotion of **tripartism and social dialogue** in design and implementation was somewhat successful in 2020, yet this was an area of weakness in 2021, despite evidence that the global pandemic led to realize the importance and need for social dialogue. **Resource leveraging** performed heterogeneously. The main area of weakness was the **sustainability** of interventions, with just over one third of the projects from 2020 and 15% from 2021 having some prospects of maintaining, or scaling up existing results, with few having prepared an exit strategy.

Implementation performance and efficiency of management and resource use

The majority of projects had low-to-average ratings in terms of their implementation and efficiency of management and resource use, with good coverage for most criteria. Areas of relatively good performance were related to the **quality of ILO support to projects**, and the **coordination** of ILO offices and units to achieve project results. **Implementation management** had mixed results, but performance was positive overall. Efforts to document and disseminate **knowledge** generated by interventions were inadequate, with many missed opportunities.

There was reasonable "**value for money**" for most ILO projects. However, the adequacy of human and financial resources was a limiting factor to deliver project outputs and objectives; this is to be interpreted in light of the many COVID-19 restrictions that limited movement and often constrained access to resources. There were important weaknesses in performance related to the **RBM approach and goal orientation** of ILO interventions, as well as **monitoring and reporting** mechanisms in 2020 and 2021. When frameworks were present, they were often not fully relevant or had missing elements, thus limiting their use and impacting effectiveness of implementation.

Figure 1. Median ratings on strategic relevance and alignment performance criteria (2020 and 2021)

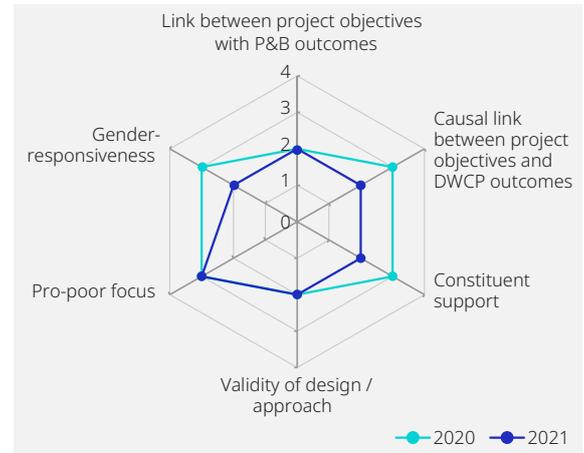


Figure 2. Median ratings on effectiveness, sustainability and impact performance criteria (2020 and 2021)

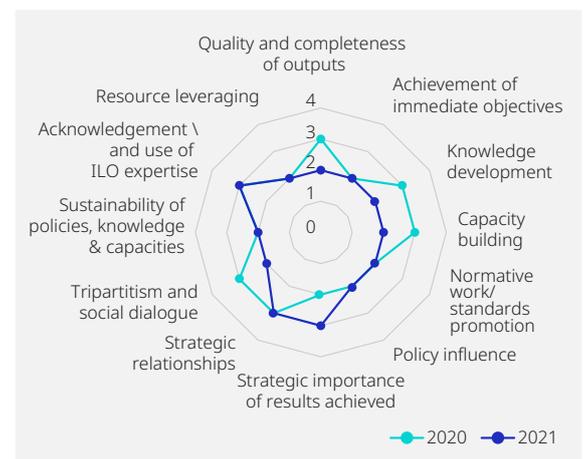
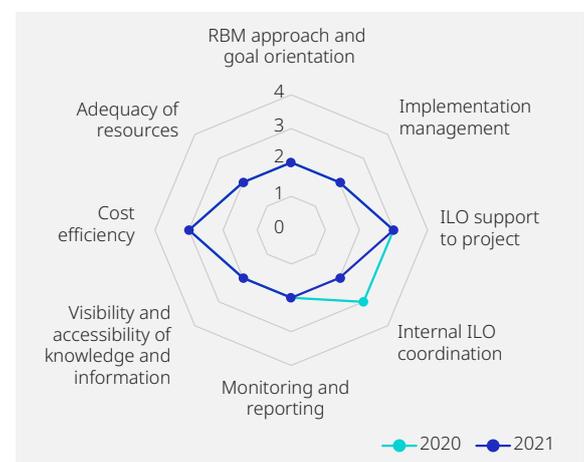
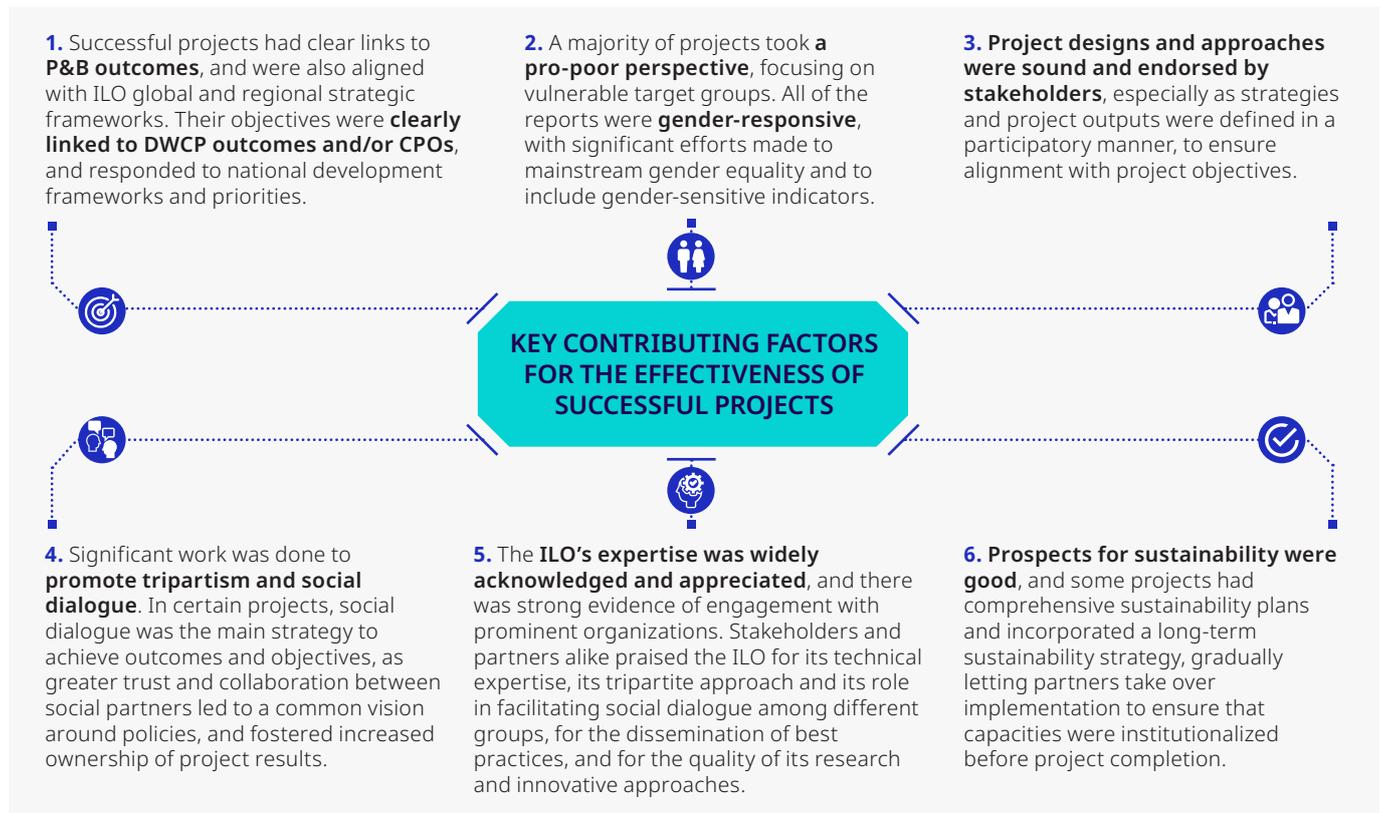


Figure 3. Median ratings on implementation performance and efficiency of management and resource use performance criteria (2020 and 2021)



► Some key factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the most successful projects



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Ensure that all projects are aligned with specific **ILO strategic objectives and DWCPs/CPOs**, even in the context of joint projects, and that they are complementary with existing UN initiatives.
- 2 Find different ways to ensure that all **constituent groups** be involved in project formulation and implementation through participatory, social dialogue, despite limitations due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. This will allow for more agility in responding to stakeholder needs, while taking into account a new context of operation.
- 3 Require that **cross-cutting policy drivers** be consistently included in project design and implementation, and that social dialogue/tripartism and normative considerations be embedded throughout the project approach.
- 4 **Focus on sustainability aspects at the design stage**, to ensure that the groundwork for maintaining or advancing results from ILO interventions is laid out, and to better identify challenges downstream.
- 5 Travel limitations have shown the importance of having national evaluation consultants on the ground to manage and carry out evaluation processes, independently or with international consultants. It is essential to **allocate sufficient time and resources for national consultants to conduct their work**, and to use these opportunities to build their evaluative capacity.
- 6 In contexts where it is possible to engage in online activities, the ILO should explore the possibility of offering **virtual training and networking activities** more systematically, as this could allow interventions to reach more beneficiaries, especially in remote or conflict-prone areas.