▶ *i*-eval Flash news

The ILO Evaluation Office is pleased to share the thirtieth edition of *i*-eval Flash news. Through this triannual electronic bulletin, we provide readers with updates, news and information on publications and upcoming events related to evaluation.

The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have further amplified the need to optimally use evaluative evidence

▶ **by Guy Thijs, Director**

In our last issue, we contemplated how the restrictions on travel and the need for teleworking were affecting our evaluations. Prompt guidance issued in March 2020 on conducting evaluations during a pandemic allowed us to cope with that initial hurdle and to continue our evaluation work. Overall, the Evaluation Office (EVAL) managed to stay on track with its evaluations during the crisis. At the same time, it continued the transformation process it embarked on following the Independent Evaluation of the Evaluation Function. The crisis provided an incentive to speed up the strategic clustering of evaluations. It also advanced the work that EVAL had started before the pandemic to increase efficiency and reduce the environmental footprint of the evaluation process by reducing travel and relying more on remote interviews and national evaluation capacity. Experience so far suggests, however, that network technology clearly only provides a partial answer to the dilemma of distance. The human element in data collection techniques cannot be underestimated.

As we all quickly realized, this initial response was only transitionary against the backdrop of the real magnitude of the problem. The current pandemic has shaken the lives of human beings everywhere in ways never imagined and continues to do so. It has forced the evaluation community to rethink how we can enhance the value added of evaluations beyond accountability and strengthen in-depth and real-time learning.

The COVID-19 crisis requires results-proven measures to mitigate and to overcome the long-term and negative consequences in an efficient manner. EVAL released in May 2020 an InFocus learning note on key lessons learned from the ILO's response to previous economic crises. This study, combined with EVAL's annual decent work results assessments, provided the building blocks for an initial outline of an evaluative framework designed to inform as well as to assess the ILO's performance in responding to the crisis. As explained further in the Innovation & Research section of this newsletter, this will include adaptive evaluation types for relevant projects and retrofitting mid-term evaluations whenever feasible into more real-time and prolonged results-monitoring exercises. The ultimate aim is to establish a robust evaluation plan, specifying tools and methodologies, to ensure that data collection systems help to generate the necessary evaluative evidence on the performance and effectiveness of the ILO's COVID-19 response.

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▶ Innovation & Research

Completed studies

Decent work results and effectiveness of ILO operations: Meta-analysis of development cooperation evaluations
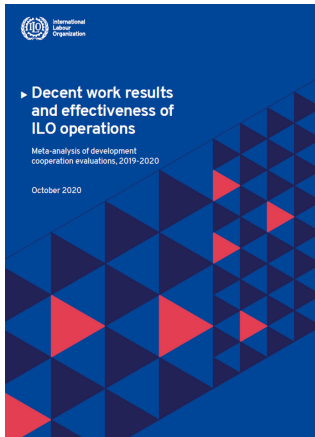
EVAL has conducted four biennial meta-analyses of independent project evaluations since 2011 covering the periods 2009-2010, 2011-2012, 2013-2016 and 2017-2018. These studies provide feedback on the ILO's effectiveness in advancing decent work. EVAL recently completed the fifth biennial meta-analysis on ILO's decent work results and operational effectiveness using its standard approach and methodology. Whereas previous studies focused on past performance, the most recent review incorporates a rolling assessment that yields results for the *period 2019-2020*. The analysis also incorporates a comparative approach to illustrate performance trends since 2013.

Overall, the ILO's operational effectiveness continues to be strong, with recurrent strengths in the engagement of constituents in interventions, strengthening of capacities, knowledge development and strategic relationships. Areas for improvement include the efficiency of operations, most notably in terms of institutional capacity to monitor and report on results. In alignment with current development cooperation concerns, two new criteria were piloted (SDG targets and disability inclusion). Whereas strong performance was observed in the former, the latter requires reinforcement. The 2019-20 Annual Evaluation report includes a summary of the main results. Together with the full meta-analysis report, they will be made available on EVAL's website in October 2020.
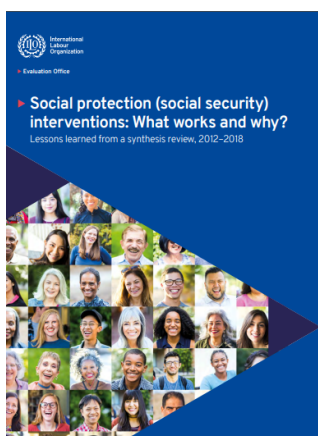
**Social protection (social security) interventions: What works and why? Lessons learned from a synthesis review, 2012–2018**

This report presents the findings of a review of evaluation reports related to ILO interventions in the domain of social protection (social security) during

2012–2018. It aims to contribute to organizational learning and to provide guidance to ILO constituents on future work related to social protection (social security). It also aims to strengthen the capacity of the Office to make evidence-based decisions from findings generated in evaluation reports. Through the systematic analysis of results, lessons learned and good practices of selected evaluation reports, this synthesis review identifies what works, for whom, and why, in the context of ILO's work on social protection (social security). The synthesis review will feed into the recurrent discussion on social protection in the upcoming International Labour Conference.

ILO's response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers and enterprises: drawing evaluative lessons from the ILO's past response to an economic and financial crisis
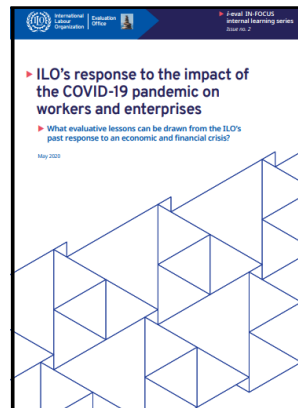
In support of current ILO efforts to address the COVID-19 crisis, EVAL released in May 2020 a synthesis of experience and lessons learned from project evaluations that addressed the ILO's response to the fall-out of the 2007-08 global economic and financial crisis. Structured around six key lessons, the study aims to support the ILO's technical departments in integrating knowledge from past experience to the current crisis. The report was widely distributed and subject to a discussion at the Evaluation Advisory Committee meeting earlier this year. It was further used in the development of an evaluation framework of the ILO's COVID-19 response.

Planned and ongoing studies

Protocol on collecting evaluative evidence on the ILO's COVID-19 response measures through decentralized evaluations and developing an evaluative framework for a strategic response
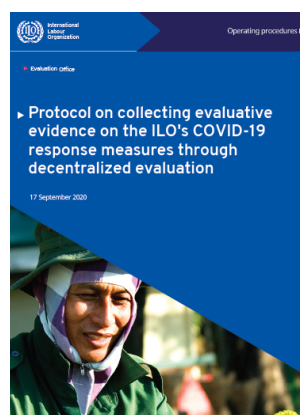
As part of the work on developing an evaluation framework on the ILO's COVID-19 policy response, the Evaluation Office is working on a protocol to guide decentralized evaluations of interventions directly or in-directly linked to the response framework. The protocol (currently available for

internal consultations) includes evaluation questions and key performance indicators to obtain relevant and comparable evidence on how the ILO is responding to the effects of the pandemic. In addition, this document provides some insights on procedures and requirements to follow when conducting decentralized evaluations. Aggregated results from these evaluations are expected to be a useful source to feed into other organizational ILO and UN performance reviews. At the organizational level, performance information and strategic learning extracted from decentralized evaluations will be documented to inform the proposed High-level evaluation on ILO's COVID-19 response in 2022.

The Evaluation Office is also developing a framework to assess the ILO's policy response to the pandemic. The framework mainly builds upon the Programme and Budget outcomes & indicators. It also takes into account the OECD/DAC criteria and other UN System-wide frameworks. It incorporates lessons learned from past experience, organizational effectiveness, and performance information, such as adaptability, internal coherence and timeliness for response.

COVID-19: Implications for evaluation

EVAL developed guidance on how to help plan and manage evaluations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance also encourages colleagues to build a community of shared experiences on how to best implement them. They are currently accessible to ILO staff, however we invite external individuals to email eval@ilo.org to request a copy.

- Implications of COVID-19 on evaluations in the ILO
- Sharing experience on the implications of COVID-19 on evaluations

New Books and Articles on Evaluation
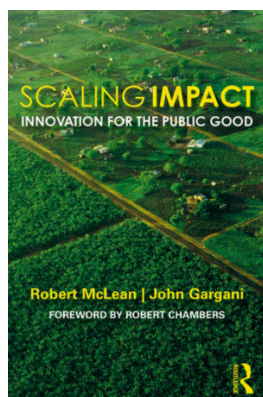
Summary from Routledge, "Scaling Impact introduces a new and practical approach to scaling the positive impacts of research and innovation. Inspired by leading scientific and entrepreneurial innovators from across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Middle East, this book presents a synthesis of unrivalled diversity and grounded ingenuity."

▶ News from the Departments

Employment Policy Department

Reference guide for Employment Impact Assessment (EIA)

Employment policy is an area where there are relatively large gaps in evidence. Employment Impact Assessment can contribute to improving the effectiveness of policy responses and to providing recommendations on the way forward.

ILO policy on impact evaluation

The overall policy on evaluation is clearly presented in the ILO Evaluation Policy (2017). Impact evaluations in the ILO are primarily for knowledge building to inform effective policy interventions. They provide credible evidence on the outcomes of interventions. This leads to learning by the ILO and by other development partners and should be able to guide improved policy and implementation decisions in the future. Decisions linked to the replication and expansion of policies/interventions, in particular, need evidence of how smaller scale (pilot) initiatives have performed, and how they generalize to a larger population. See Guidance Note 2.5: Impact evaluation in the ILO for more information on the support that EVAL provides.

Background

The main work of the ILO's Employment Policy Department (EMPLOYMENT) is to provide policy advice to constituents on employment policies at macro, meso and micro levels. Given the complex nature of employment policies that include macro, industrial and specific interventions implemented in different scenarios, EMPLOYMENT uses a variety of impact assessment tools for its evidence-based policy development such as qualitative and quantitative research, ex ante and ex post analysis, macro, sectoral and individual evaluations. All of these dimensions are relevant for assessing the success of an intervention.

With this new Reference Guide, EMPLOYMENT aims to improve the effectiveness of this important work by taking stock of its existing experience in the field of impact assessment and creating a central guide that sets out guidelines for the Department. This is particularly important, first and foremost, since without solid impact assessment the credibility and reliability of policy orientation efforts can be challenged, with significant implications for the validity and accountability of the work of the Department. Furthermore, the results of these assessments can impact resource mobilization efforts.

Development and content

In creating the Guide, the Department formed a Task Force* made up of several colleagues with expertise in this area of work. They carried out extensive consultations with colleagues at HQ and field employment specialists and identified some 62 documents directly or indirectly developed by the Department on impact assessment.

The final guidelines are the result of long discussions within the EIA Task Force aimed at reviewing existing EIA tools in the Department and providing recommendations on the way forward. The publication describes the methods and tools most frequently used by EMPLOYMENT, among them: General Equilibrium Models (GEM); Partial Equilibrium Models (PEM); Input–Output Analysis (IOA); Social Accounting Matrices (SAM); Growth accounting decomposition methods; Local multipliers; Sectorial identification; Systematic reviews; Skills prospection (anticipation); Experiments; Quasi– experiments; Qualitative assessments; and, Meta-analysis.

In many cases, applications combine different methods, for example, quantitative and qualitative methods, which are complementary and taken together can provide more in-depth insights into employment effects. The selection of economic sectors or economic structures is also critical to the success of any employment intervention, and this can be done using ex-ante methods and/or prospective methods. The intervention itself can then be analysed using methods that assess the effects on individuals, in contrast to control groups.

However, none of the above-mentioned methods is inherently superior to the other. In practice, all have strengths and weaknesses because all are based on specific assumptions. Yet, some methods are better equipped for ex-ante analysis and others for ex-post analysis. And, some are better for revealing the impact on beneficiaries and others for reporting the impact on the economy or economic environment.

Moreover, the Reference Guide discusses some frequently asked questions, such as whether every intervention needs to be assessed in terms of its impact. (The answer is that this is not necessarily the case.) Aside from the issue of measurability, the monitoring stage can provide important information for the development of an effective EIA, specifically by: assessing how an intervention evolves over time; and, evaluating data available from the project management office in terms of initial goals, indicators and outcomes associated with the programme.

Although it does not address the issue of causality, it helps to understand if the intervention is being implemented according to its 'theory of change', i.e. the causal logic of how and why a particular programme, programme modality, or design innovation will reach its intended outcomes.

The Reference Guide has already been used in two courses on Employment Impact Assessment offered by the ILO/ITC in 2019 and 2020.

▶ News from the Regions

Africa

Contributing to organizational learning in Africa by implementing recommendations from a recent high-level evaluation

Africa has not been spared from the detrimental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It continues to pose serious challenges to the region's advancement of social justice and decent work. As a result, and now more than ever, evaluation results must be used to enhance organizational learning and to support constituents to navigate these challenging and uncertain times.

As a region with one of the highest volume of evaluations, the potential for learning and improvement is far-reaching. Since 2019, the region has conducted over 30 independent and internal evaluations of development cooperation projects and has dozens more in the pipeline. The evaluation network in the region helps to ensure that, not only are evaluations completed but also, the follow-up to evaluations are done in a timely and accurate manner. In addition, to foster learning, dissemination events are held to improve learning opportunities from evaluation results.

The High-level evaluation (HLE) of the ILO's activities and results in the South Africa Development Community (SADC) that was undertaken in 2019 provided a good opportunity to involve colleagues in the region in the follow-up process. The evaluation recommended inter-alia a major initiative to strengthen the capacity of constituents to advance decent work.

The region used this opportunity to host a webinar in July 2020 to further disseminate the HLE's key recommendations. This was the first webinar scheduled in a series that is intended to disseminate evaluation recommendations and how ILO management in Africa is addressing them. The objective of the webinar was to reinforce the concepts and actions required for their implementation. This webinar was presented in two sessions: one in English and a second in French. Each session was attended by more than 50 ILO officers in the region.

Four major points with respect to the HLE were discussed: 1) Constituents' needs should guide the ILO's capacity development plan; 2) the ILO's capacity development strategy for constituents should look beyond the life of a Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) and should be a process in which workshops are only one activity; 3) a DWCP should be aligned with the Country UN CCA and UNCF in order to build synergies with UN agencies; and 4) the ILO should continue promoting ownership of DWCP by the constituents.

One of the main outcomes of the webinar was the agreement to develop a capacity development plan for constituents in every country, It was also agreed that capacity development activities should be planned and organized as integral parts of larger development plans and not as individual activities. They should have a strong focus on organizational and policy capacity development rather than focus on the individual level. DWCPs were discussed and reviewed as a means and not an end, and therefore constituents' capacity development should have a long-term view beyond the life of the DWCP. Finally, DWCPs should be flexible and adaptive enough to reflect changed contexts as agreed with constituents.

▶ EVAL Highlights

Towards greater gender-responsive decentralized evaluations in the ILO – emerging need to step up efforts

The quality of evaluations is a predominant consideration when it comes to the credibility and use of an evaluation's findings. EVAL therefore established a dual quality assurance mechanism that involves in-house quality control by EVAL and ex- post quality appraisals (QAs) of decentralized project evaluations by an external (and independent) firm. This process includes assessing the extent that ILO evaluations properly address Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (GEEW) issues.

The latest annual assessment of QAs at the aggregate level covering the period of 2019 showed good results. Yearly comparisons since 2015 of the average meta-scores demonstrate steady improvement over time in the extent to which ILO evaluations mainstream GEEW consideration in their reports (see Figure 1). However, ongoing challenges in meeting the UN requirements on gender equality mainstreaming persist. Areas for improvement relate notably to the extent that gender-responsive methodologies, methods and data analysis techniques are included in evaluations and findings, conclusions and recommendations reflect a gender analysis.

Need to improve efforts to address gender

In addition to the annual review of QAs at the aggregate level, EVAL also reviews the ex-post QAs individually as they come in. This allows us to assess trends and interfere early if we see systemic issues that need addressing. A review of recent QAs has seen a deteriorating in the gender sensitivity of evaluation reports. It is therefore important that the evaluation network and evaluation managers step-up efforts to apply methodological guidelines and toolkits to better integrate gender equality and non-discrimination issues in managing and conducting evaluations, and work with EVAL colleagues to further our collective effort in ensuring ILO evaluations advance towards meeting UN-SWAP requirements.

Figure 1. Meta-scores obtained between 2015 and 2019
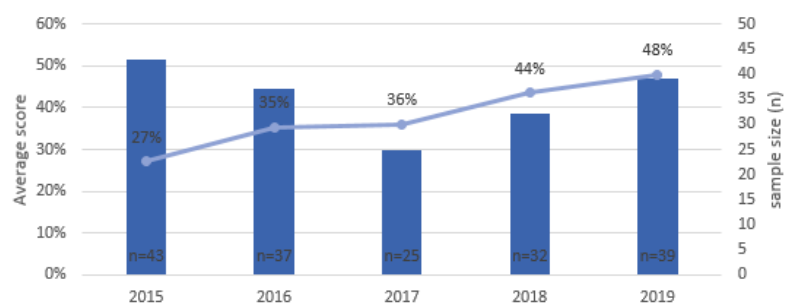
A Think Piece on the most recent ex-post QAs of the ILO project evaluations will be shortly released. Meanwhile, individual scores for decentralized project evaluations can be consulted in EVAL's _i_-eval Cloud.

Guidance material to support responsive evaluation for the world of work

The latest edition of the policy guidelines for evaluation will be publicly launched in October along with an interactive suite of guidance notes. The material has been updated to reflect developments in the new evaluation policy and strategy, namely with respect to:
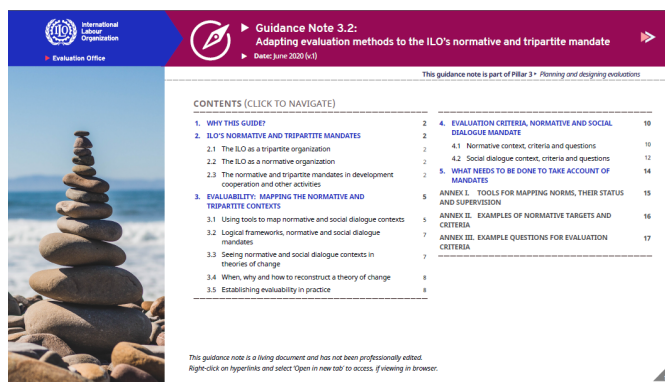- Clustering evaluations;
- Ensuring that evaluations sufficiently capture the ILO's normative work and reflect its unique mandate of promoting tripartism and social dialogue; and
- Appropriately reflect the ILO's cross-cutting policy drivers.

The 22 guidance notes have been developed with the user in mind. Innovations include an interactive format and easy to use navigation features which are organized into five thematic pillars depending on the area of guidance required:
- Enabling conditions for good evaluations;
- Types of evaluation;
- Planning & designing evaluations;
- Managing and conducting evaluations; and
- Use and dissemination of evaluation findings.

As a preview, click on the attached images to access two examples of the many new guidance notes:

Adapting evaluation methods to the ILO's normative and tripartite mandate

Strategic clustered evaluations to gather evaluative information more effectively
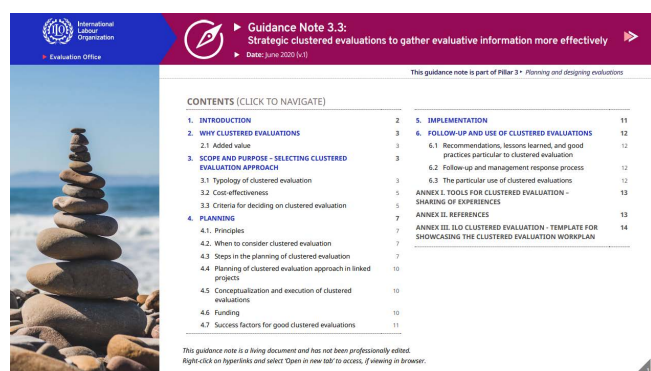

Biennial workshop to direct the work ahead

EVAL hosts a workshop every two years that brings together members of the evaluation network to address common issues, raise solutions and discuss the path moving forward. Due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19 pandemic the workshop will be held virtually, spanning three days over two weeks in November.

The objectives of the workshop are principally to: (1) to learn and to share experiences on how to optimally address evaluation challenges under the current crisis; (2) to take stock of successes and challenges in order to best report against the evaluation strategy (2018-21) and to feed into the next strategy's design; and (3) to strengthen the sustainability of the evaluation network. Members of the network will participate in the workshop, including Regional Evaluation Officers and Departmental Evaluation Focal Points, in addition to high-level speakers and senior management.

▶ Learning activities and events

Training programme for ILO Constituents on evaluation in the SDG era
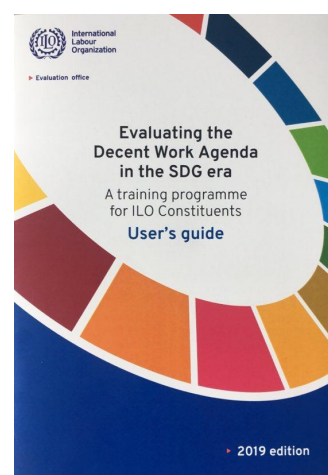
EVAL has launched a kit in a hard copy format on a new training programme for constituents on evaluating the decent work agenda in the SDG era. It is equipped with a user guide, training material, learning sheets and templates. The online version of the training kit will be released before the end of the year and will be made publicly available on EVAL's website for further reference and used by the ILO Constituents. At the same time, EVAL continues to work with ILO technical departments, regions and the ILO International Training Centre to mainstream the training content within existing capacity-building programmes for constituents.

Calling all evaluation consultants: Complete the self-induction programme

Evaluation consultants interested in conducting evaluations for the ILO are encouraged to undertake the self-induction programme. Participation will help to boost their familiarity with the unique aspects of the ILO's mandate, its evaluation policy (2017) and evaluation strategy (2018). Almost 100 evaluators have already completed the programme and submitted their attestation of completion to eval@ilo.org.

Evaluation Manager Certification Programme

The training programme to certify ILO officials to manage independent evaluations is being converted into a virtual format in order to deliver the programme more efficiently and to respond to travel restrictions imposed by the global pandemic. EVAL aims to conduct the first virtual training programme before the end of the year. Effort will be made to accommodate all officials from the field and headquarters to enroll in the programme. Please contact eval@ilo.org for more information.

▶ UNEG developments

Annual General Meeting

The UNEG Heads held their Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 22 and 23 June, 2020 using virtual means. Discussions focused on work accomplished since the last meeting in 2019 and the special challenges posed

by the COVID-19 pandemic. The AGM approved the new Ethical Guidelines produced by the UNEG Working Group (WG) as one of the completed deliverables. In addition it reviewed the work plans of various WG such as the one Gender, Disability and Human Rights; Environmental and Social Impact; Professionalization; and UN Cooperation Framework (UNCF).

The latter WG was requested to produce an addendum to UNCF Evaluation Guidelines on how UNCF evaluations could deal with the COVID-19 and to look into regional platform to ensure quality control and independence of the UNCF evaluations.

As expected, in the context of COVID-19, Independent System Wide Evaluation matters received a good amount of attention. For 2020-2021, as an interim solution to the need for more coordination among different groups related to system-wide evaluations (SWE), the SDG, SWE and COVID-19 Working and Interest Groups were merged. Members agreed to move the AGM to January 2021 (instead of May-June).

External knowledge sharing, conferences, courses and webinars

American Evaluation Association: The annual conference will take place virtually from 27-30 October 2020. This year's theme is "How will you shine your light" in evaluation practice?

UK Evaluation Society Annual Conference 2021: The conference will take place in London from 26-27 May 2021. The focus will be on "Evaluation and Evaluative Thinking: Insights for methods, capabilities, culture and implementation."

Comic/animation

Read the latest revived edition of EVAL's animation/cartoon series on the pandemic response

COVID-19
The ILO Evaluation Office wishes good health and well-being to all colleagues, constituents, partners and those close to you during this unprecedented time of crisis that we face together.