



02

▶ Introduction

▶ Introduction

BACKGROUND

In March 2020, just a few months after it began its second century of operations, the ILO faced an unimagined new world. The COVID-19 pandemic had plunged the world into a crisis of unprecedented scope and scale. Lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and disruptions to global trade saw economic activity halted and the global economy shrink. Over the next two years, global poverty would increase for the first time in a generation. Inequality would grow within and between nations.¹⁰ Nearly six and a half million people would lose their lives to the disease.¹¹

The world of work was devastated by this health and economic crisis. Full or partial lockdowns affected billions of businesses and workers, jobs disappeared, and working hours and incomes dropped precipitously. Many of those who continued to work had to deal with a new and potentially deadly health risk. Gaps in social protection coverage and the human consequences of these were exposed, particularly among those in the informal economy. Enterprises failed or faced closure, especially those operating in the hardest-hit sectors.¹²

The damage caused by the crisis was uneven. Women, young people, and other groups who were already disadvantaged in the labour market were disproportionately affected. While some workers were able to switch to telework and could maintain their income, this was not an option for many others. Furthermore, the fiscal and technical capacities of countries to respond to the initial crisis and to quickly restore employment and economic growth were unequal. Fears emerged of a “great divergence” in the paths of higher and lower income countries.¹³

Initially, as the crisis unfolded, the ILO worked with constituents to support the safety of workers and the sustainability of businesses and jobs. Then its focus turned to promoting a human-centred recovery founded on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, international labour standards, and social dialogue.

The challenges faced by the ILO were twofold. First, the ILO had to **adapt as an institution** to its changed operating environment. To continue to operate, it needed to work out how it would manage global operations in a period of uncertainty and unpredictable change, how its unique governance processes would continue, how its staff could continue to do their jobs, how resources would be sourced or re-allocated, and how it would support constituents in their work.

Second, the ILO needed to **re-focus its policy work** on the new needs and priorities of its constituents. Work plans would need to be adapted, strategies revised, new research and knowledge products developed, and technical support given that would help constituents design and support response strategies across multiple policy domains. It would also need to engage and cooperate with other UN agencies and development actors in the massive task of rebuilding the world of work.

10. World Bank, World Development Report 2022: Finance for an Equitable Recovery (2022, p. 1).

11. NCoV2019, [World COVID-19 Stats](#), database, accessed 30 June 2022.

12. ILO, “[COVID-19 and the world of work, 3rd Edition](#)”, ILO Monitor, 29 April 2020.

13. ILO, [Great divergence threatens economic and employment recovery](#), 2021.

ABOUT THE HIGH-LEVEL EVALUATION

To support the evaluation of the ILO's strategic response to the pandemic, in November 2020, the ILO's Governing Body (GB) approved a recommendation to conduct a high-level evaluation (HLE) of the ILO's response to COVID-19 to be conducted in 2022. HLEs are governance-level evaluations that aim to generate insights into organizational performance within the context of the ILO's results-based management system. Findings from HLEs can help ensure accountability and contribute to future decision-making on policies and strategies, and institutional arrangements.

While the pandemic is by no means over, the HLE came at a time when many Member States had emerged from waves of lockdowns and were looking at what their response would be in the medium to long term. At the same time, they are now grappling with the compounding effects of new crises including the war in Ukraine, food and energy shortages, global inflation, climate change.

In this context the HLE aims to provide the ILO's constituents with:

- ▶ Findings on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the world of work and how the ILO has adapted and strengthened its work in response to these changes.
- ▶ Analysis of key lessons from the ILO's COVID-19 responses, documenting good practices to bolster the evidence base for future programming and evaluations.
- ▶ Recommendations on how to support Member States in providing a fully inclusive and sustainable recovery from the crisis.
- ▶ Accountability on the ILO's response and the extent of its alignment with the ILO Centenary Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The **scope of the HLE** is broad, covering relevant ILO **policy action** from the onset of the pandemic from March 2020 to March 2022. This includes work carried out at headquarters (HQ) and the field. It also looks at the **institutional dimension** of the ILO's response insofar as it pertains to the delivery of its mandate and implementation of its strategies (namely, it does not fully evaluate such things as the ILO's HR practices, teleworking, and so on, although these are touched on in the evaluation's narrative).

The **principal client** for the evaluation is the GB, which is responsible for governance-level decisions on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. Other key stakeholders include the Director-General and members of the Senior Management Team at HQ, as well as Directors and staff of field offices. It should also serve as a source of information for ILO constituents, donors, partners and policy-makers.

METHODOLOGY

Evaluation framework and questions

In line with the evaluation framework and protocol produced by EVAL on the collection of evaluative evidence on ILO's COVID-19 response measures,¹⁴ the HLE considers two "evaluative dimensions" of the response: (a) ILO's institutional readiness, adaptability and capacity to deliver timely support in a responsive manner; and (b) ILO's policy action at national, regional and global levels.

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

The HLEs in ILO take a summative as well as formative approach. They provide insights into the relevance, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of the ILO's strategy, programme approach, and interventions (summative). They are also forward looking and provide findings and lessons learned and emerging good practices for improved decision-making within the context of the next strategic framework (formative).

The evaluation applied a theory of change (ToC) and outcome-based approaches as the analytical frameworks against which processes, and results were measured. The ToC behind ILO's COVID-19 responses (covering actions both in the crisis phase and recovery phase) was (re)constructed at the inception phase.

Key evaluation questions for both these dimensions, based on OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, guided the HLE's work. These are included in Annex B: Evaluation questions.

Data collection methods

The methodology was based on the ILO's evaluation policy and procedures, which adhere to international standards and best practices articulated in the OECD/DAC Principles and the Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the United Nations System approved by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) in April 2016.

The evaluation was participatory. It paid specific attention to responding to the ILO's normative and tripartite mandate, gender equality responsiveness and contribution of the ILO to the relevant targets set in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition, a gender and inclusion dimension as well as environmental issues and social dialogue were considered as cross-cutting concerns throughout the methodology, deliverables and final report of the evaluation. This implied involving both men and women in the consultation, evaluation analysis and evaluation team. Moreover, the evaluators reviewed data and information disaggregated by sex and assessed the relevance and effectiveness of gender-responsiveness and disability-inclusion-related strategies and outcomes.

Mixed methods were applied to draw on multiple lines of evidence (both quantitative and qualitative) and multiple means of analysis to triangulate findings. Four main methods were used for collecting evaluation data: (a) document review; (b) interviews; (c) surveys; and (d) case studies. Data were assessed using both qualitative and, where appropriate, quantitative approaches. Continuing COVID-19 travel restrictions meant that interviews by the evaluation team were undertaken remotely and via national consultants based in the case study countries.

Document review

Relevant policy, strategy, and management documents and web pages related to the ILO response were reviewed as well as the tools, policy guides and research papers prepared to support the ILO's constituents. Data on website views and downloads were analysed and the Overton tool was used to measure citations and mentions to assess the dissemination and influence of knowledge products related to COVID-19.

In preparation for the HLE, a phased synthesis review was started in early 2021 which examined in two rounds a purposive sample of 41 evaluation reports to collect evaluative evidence on the ILO's COVID-19 response measures. A third round looking at another 46 recent project evaluation reports was completed concurrently with the HLE.

The HLE analysed Country Programme Outcomes (CPOs), global products, programmes and projects that included elements responding to COVID-19 and the resources applied. Data were provided by the ILO FINANCE and PROGRAM departments to inform this exercise as well as qualitative reports on actions and achievements.

Interviews

Interviews were held with 354 (47 per cent female) constituents, staff, funding partners and other ILO partners including:

- ▶ ILO staff and senior management in Geneva;
- ▶ High-level representatives of employers' and workers' organizations (namely, IOE and ITUC);
- ▶ ILO regional and country office staff;
- ▶ International partners and other UN organizations collaborating with the ILO on COVID-19-related initiatives;
- ▶ Country-level stakeholders (governments, workers' and employers' organizations, project stakeholders). **See Annex A: Interviews.**

Interviews were semi-structured based on the evaluation matrix and guided by tailored questions. Country-specific data collection templates were developed by the international evaluation consultants to guide the work of national consultants.

Surveys

In addition to an initial scoping survey distributed to ILO management and staff in early 2022, surveys focused on key evaluation questions that were sent to staff and constituents in May and June 2022. The response rate for the staff survey was 13 per cent (292 responses) and for the constituent survey was 8.5 per cent (129 responses). A summary of findings is included in Annex D: Results of staff and constituent surveys.

Case Studies

Case studies were conducted in eight countries (Argentina, Indonesia, Iraq, Madagascar, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand and Viet Nam) and one subregional group of countries (the Western Balkans). "Topical" case studies were also conducted that explored the ILO COVID-19 response in terms of social dialogue, the role played by ITCILO and CINTERFOR, knowledge management and research, the role of standards (a study of the Seafarers/Maritime Sector), UN reform and engagement with partners, and Green Jobs and Just Transition.

More details on the HLE's methodology are set out in Annex C: Methodology, which is an integral part of this report.

Data limitations

The evaluation experienced some delays due to difficulties in connecting with stakeholders and the need to engage, brief and manage national consultants. In some countries, there were delays that led to curtailed interview phases and limited ability to interview some stakeholders and collect sufficient data and information.

The evaluation exposed some inadequacies in the ILO's Results-Based Management systems in tracking and reporting on COVID-specific responses. Results were often poorly reported, limiting the evaluation's ability to conduct detailed analyses of outcomes.

The breadth of topics, policy areas, programmes and services covered by the evaluation meant that not all could be covered in equal depth.