



# 04

▶ Policy action in the pandemic

## ► Policy action in the pandemic

### EVOLUTION OF THE ILO'S POLICY RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

#### KEY POINTS

- The ILO began considering policy responses well before the pandemic was declared and, careful to avoid mistakes from previous crises, shaped its framework to ensure a human-centred recovery.
- Its initial “four pillars” policy framework reflected the Centenary Declaration, and this shaped the ILO's work through the earliest stages of the crisis in 2020.
- Inspiring global action through a true tripartite agreement was the next step and, following months of consultation with constituents, the “Global Call to Action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient” was formally adopted at the June 2021 ILC. This also reflected the Centenary Declaration and set out the leadership and support role envisaged for the ILO.

Senior ILO staff told the evaluation team that the ILO began considering possible policy responses to COVID-19 as early as January 2020. Having relatively recent experience of epidemics in Asia, ILO Decent Work Team specialists in Bangkok had begun to work with the Employment Department in Geneva to consider the implications of this new outbreak. As COVID-19 cases started to spread to Europe, the Middle East and the Americas in February, it became clearer that a global crisis was looming and that its impact on the ILO's work could be substantial. An informal team was formed in HQ that reported on the potential impact on jobs and incomes, initially to the DDG/POL and soon after to the DG and constituents.

Lessons learned in the Global Financial Crisis of 2008–9 were not forgotten. In that crisis, when recovery came, it was at a macroeconomic level and without a corresponding recovery in employment.<sup>76</sup> Senior management agreed that the world “could not afford to make this mistake again” and that ILO needed to champion a “human-centred recovery” and to ensure decent work was at the centre of policy responses. As one department director said, the view at the time was “if the ILO can't take centre stage now, when can it?”

In this context, the ILO drew on both the knowledge and technical capacity of its policy departments and the frontline understanding of management and staff working in the field to quickly put together a strategy and framework to guide its work in response to the pandemic. This took the form of a policy brief, released in May 2020 – A policy framework for tackling the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Based on international labour standards and aligned with the 2020–21 P&B and the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, this document set out key policy messages around “four pillars”:

<sup>76</sup> ILO, *Global Employment Trends* (Geneva: 2010) p. 9.

- ▶ Pillar 1 – Stimulating the economy and employment

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- ▶ Pillar 2 – Supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes

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- ▶ Pillar 3 – Protecting workers in the workplace; and


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- ▶ Pillar 4 – Relying on social dialogue for solutions.

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In the absence of any policy instrument approved by the GB or the ILC, this initial framework shaped the ILO's response through the earliest stages of the crisis in 2020. It provided a policy basis for determining how country strategies could be adapted or re-prioritised, what global knowledge and capacity development initiatives could be pursued, and how resources could be re-allocated. As one senior manager said:

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 **Global deliverables set under the outputs of the Programme and Budget might have to be re-oriented or de-emphasized to the advantage of others that acquire greater relevance in view of evolving demands and circumstances. Country-specific strategies may also require revision. Adjustments in this respect will need to fit within the four interconnected pillars of the ILO framework for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic as it affects the world of work.**

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Inspiring global action through a true tripartite agreement was the next step. At its 340th Session (October-November 2020), the GB saw the need for a “global response for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is sustainable and resilient”. It asked the Director-General to commence consultations with constituents on the form of such a global response and the process to reach tripartite agreement<sup>77</sup>. Initial consultations identified “building blocks” which were considered by the GB at its 341st Session (March 2021). These included many of the elements of the ILO’s “four pillars” framework but canvassed a broader and more detailed range of potential actions. These could be used as inputs in developing an “outcome document” for consideration at the June 2021 ILC.<sup>78</sup>

Over the following months, there were continuing consultations with constituents on these “building blocks” which culminated in the adoption at the ILC of the *Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient*. Through it, governments and employers’ and workers’ organizations committed to “working individually and collectively and with the support of the ILO for a human-centred recovery”. Like the ILO’s initial framework, the Call to Action had four parts. It listed these as “urgent actions to advance a human-centred recovery” but grouped them differently:

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77 GB.340/HL/PV, para. 78

78 GB.341/INS/4, para. 12

- A. Inclusive economic growth and employment (combining elements of Pillars 1 and 2 related to economic, fiscal and sectoral policies, and employment and enterprise policies and services).
- B. Protection of all workers (aligned with Pillar 3 but highlighting the need to address fundamental rights violations and to execute a transformative agenda for equality, diversity and inclusion).
- C. Universal social protection (included as part of Pillar 2 but given more prominence as a separate action area in the Call to Action).
- D. Social dialogue (aligned with Pillar 4 and emphasizing its importance in shaping recovery plans and action at regional, national, sectoral and local level).

The Call to Action was also more explicit about the leadership and support role envisaged for the ILO in advancing a human-centred recovery. Focusing and accelerating its implementation of the Centenary Declaration, the ILO would “strengthen its support of Member States’ recovery efforts”, “leverage the support of other multilateral organizations”, and contribute the efforts of the UN system in delivering the 2030 Agenda (Para. 12). Specific support measures related to four action areas above were also listed (Paras. 13, 14, 15) and, along with the actions described under the initial four-pillar framework, will be used later to evaluate the ILO’s actual responses.

The nature of the ILO’s response is explored in detail below. The staff survey conducted by the HLE gives an insight into their perceptions of the relevance of actions taken in various policy areas, though it must be noted that, as one respondent commented, “it is difficult to assess what other departments are doing and whether there is really a different approach than before the crisis”. In response to the question “Do you think that the ILO is taking the necessary steps to design and implement recovery actions that are relevant to the needs of constituents?” protection of all workers rated highest (79 per cent “yes”, 7 per cent “no”), followed by universal social protection (77 per cent “yes”, 6 per cent “no”) and economic growth and employment (70 per cent “yes”, 11 per cent “no”). Perception of the ILO sectoral and Just Transition work were less favourable, but around a third of respondents in these two policies areas responded “don’t know” suggesting awareness of the activities in these specialist policy areas was a factor.

The staff survey also gauged perceptions of how well the ILO incorporated some key guiding principles and policy drivers in its work. **Eighty-six per cent said that the ILO’s COVID recovery actions were framed in a way that promoted international labour standards, 84 per cent said it shaped actions through social dialogue and tripartism, 80 per cent said it sought to “leave no one behind” in terms of gender and vulnerable groups, and 67 per cent said it sought to maximize synergies with other development partners.**

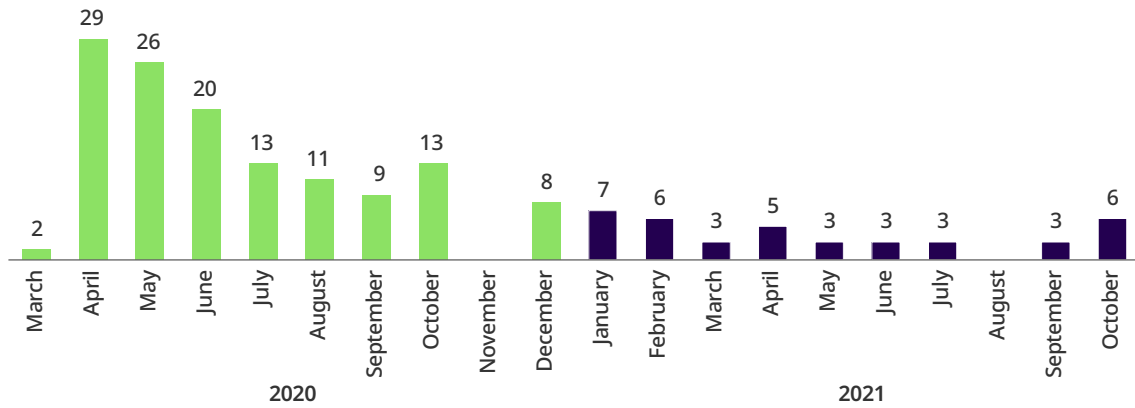
## THE ILO'S IMMEDIATE RESPONSE – IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE AND GUIDING POLICY

### KEY POINTS

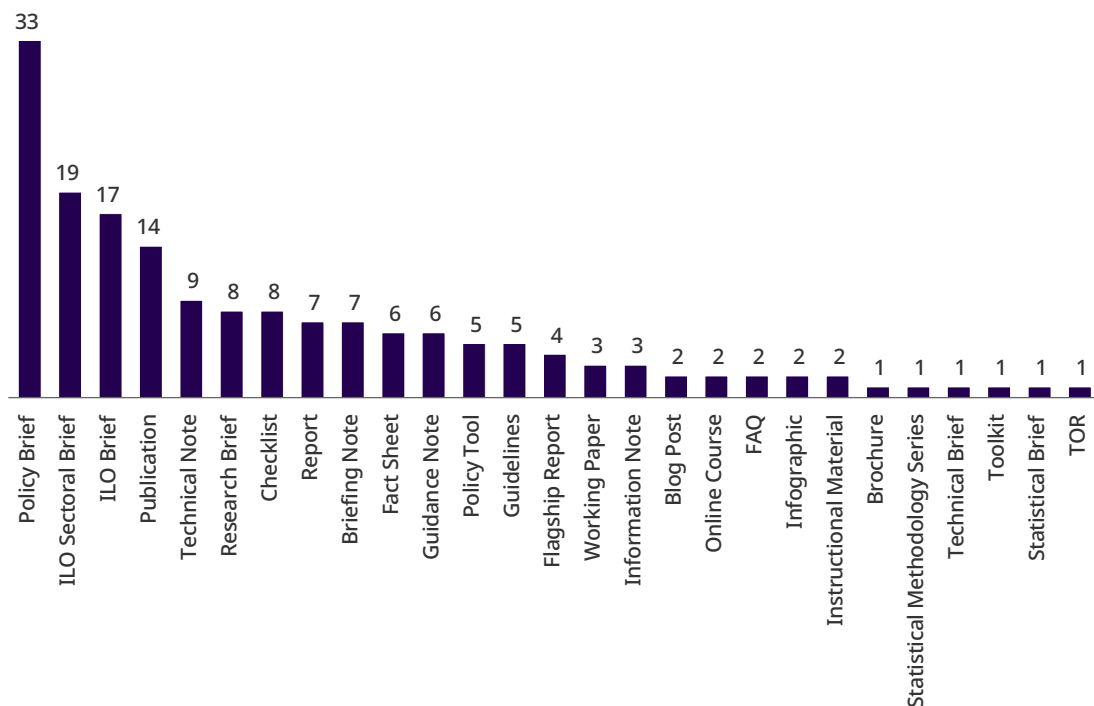
- ▶ The ILO was quick to produce data, statistics and knowledge products to guide its constituents. In the first 18 months of the pandemic, the ILO produced more than 170 COVID-related policy publications.
- ▶ Policy publications aligned with the four-pillar policy framework and, cutting across all pillars, the Office prepared a series of 19 sectoral briefs to assist constituents in assessing the impact of the pandemic in specific sectors and to highlight existing ILO tools and instruments to help sustain enterprises and protect workers.
- ▶ While the relevance of some of the early policy publications was questioned, coordination of knowledge product development subsequently improved, but there were still some inefficiencies and duplications.
- ▶ Production of knowledge products during the crisis highlighted the benefits of improved internal collaborations and coherence – the *ILO Monitor* being the prime example.
- ▶ Much of the knowledge work done by the ILO in the period required a high level of innovation and, given constituent demand, efficiency in delivery.

The ILO responded swiftly to the COVID crisis by providing data, statistics, and knowledge products to guide its constituents. On 18 March 2020, one week after the pandemic was declared, the ILO published the first issue of what was to become a series of nine publications – *ILO Monitor: “COVID-19 and the world of work – impact and policy responses”*. The second issue came out three weeks later to provide information about the impact of the crisis on the reduction of hours worked. On 24 March, ACTRAV released a note showing why the ILO Recommendation No 205 on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience (R205) was an effective instrument for governments, employers and workers organizations to address the COVID-19 pandemic. On 30 March, ACT/EMP published three guides to support employers and business membership organizations in managing the workplace and in assessing the needs of enterprises in the pandemic. April 2020 saw a peak in the number of knowledge products released by the ILO's departments (Figure 13).

Several factors contributed to the prompt development by the ILO of COVID-related knowledge products. Some informants reported that the ILO had learned lessons in the 2008-09 Global Financial Crisis of the need to respond quickly to set the agenda for labour market action in the crisis – as one said, there was a perception that the ILO “missed the boat” in responding to the previous crisis too slowly and narrowly. Informants also referred to the leadership of the ILO's Director General who stressed the importance of developing a clear picture of needs and priorities of member States, and delivering a focused response backed with policy publications that offered practical solutions at a country level.

**FIGURE 13 NUMBER OF COVID-19-RELATED POLICY PUBLICATIONS PRODUCED BY THE ILO PER MONTH**

In 18 months, from March 2020 to October 2021, the ILO produced more than 170 COVID-related policy publications. Knowledge products took primarily the form of policy briefs, sectoral briefs, and other publications conveying data and analysis along with practical recommendations (Figure 14). To ensure visibility and facilitate access to these data and knowledge products, the ILO launched on 1 April 2020 the [COVID-19 Information Hub](#). The Information Hub also summarized country policy responses by governments and social partners in each of the 187 Member States of the ILO. It was updated regularly and served as a knowledge-sharing platform for constituents. By the end of 2020 it was reported to have been visited 162,211 times, with peak traffic of around 4,000 visits per day in early May 2020. A majority of policy publications conveyed concrete guidance and recommendations.

**FIGURE 14: NUMBER OF COVID-19-RELATED POLICY PUBLICATIONS PER TYPE**

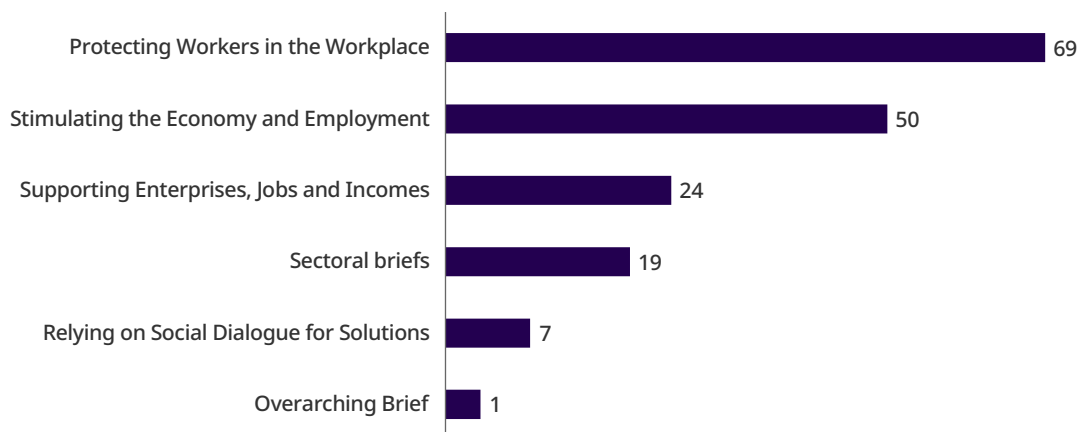
In some cases, the ILO based its knowledge products and policy guides on the researched needs of different audiences. For instance, the Inclusive Labour Markets, Labour Relations and Working Conditions Branch (INWORK) conducted a survey of field colleagues to identify priority needs in supporting constituents – an approach that represented closer and more responsive collaboration between the field and HQ. About 120 people responded, leading to the development of new resources to support emerging needs (for example, health guidelines for street vendors). Similarly, frequent requests from constituents about the application of the international labour standards in the COVID context led NORMES to develop a FAQ that served as a policy guidance tool, covering areas like teleworking that had generated many calls for guidance. Constituents consulted by the evaluation also assessed positively the sectoral briefs produced by SECTOR, praising the fact that they were “prepared with constituents for constituents”.

Knowledge products were also adapted to the emerging needs of target users. The *ILO Monitor* evolved from concentrating on global trends to providing regional data as well as statistics relevant for enterprises. In some cases, national knowledge products were also scaled to the global level. For example, some global tools released by the Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health Branch (LABADMIN/OSH) were based on initiatives developed in the field, like a tool developed for domestic workers in Latin America.

Policy publications aligned with the four-pillar policy framework (see **Para 228**). The highest number of knowledge products addressed issues around the protection of workers in the workplace – reflecting to some extent the urgent need to address this issue in the early stages – followed by stimulating the economy and employment and supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes (Figure 15).

Cutting across all pillars, the Office prepared a series of 19 sectoral briefs to assist constituents in assessing the impact of the pandemic in specific sectors and to highlight existing ILO tools and instruments to help sustain enterprises and protect workers. Sectoral briefs and tools were produced in collaboration with other UN agencies and with sectoral employers’ and workers’ organizations. For example, the ILO actively worked with UN agencies, governments, and social partners in the maritime industry to find solutions to maintaining shipping operations despite severe mobility limitations, and to guarantee seafarers’ rights, in particular access to health care, shore leave and repatriation. The ILO advised constituents and other partners on the implementation of the [Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended](#) in this context, including by publishing an information note on maritime labour issues and COVID-19.

**FIGURE 15: NUMBER OF COVID-19-RELATED POLICY PUBLICATIONS PER PILLAR OF THE ILO’S POLICY FRAMEWORK**



In some cases, evaluation informants expressed reservations about the responsiveness of the ILO and the relevance of some policy publications. Some said the ILO's consultative mechanisms "slowed things down" too much in some cases. In contrast, some also commented that, to speed up delivery, the ILO had been more "top-down" than usual. As for the added value of the knowledge products, several informants, including constituents, questioned the relevance of some of the early policy publications. As one said, "at the start, it was almost a competition on who could produce the most briefs" and "while some papers were good, some were the result of staff at home wanting to make a contribution". Over time more coordination of knowledge product development was introduced through the DDG/POL. The coordination and review process was put in place after a call from the Director-General for prioritization, stronger predictability, coherence, focus and applicability of the knowledge products. As for the coordination part, it involved near daily meetings with DDG/POL and Cabinet which consolidated two lists, one for the COVID-related knowledge products that the departments proposed to develop, and a second list compiling published publications. As for the review part, ACT/EMP and ACT/TRAV were involved in reviewing all papers, prior to DDG/POL and Cabinet. Some informants mentioned the usefulness of the process with many improvements or corrections brought to the papers. Some regretted that this overall coordination and review process was dropped after the peak of the crisis, noting that the Organization was now "blind" again as not knowing what will come up except for the flagship and major publications which are covered by the Publications Board. Coordination between departments improved as a result, but there were some gaps. SECTOR was not directly engaged at first in the policy coordination process, creating some problems, for example, both SECTOR and LABADMIN/OSH found out that they were both working on similar "Safe Return to Work" guides. Furthermore, the evaluation found the coordination and review process HQ centric with the knowledge products produced in the regions largely out of sight. Furthermore, knowledge products developed by ACT/TRAV and ATC/EMP were also not part of this coordination and review process and not integrated into the list consolidated by DDG/POL and Cabinet. This overall situation may have nurtured the perspective the evaluation sometimes encountered of overlaps or inconsistent messages remaining between knowledge products.

Despite such reservations, **staff and constituents had an overall positive perception about the relevance of the ILO's knowledge products.** In particular, the *ILO Monitor* was praised for its timeliness, relevance, and usefulness. For example, during the 340th Session of the GB, a Government representative of the United Kingdom commended the *ILO Monitor*, highlighting the need for a high-level, authoritative, and employment-focused assessment of the impact of the pandemic, and encouraged the Office to continue producing those assessments quarterly. During this event, a worker spokesperson also said to the GB that "the ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work, the ILO Monitor and the COVID-19 Information Hub all highlighted the key role that the ILO had to play at a time when the world of work had been hit extremely hard by the pandemic".<sup>79</sup> The HLE surveys reinforced this positive finding with staff and constituents rating highly the efficiency and speedy development of knowledge products (see Para. 223).

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79 ILO, Minutes of the 340th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. GB.340/PV (2020).



Much of the knowledge work done by the ILO in the period required a high level of innovation and given the substantial demand from constituents, efficiency in delivery. ILO's Statistics Department (ILOSTAT) saw increased requests for technical support for different strategies to enable countries to produce data. Many faced a two month "blackout" period when no data could be collected. Initial interest was around unemployment statistics, but soon there was demand for ILOSTAT support in new areas, such as collecting data on teleworking and working hours for home workers. Reliance on household survey-based data presented challenges during the early days of the crisis. Many countries could only reach telephone users, requiring the ILO to assess ways of recognizing biases in data created by these changes. To capture the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on labour markets more accurately, the ILO needed to innovate and to introduce new methods for generating global estimates. Again, this was done in very quickly – the estimates in the second *ILO Monitor* (issued on 7 April 2020) were based on a new ILO "nowcasting" model, which relied on real-time economic and labour market data to predict the loss in working hours in the second quarter of 2020.

Production of knowledge products during the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the benefits of improved internal collaborations and coherence across ILO departments and between HQ and the field, but it also demonstrated the continuing institutional challenge of sustaining these improvements. Supervised by the Director-General, the *ILO Monitor* was frequently mentioned as having triggered increased collaboration between HQ departments, with EMPLOYMENT engaging, for example, with ENTERPRISE, STATISTICS, and RESEARCH for data and analysis, and driving improved coherence within the organisation. The *ILO Monitor* was not only based on the work of economists and statisticians but also harnessed the knowledge and expertise of policy specialists, bringing together teams of people who were otherwise "often rivals, to produce together the Monitors". The *Monitors* also provided a platform for strengthening collaboration between HQ and field offices. Regional economists in Asia and the Pacific, for example, contributed to the development of the publication. The benefits of such collaborations within HQ and between HQ and the field need to be sustained. As the ILO's Research Department reported:<sup>80</sup>

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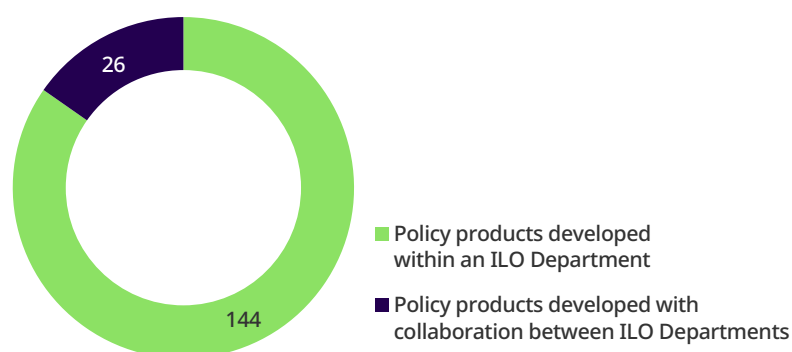
 **Research outcomes have seen the strongest outreach when done through cross-departmental and cross-regional collaboration. The COVID-19 crisis situation fostered successful cross-departmental collaboration resulting in the widely circulated ILO Monitor. Catalysed by senior management such collaborative approach could become the norm for the future to generate authoritative research products that speak directly to the interests of the constituents.**

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<sup>80</sup> ILO, Outcome-based Work planning (OBW). Outcome A: Authoritative knowledge and high-impact partnerships for promoting decent work. Annual progress report, 2020.

While the crisis increased cooperation between departments and the field in the production of knowledge products, resulting in 15 per cent of COVID-related policy publications being developed through a joint effort between several departments (see Figure 16, institutionalization of this approach remains uncertain. As highlighted in a previous evaluation, “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”<sup>81</sup>. Several staff stressed the need for increased coherence within the ILO, reporting that there was room for more cross-departmental teams, more synergy, structured mechanisms to encourage collaboration, and more frequent interactions between policy portfolio directors and Regional Directors. Some also mentioned room for better capitalizing on the Global Technical Teams to facilitate spontaneous horizontal exchanges and mutual support, including when short turnarounds times were needed.

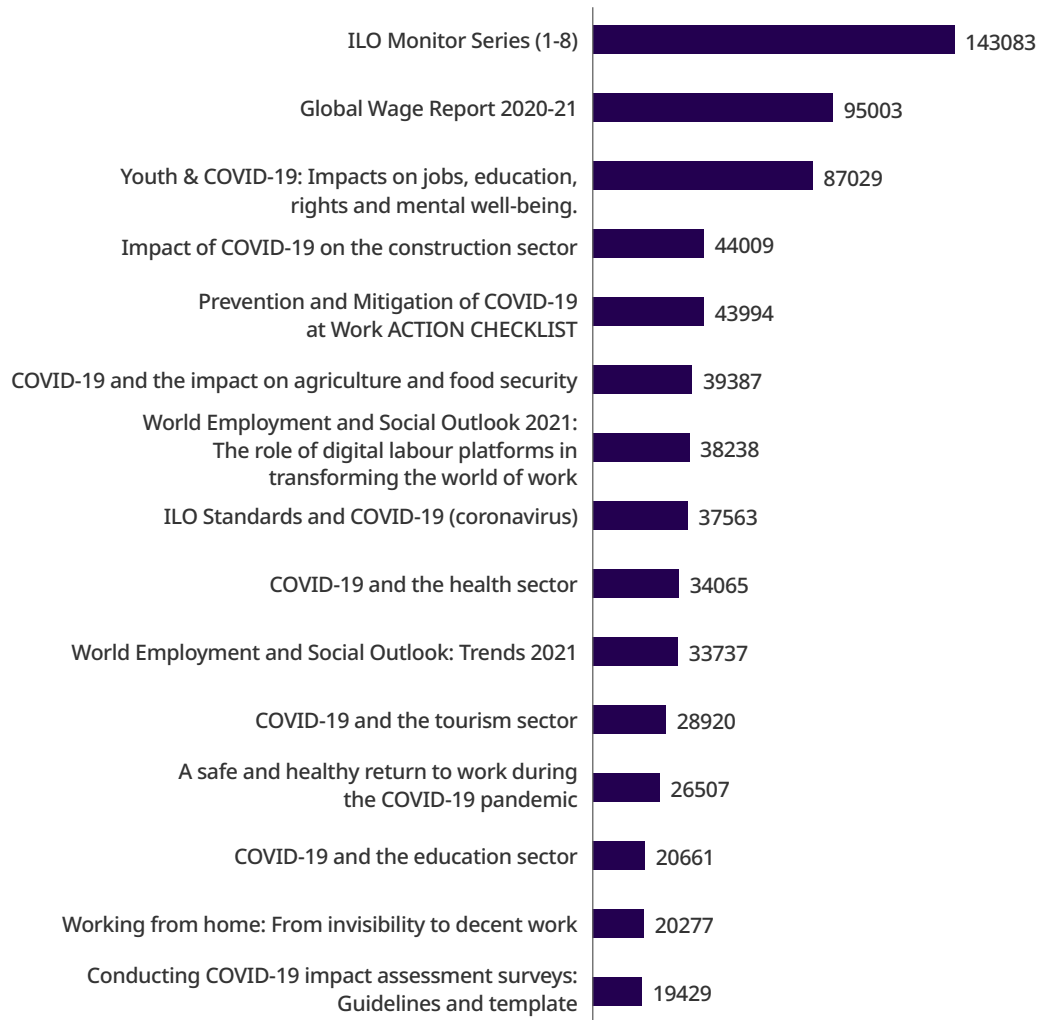
**FIGURE 16: COVID-19-RELATED POLICY PUBLICATIONS BASED ON INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION**



Evaluating the extent to which these knowledge products have reached their target audiences and, more importantly, have been applied is not an exact science but there are some indicators, such as the number of downloads (Figure 17). In general terms, the ILO’s outreach, public engagement, and media coverage grew substantially during the COVID crisis. The audience of most of the ILO’s digital platforms multiplied, especially the ILO Newsroom and new web platforms such as ILO Voices, ILO Talks, Twitter and LinkedIn. Instagram engagement increased by over three times in 2020–21. Data and analysis from knowledge products were disseminated at high-level events. For example, the Director-General cited data from the ILO Monitor at the spring meetings of the World Bank and the IMF on 16–17 April 2020 and at several G20 meetings, such as on 20 April 2020 and during the G20 Leaders’ Summit in Saudi Arabia on 22 November 2020. Evaluation informants reported that the Office achieved its highest ever media coverage during the pandemic. As the synthesis review highlighted, “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”.

81 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 – A synthesis review. Evaluation Office, 2021.

82 Constituents from Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific, found the policy guides and tools prepared by the ILO more useful than constituents from Africa and the Arab States.

**FIGURE 17: NUMBER OF DOWNLOADS OF THE MOST ACCESSED POLICY PUBLICATIONS<sup>82</sup>**

Other evidence found by the evaluation team of the use and uptake of the *ILO Monitor* and, to varying degrees, other COVID-related policy publications included feedback provided at GB meetings;<sup>83</sup> feedback from trade unions on the usefulness of tools and checklists produced by SECTOR and OSH guidance; and a 29 per cent increase in ILO research citations from multilateral organizations.<sup>84</sup> According to Overton,<sup>86</sup> the *ILO Monitor* has been cited more than 600 times in policy documents (Figure 18), primarily by international governmental organizations but also by think tanks and governments (Figure 19). The World Bank is one of the institutions that has cited the *ILO Monitor* the most (Figure 20). This figure can be benchmarked with records on the number of citations of key ILO flagship reports such as the Global Wage report and the Work Employment and Social Outlook, which only in 2019 received 291 and 629 citations, respectively.<sup>87</sup>

83 For example, a Government representative of Barbados, speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) said that GRULAC welcomed the publication of the *ILO Monitor*, which facilitated assessment and guided preparedness; also, a Government representative of Thailand, speaking on behalf of ASEAN, welcomed the *ILO Monitor* and sectoral briefs, pointing out that reliable information was a key factor in COVID-19 response.

84 For example, in the mining sector, global trade union INDUSTRIALL that embraced and applied the checklists; similarly, in Jordan, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania with OSH guidance; in Tunisia, they were reported as an inputs into wider policy initiatives.

85 GB.344/PFA/1(Rev.1)

86 Overton is a private company that monitors references to publications in policy documents. Overton has indexed more than 5.1 million documents from more than 1,500 policy sites that host documents from over 25,000 organizations. <https://www.overton.io/>

87 *ILO, High-level independent evaluation of ILO's research and knowledge management strategies and approaches, 2010–2019.*

FIGURE 18: CITATIONS OF THE ILO MONITOR

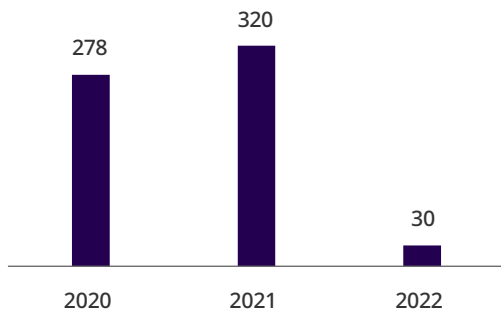


FIGURE 19: CITATIONS BY ORGANIZATION TYPE

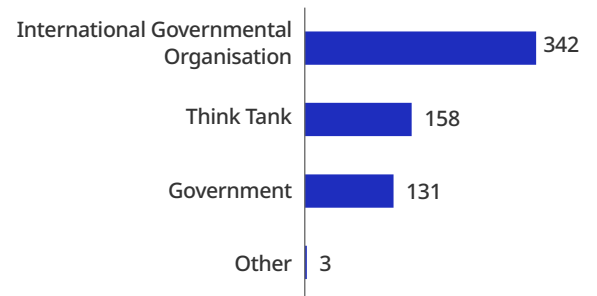
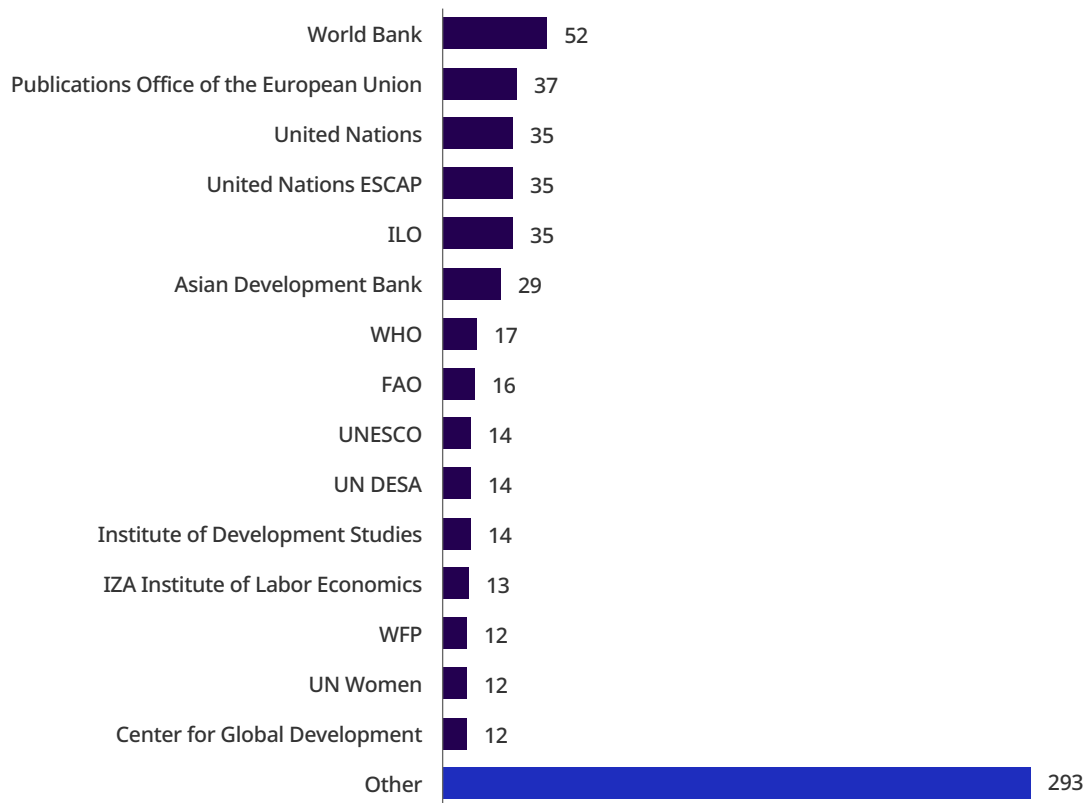


FIGURE 20: ORGANIZATIONS CITING THE ILO MONITOR



## ACTION PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT

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**▶▶ A world of work already in transition, as a result of demographic shifts, technological disruptions and climate change, descended further into disarray as the pandemic continued. Few had anticipated that the pandemic would last this long or cut so deep."**

▶ World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2022

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### KEY POINTS

- ▶ The pandemic had severe effects on jobs, enterprises, and skills that were felt in different ways and to varying degrees around the world. The ILO had to accommodate this diversity while implementing its responses in line with its policy framework and the Call to Action.
- ▶ Rapid assessments of the country-level impact of COVID-19 on the economy and labour market were conducted in more than 47 countries. Results were reported to have influenced National Employment Policies in several countries.
- ▶ A global survey on youth and COVID-19 examined the experience of young people in the pandemic including job loss and decline of working hours, effects on education and training and mental health.
- ▶ A tool was developed and applied in 14 countries to assess reskilling and upskilling needs in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Capacity-building courses for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions were delivered remotely via ITCILO and CINTERFOR.
- ▶ Countering the threat of enterprise failure brought on by the pandemic and its potentially devastating effect on jobs and incomes was quickly seen as a priority. The ILO scanned global best practices in supporting enterprises, distributed weekly updates, produced enterprise support recommendations for policy-makers and constituents as well as knowledge products to directly support enterprises.
- ▶ Enterprises Department's programmes and services all contributed to the ILO response and were quickly adapted or digitalized to ensure their continued delivery; SCORE introduced new COVID-related modules in Business Continuity Planning (BCP) and OSH; value chain analyses were conducted to support recovery; a rapid assessment tool was introduced to measure impacts in the informal economy; COVID-19 resources related to Responsible Business Conduct by Multinational Enterprises were developed; the Green Jobs Programme promoted Green Jobs and Just Transition as part of the recovery; and a new training programme, SURE, was developed in partnership with ACT/EMP to strengthen the resilience of small business in the face of crises.

## Context

The pandemic's effects on labour markets around the world were severe – millions of jobs were lost, enterprises shut down, poverty increased, skills development was disrupted, and decent work gains were reversed. At a global level, the ILO has been a leading institution in analysing and communicating these effects and in highlighting the policy challenges they present both in the immediate crisis response stage and in the long-term recovery. **Table 1** sets out some of the key global effects and trends brought about by the pandemic on labour markets.<sup>88</sup>

At a regional level, the pandemic created new challenges in promoting inclusive economic growth and employment and gave new prominence to existing policy problems:

- ▶ In **Africa**, the pandemic has further highlighted the need for macroeconomic and sectoral policies that can diversify the labour market and employment growth beyond its current reliance on subsistence agriculture and self-employment in the informal economy. As the *World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2022* points out, “even if economic growth picks up, a return to the pre-crisis baseline for Africa’s labour market will not be sufficient to repair the damage caused by the pandemic.”
- ▶ In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, increased “de-formalization” of the labour market flowing from the pandemic is a real risk – support for the creation of more jobs in the formal sector and the formalization of enterprises is needed.
- ▶ In the **Arab States**, labour force participation is expected to surpass pre-crisis levels in 2022 in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries but is expected to remain lower than the already low pre-crisis levels in non-GCC states.
- ▶ In **Asia and the Pacific**, the pandemic labour market effects varied greatly between countries but, as a whole, the equivalent of 130 million full-time jobs were lost in 2020 and more than 2 million people fell below the extreme poverty line. The disruption of the tourism sector was especially felt in the Pacific subregion.
- ▶ The pandemic's effects on labour markets and growth in **Europe and Central Asia** were similarly diverse as are the prospects for recovery. Governments in Northern, Southern and Western Europe mitigated employment losses through retention schemes and labour market recovery in 2021 and 2022 has been strong. In Eastern Europe, a shift to informal work mitigated job losses to some extent, but despite this 2.7 million people either became unemployed or exited the labour force. The labour market situation of young people deteriorated.

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88 ILO, [World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2022](#) (2022).

TABLE 1: LABOUR MARKETS AND THE PANDEMIC – KEY GLOBAL EFFECTS AND TRENDS

Issue	Main global effects and trends
Jobs, incomes, and poverty	8.8 per cent of global working hours were lost in 2020, equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs. <sup>89</sup> 77 million people were pushed into poverty and another 31 million into extreme poverty. <sup>90</sup> Recovery in 2021 was modest in many parts of the world and employment has not returned to pre-pandemic levels <sup>91</sup> though in advanced economies labour markets have tightened with a growing number of jobs available relative to job seekers. <sup>92</sup>
National employment policies	Trend accelerated towards new generation of national employment policies with scope expanding beyond labour market governance to include trade policy, sectoral policy, inclusiveness for women and vulnerable groups, and social protection. Development requires broader input from multiple stakeholders and ministries. Subnational action plans are increasingly being considered as part of these policies. <sup>93</sup>
Active labour market policies (ALMPs) and public employment programmes (PEPs)	Increased use of ALMPs, particularly in advanced economies, including employment subsidies, job-retention schemes, support for workers facing reduced hours of work or temporary unemployment. Public employment services adapted their case management systems, combining ALMPs and social protection policies including cash transfers. <sup>94</sup> In the recovery, PEPs are being used to improve labour market re-integration.
Young people	Youth employment fell by 8.7 per cent in 2020 compared with 3.7 per cent for adults. Many worked in sectors badly affected by the pandemic. The number not in employment, education or training (NEET) has risen, risking long-term exclusion of these young people from the labour market. <sup>95</sup>
Women	The-job loss rate was higher for women than for men in 2020 – 4.2 per cent versus 3.0 per cent. <sup>96</sup> Women were employed in sectors most affected by the pandemic. Many women entrepreneurs struggled to balance the demands of their businesses with care/domestic work.
Informality	Initially, informal employment did not play its usual counter-cyclical role of absorbing displaced formal sector workers and experienced higher job losses. More recently, labour informalization has accelerated, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. <sup>97</sup> Recovery in countries with large informal economies was slower than in advanced economies. <sup>98</sup>
Skills	Early in the pandemic, 90 per cent of training centres and almost all work-based learning stopped due to enterprise closures. <sup>99</sup> This especially affected young people in their transitions from education to the workforce. Remote learning expanded, excluding some vulnerable groups.

89 ILO, "COVID-19 and the world of work", *ILO Monitor* (7th ed.).

90 World Bank and IMF, *COVID-19 recovery must be human centred*, Statement, 9 April 2021.

91 ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2022*.

92 ILO, "Press Release: *Labour market recovery goes into reverse*", 23 May 2022.

93 ILO, *Report V of 110th Session of International Labour Conference. Responding to the crisis and fostering inclusive and sustainable development with a new generation of comprehensive employment policies*, ILC.110/Report V (2022).

94 ILO, "*Delivering income and employment support in times of COVID-19: Integrating cash transfers with active labour market policies*", Policy Brief, June 2020.

95 ILO, "*An update on the youth labour market impact of the COVID-19 crisis*", Statistical Brief, June 2021.

96 ILO, "*An uneven and gender-unequal COVID-19 recovery: Update on gender and employment trends 2021*", Policy Brief, October 2021.

97 Roxana Maurizio, *Technical Note: Employment and informality in Latin America and the Caribbean: An insufficient and unequal recovery*, ILO, September 2021.

98 ILO, *G20 Leaders' Summit: Great divergence threatens economic and employment recovery*, October 2021.

99 ILO, *Skilling, upskilling and reskilling of employees, apprentices and interns during the COVID-19 pandemic: Findings from a global survey of enterprises*, 2021.

Digital transformation of labour markets	Jobs in the platform/gig economy accelerated during the pandemic, both as a job option for those who lost their jobs and a mechanism for enterprise resilience. The ILO faces challenges in balancing the opportunities this growth presents with other decent work goals.
Micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)	MSMEs faced closures, job losses, and reductions in hours worked (larger than those experienced by larger firms). Lack of access to capital and higher debt threaten viability. Capacity for diversification, improved productivity and access to supply chains were weak. MSMEs in the informal sector cannot access government support.
Enabling environment for enterprises	The pandemic exposed weaknesses in the enabling environment for business in many countries including the legal and regulatory framework, financing, measures to facilitate formalization, and support for improved innovation/diversification and resilience to economic shocks/crises. <sup>100</sup>
Multinational enterprises (MNEs) and global supply chains	MNEs and their supply chains were severely affected, foreign direct investment and trade flows collapsed, and decent work deficits in supply chains were exacerbated. <sup>101</sup> More firms may choose to near-shore or re-shore production and to automate it as a hedge against future disruptions. <sup>102</sup>
Social Solidarity Economy	Increased mobilization of SSE organizations and their members including in local crisis response and recovery actions and supply chain stabilization. Membership and turnover of cooperatives historically increase in crises. <sup>103</sup>

## ILO Action

Both the Call to Action and the ILO's four-pillar policy framework defined areas of policy action designed to **minimize the damage** caused by the pandemic on the quantity and quality of jobs and to **promote a broad-based, job-rich recovery** with decent work opportunities for all. These action areas build on the principles and priorities set out in the Centenary Declaration and, therefore, are closely parallel with the outcomes and outputs defined in the 2020–21 P&B.

The following sections describe the ILO's COVID-related actions and results in promoting **economic growth and employment**. They align with key 2020–21 P&B outputs and indicators related to **Outcome 3** (Economic, social and environmental transitions for full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all), **Outcome 4** (Sustainable enterprises as generators of employment and promoters of innovation and decent work) and **Outcome 5** (Skills and lifelong learning to facilitate access to and transitions in the labour market). The evaluation draws on a review of results described on the ILO's Decent Work Results dashboard for country programme outcomes (CPOs) and Global Deliverables,<sup>104</sup> evidence gathered from the case studies, the findings of the synthesis review, and other evidence identified through the literature review and web search.

In terms of the overall staff perception of the effectiveness of work across these diverse policy areas, the HLE survey indicated that 54.5 per cent of staff rated the effectiveness of the ILO's pandemic response work in economic growth and employment (for example, implementing projects and programmes in a manner that brings positive change) as being "satisfactory" or "highly satisfactory" with a further 22.3 rating it as "somewhat satisfactory" – see Para. 457.

<sup>100</sup> ILO, "Enabling environment for sustainable enterprises and the Post-COVID-19 rapid response", Policy Brief, June 2020

<sup>101</sup> ILO, "COVID-19 and multinational enterprises: Impacts on FDI, trade and decent work in Asia and the Pacific", ILO Brief, 8 April 2021.

<sup>102</sup> ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2022*.

<sup>103</sup> ILO, "News: Cooperatives and wider SSE enterprises respond to COVID-19 disruptions, and government measures are being put in place", 24 April 2020.

<sup>104</sup> As mentioned earlier, there were some limitations in the ability of the ILO's reporting systems to capture a detailed picture of all aspects of the Organization's response. To some extent, relevant results had to be inferred from the detailed descriptions on the dashboard.



## Integrated national employment policies

The ILO recognizes the importance of national employment policies (NEPs) as a means of generating full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work. The P&B promotes the pursuit of “a new generation of gender-responsive national employment policies, including for youth” (Output 3.1, Indicator 3.1.1). These integrate a wide range of national policy settings including macroeconomic, industrial, environmental, trade and public and private investment policies with traditional employment policy concerns relating to employment conditions, wages policy, labour market policies and services.<sup>105</sup> Recent ILO work on the UN Secretary-General’s Global Accelerator initiative has also more closely linked NEPs with social protection systems with the aim of accelerating the recovery and bolstering resilience against future shocks.<sup>106</sup>

In the context of the response to COVID-19, “integrated national employment policy responses” were promoted in the Call to Action (Para. 11.A.a) and play a key role in driving a human-centred recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. The ILO works to increase the development of NEPs by providing research, technical guidance and support to constituents. The pandemic has introduced new labour market challenges that need to be navigated through this work. A specific policy brief on the place of NEPs in the COVID recovery was published in September 2020<sup>107</sup> and many of the other policy briefs and guides produced by the ILO in response to COVID-19 were also potentially relevant to NEP development, though their actual application is hard to measure.

One ILO knowledge product that was widely applied and reported to have influenced employment policy development in the context of the pandemic was the guidelines on **Rapid Diagnostics for Assessing the Country Level Impact of COVID-19 on the Economy and Labour Market**.<sup>108</sup> Developed by the ILO’s Employment, Labour Markets and Youth Branch (EMPLAB) and released in May 2020, this practical tool/methodology assisted the tripartite constituents to generate immediate, real-time information on the employment impacts of the pandemic (**Box 2**). Using these guidelines, **rapid assessments were conducted with strong tripartite engagement in 47 countries**, sometimes in cooperation with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or regional financial institutions such as the Asian Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Inter-American Development Bank.<sup>109</sup> As evidence of effectiveness, the information generated by these assessments was reported to have been applied in the development of NEPs. Of the 16 country programme results reported for 2020–21 under the relevant P&B Indicator 3.1.1,<sup>110</sup> **10 programmes described how progress in developing national employment policies had been advanced** using the rapid diagnostic tool.<sup>111</sup> In the Western Balkans case study, a Ministry of Labour representative in **North Macedonia** told the HLE that:

105 The most recent report of the ILC’s Recurrent Discussion Committee: Employment (June 2022) lists 24 elements of “coherent, comprehensive and integrated employment policy frameworks”, ILC,110/Record No.6A (2022).

106 ILO and WHO, Concept note on the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transition. Draft for consultation (Geneva: March 2022).

107 ILO, “[National employment policies for an inclusive job-rich recovery from the COVID-19 crisis](#)”, Policy Brief, September 2020.


108 ILO, “[Rapid diagnostics for assessing the country level impact of COVID-19 on the economy and labour market – guidelines](#)”, Technical Brief, 2020.

109 ILO, [Report of the Director-General. Sixth Supplementary Report: The response of the International Labour Office to the COVID-19 pandemic](#), GB.340/INS/18/6 (2020). Note that, for the majority of these rapid assessments, ILO-sourced funds were not required. The cited GB document said that assessments were done in “more than 47 countries”, suggesting that other countries had adopted the methodology, perhaps without ILO involvement.

110 3.1.1: Number of Member States with new generation of **national employment policies** addressing country-specific future of work challenges

111 Bosnia-Herzegovina (BIH128), Burkino Faso (BFA105), Gabon (GAB101), Guatemala (GTM127), Mozambique (MOZ101), North Macedonia (MKD130), Palestinian Occupied Territory (PSE126), Philippines (PHL102), Samoa (WSM902), and Serbia (SRB130)

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 **The ILO/EBRD analysis was pivotal for creating policy response. We could not implement specific measures without that analysis. The analysis had it all: the impact on workers and employers; vulnerable groups of workers; those in standard and non-standard forms of employment; the ones with contracts and in the grey economy. We also made analysis of the legal aspects of response to COVID.**

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In **Serbia**, the HLE learned that the assessment was less enthusiastically embraced by constituents. First, Serbia had to wait for the assessment to be made and needed it sooner. As one told the HLE: “The ILO is very slow. From the moment of the outbreak of COVID to the moment when the first survey was organized, a lot of time had passed.” When released, the report was highly visible, but the Fiscal Council of Serbia disagreed with some of the expert findings. Policy recommendations were discussed, but a key proposal for the Government to provide more targeted support, instead of giving small sums to everyone, was not adopted.

National employment policy results were also reported to have been linked to other ILO COVID-19 initiatives in some countries. These included assistance in designing a **simulation model to measure pandemic impacts** on the labour market (Gabon, GAB101), support in developing a **strategy to address COVID-19 job losses and labour migration issues** (Nepal, NPL126), and two COVID-19 employment recovery strategies which followed the **ILO’s four-pillar policy framework** (Paraguay, PRY128 and the Philippines, PHL102). Policy advocacy in the case study country, **Argentina**, included work with the new Economic and Social Council (CES), supporting its institutionalization, establishment of working groups (for example, on future of work), and the development of policy proposals and strategies (for example, for the formalization of domestic work).

Reported COVID-19-related results for global deliverables in support of NEPs (Output 3.1) included the rapid assessment tool described above as well as a long list of papers and policy briefs (see **Annex G: ILO COVID-19 policy publications**) and other initiatives intended to share knowledge and build capacity in NEP development including webinars and seminars<sup>112</sup>, an employment policy research symposium held in November 2021<sup>113</sup>, new training courses delivered through ITCILO<sup>114</sup>, and presentations to the G20 Framework Working Group on the employment impact of COVID-19 and jobs in the digital economy (used as inputs to the “G20 Menu of Policy Options for Digital Transformation and Productivity Recovery”).

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112 For example: Institute of Labor Economics and ILO, [“Taking stock of the COVID-19 crisis: the impact on the labour market and how countries have responded”](#) [webinar], 2021.

113 ILO, [“Employment policies for a job-rich recovery and a better future of work”](#) 4th Employment Policy Research Symposium, 15–16 November 2021.

114 For example, ITCILO, [“Macroeconomic and sectoral policies for a sustained job recovery”](#) [online course], April–June 2021.

## Youth employment strategies

▶▶ **Recycling youth employment policies and interventions that may not have worked pre-pandemic will definitely not work in the post COVID-19 era. There is therefore a need to learn from experience and explore alternative ways to address the ever-increasing youth employment challenge.”**

▶ Barford, Coutts and Sahai, *Youth Employment in Times of COVID*, ILO, 2021.

As indicated in **Table 1**, the already difficult labour market situation of young people was made significantly worse by the pandemic and there is growing concern about the long-term exclusionary effects of the crisis on this group. As was the case in other policy areas, the ILO's initial response focused on **research to better understand** the nature of the problems faced and the **development of policy briefs and tools**. To develop **constituent capacity**, online courses were delivered by ITCILO on the promotion of youth employment in the context of COVID-19. The NEPs described above were often focused on youth, but some countries also developed or adapted specific **youth employment strategies** with ILO support. Existing **development cooperation projects** also often needed to be re-purposed, sometimes struggling to achieve planned employment outcomes due to the COVID-induced deterioration of labour markets.<sup>115</sup>

**A global survey on youth and COVID-19**,<sup>116</sup> conducted in partnership with the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth and generating over 12,500 responses from 112 countries, looked closely at the experience of young people early in the pandemic including job loss and decline of working hours, effects on education and training, and mental health. The survey complemented data collected via the rapid assessment tool which paid specific attention to youth labour markets at the country level. Regular youth labour market updates were also published.<sup>117</sup> Regional reports on youth employment were also published, for example, a joint [ILO-Asian Development Bank report](#) issued in August 2020.

The P&B includes “national strategies for youth employment” as an indicator (3.1.2<sup>118</sup>) under NEPs while the Call to Action includes as an area of action “decent work for young people, to maximize their potential as a source of dynamism, talent, creativity and innovation in the world of work” (Para.A.g). Nine of the 12 reported results against this P&B indicator described a link to COVID-19 responses including new or updated youth employment strategies and objectives that were part of national pandemic response plans and NEPs (**Chad, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Palestinian Occupied Territory, Philippines**), updated Youth Employment Action Plans (**Nigeria**), a programme document for youth job creation (**Democratic Republic of Congo**), and a review of strategic employment objectives (**Uzbekistan**).

115 ILO. 2021. *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*. Evaluation Office. Geneva. P.6

116 ILO, [Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being](#) (Geneva: 2020).

117 ILO, “[An update on the youth labour market impact of the COVID-19 crisis](#)”, *Policy Brief*, 2021.

118 Other ILO results also related to its COVID-19-related work to support youth including employment services (Output 3.5, Indicator 3.5.1), skills and lifelong learning (Outcome 5), and the creation, preservation and formalization of enterprises (Outcome 4).

In the context of the EU's strengthening and expanding its **Youth Guarantee**<sup>119</sup> in response to the pandemic, the ILO has also recently started working with the EU and constituents in the **Western Balkans** to provide policy, programming and monitoring support for its introduction in this region. This approach offers all young people under 30 quality employment, education or training within four months of becoming unemployed. Constituents in **North Macedonia** indicated that ILO support was instrumental in establishing the programme which the Ministry of Labour said had created 6,700 jobs for youth.

### ► **Box 2: Rapid diagnostics for assessing the country-level impact of COVID-19**

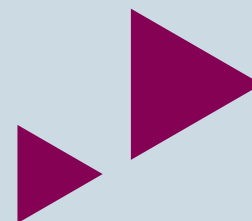
To help countries undertake immediate, real-time support in assessing the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and related policy responses, the ILO has developed guidelines for the conduct of rapid diagnostics. By completing such assessments, countries would be equipped with data to help them assess the impact of the crisis on employment in general and for specific sectors and groups including women, migrant workers and refugees, and young people. This would inform their policy responses, including by identifying any policy gaps.

The diagnostics have four components:

- Overview of socio-economic situation (for example, economic, demographic, labour market and health effects).
- Labour market transmission mechanisms (for example, impact of containment measures, effects on trade, sectoral impact including by firm size and formality, effects on prices).
- Identifying workers at risk (including by working status, location, age, gender, disability, HIV, indigenous and tribal peoples).
- Policy responses and gaps (for example, stimulus packages, sectoral support, enterprise and worker support, active labour market programmes (ALMPs) and public employment programmes, coverage and capacity gaps).

The model includes a step-by-step process for implementation.

As an example, from one of the HLE's case study countries, South Africa, conducted a Rapid Assessment and published its findings in August 2020.<sup>120</sup> It assessed the immediate impact of three possible contractions in final demand on employment by industry, gender, skill level, formality and wage-earning level. Following the ILO's four-pillar policy framework, the assessment set out detailed policy options (including resource estimates) for the Government of South Africa to consider, recommending that "swift and expansive action is required in a manner that does not hamper administration but also targets the sectors and demographics identified here as most at risk". It also warned that the labour market, already characterized by high unemployment, could be set back "by at least a decade" by the crisis.



119 European Commission, "[Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion – the reinforced Youth Guarantee](#)".

120 Gilad Issacs, Josh Rosenberg and Patienne Passoni, [Rapid Country Assessment: South Africa. The impacts from a COVID-19 shock to South Africa's economy and labour market](#) (Geneva: ILO; 2020).

## Employment Intensive Investment/Public Employment Programmes and COVID-19

Employment Intensive Investment (EII) projects are a form of Public Employment Programme (PEP) that provide employment for workers who are unable to support themselves due to a shortage of market-based employment opportunities. Publicly financed and implemented by government or with the support of donor agencies, they can generate employment through infrastructure development, natural resource management and environmental rehabilitation, building social assets (such as water facilities) and through services for improving health care, education and sanitation. They have long been a tool used by the ILO to support the incomes and livelihoods of vulnerable rural populations in response to crises, including natural disasters and conflicts. The Call to Action highlights EII projects as an area in which ILO should increase its support (Para.13.a.i). In the P&B, EII was reported mainly against Indicator 3.2.1 (“decent work measures in rural areas”) and Indicator 3.4.1 (“peace and resilience programmes”). As one ILO informant explained, “Wherever there is vulnerability in employment, we have a role to play.”

The ILO's COVID-19 initial response in this area again included the development and distribution of **knowledge products**, in this case to support constituents to consider PEPs as a COVID policy response. Examples include: a **policy brief**<sup>121</sup> and a **promotional brochure**<sup>122</sup> on PEPs as a policy response to the crisis (including their role in supporting vulnerable groups, keeping the unemployed engaged with the labour market, addressing decent work deficits, and acting as an instrument for social protection); a **compendium of examples** of PEPs introduced in response to COVID-19 in 13 countries;<sup>123</sup> and a **technical note** on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions in response to COVID-19 in the context of EII projects.<sup>124</sup> **Guidance on adjusting labour practices** in response to COVID-10 were updated within a month of the pandemic being declared.<sup>125</sup> To complement these written resources, constituent capacity development included an online course delivered through ITCILO on designing PEPs for a sustainable recovery<sup>126</sup> and a **two-day webinar** on “Public Works and Public Employment Programmes: What role in socioeconomic recovery?”<sup>127</sup>

In terms of the effectiveness of these efforts in influencing policy, DEVINVEST staff indicated that there was a “clear appetite” for the guidance on adjusting labour practices and its timely provision was welcomed by constituents and applied, for example, in South Africa, ILO guidelines on COVID-19 prevention were mainstreamed into all public works programmes nationwide.<sup>128</sup> They acknowledged that the application of policy papers is hard to track: “We know we contributed in **South Africa, Tanzania, Jordan and Kenya**, and that **Tunisia** used some as inputs into wider policy initiatives. We know that countries have set up PEPs in line with our recommendations, but it is hard to directly attribute.”

Once the pandemic hit, the ILO's existing portfolio of EEI **development cooperation projects** all needed to be adjusted in response to lockdowns and to ensure participants remained safe and healthy.<sup>129</sup> Some, like a Japan-funded project in the **Philippines** (PHL/18/04/JPN) pivoted to provide more than 2,000 short-term jobs under the Community Emergency Employment Programme to support those who have been affected by COVID-19. In **Uzbekistan**, as a COVID-19 response, the ILO

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121 ILO, “[The role of public employment programmes and employment guarantee schemes in COVID-19 policy responses](#)”, Policy Brief, May 2020.

122 ILO, Public Employment Programmes (PEPs): Creating decent jobs through national investments, 2020.

123 Nikos Avgeris and Maikel Lieuw-Kie-Song, [Public Employment Initiatives and the COVID-19 crisis: A compendium of infrastructure stimulus, Public Employment Programs \(PEPs\) public works programs case studies](#) (Geneva: ILO EII; 2021).

124 ILO, “[Technical note on water, sanitation and health \(WASH\) interventions in response to COVID-19](#)”, EIIIP Guidance, 14 May 2020.

125 ILO, “[Adjusting labour practices in employment intensive works in response to COVID-19](#)”, EIIIP Guidance, 12 April 2020.

126 ITCILO, “[Training course: Designing Public Employment Programmes for a sustainable recovery](#)” [online training course], September–November 2021.

127 ILO, “[Public Works and Public Employment Programmes: What role in socioeconomic recovery?](#)” [webinar], October 2021.

128 Reported against CPO ZAF103.

129 For example, new COVID-19 OSH arrangements were mentioned in reported CPO results in Cameroon (CMR111), Jordan (JOR109), Mozambique (MOZ101), Sao Tome and Principe (STP803).

130 Reported against CPO UZB126.

was asked to carry out assessments aimed at increasing the capacity of the government-funded Public Works Programme. These led to the programme doubling the numbers employed to around 500,000 jobs (including 270,000 for women).<sup>130</sup> A new RBSA-funded project (UZB/22/02/RBS) builds on this work to develop innovative ALMPs for the post-crisis recovery.

DEVINVEST staff at HQ reported that there were also **new EII projects** introduced in the Asia-Pacific region as specific responses to COVID including:

- ▶ **Myanmar:** To mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and armed conflict on remittance dependent communities, an EII project funded by New Zealand (MMR/20/02/NZL) created employment opportunities in rural infrastructure improvement.
- ▶ **Nepal:** In response to lost household income caused by COVID-19, an EII project funded through the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (NPL/20/51/UND) created employment in rural road maintenance works in two provinces.
- ▶ **Timor Leste:** To support COVID-19 recovery through RBSA funds, an EII project created employment for the rural poor in roads maintenance (involving constituents in design, implementation and monitoring). This built on previous programmes in this field in the country.

The synthesis review covered only one EII project, an initiative in Jordan (JOR/18/05/DEU) which began prior to the pandemic. The evaluation indicated that the overall job creation results of the project were adversely affected by lockdowns, restrictions and worker absences, but noted that these can be expected to be better in projects operating in the recovery phase. It also noted that concerns expressed about the short-term nature of the jobs created may be lessened in post-COVID-19 projects where such jobs can serve as a bridge to new opportunities that arise as part of economic recovery (pp. 19–20). Later development project evaluations covered two initiatives in which EII strategies were implemented as a recovery response to COVID-19. In Mozambique, public works trained 357 unemployed informal workers in labour-based construction techniques. Until 2021, 18,300 person-days of employment community were contracted, through agreements with municipalities, to perform rehabilitation works in peri-urban markets. In the Philippines, a Community Emergency Employment Programme (CEEP) on the construction sector was an approach primarily to target informal workers mostly economically vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19. The CEEP was repurposed from an original plan to fund works on the islands. Jobs provided through CEEP were green works in nature which, aligned to relevant government and ILO strategies, also contributed to greener communities and resilience to future impacts of climate change.

In the case study countries, **Iraq's** "Employment Intensive Investment Programme through Conservation of Cultural Heritage"<sup>131</sup> project with UNESCO, while not conceived as a COVID response, is being implemented in Erbil in a way designed to boost employment and income during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. Rather than a simple "cash for work" approach, the HLE learned that more sustainable jobs were being sought by engaging specialized private sector companies with the potential to transition participants into continuing formal employment. In **South Africa**, the ILO provided guidance to support the continued safe operation of the government's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), a key part of President's Economic Stimulus and Recovery Plan.

Given the loss of jobs globally, HQ staff said that they had anticipated that they would have been more successful in mobilizing resources for EII projects, but apart from these new projects – all in Asia – this did not happen. Higher income countries used their own resources, but lower income countries generally did not attract donor funds for EII. Given the difficulties created by lockdowns and the need for a rapid response, HQ staff said that unconditional cash transfers may have been favoured instead with the ILO itself involved in some cash transfer projects during the pandemic

(see **Para. 387**). As there is no ILO corporate policy framework on emergency cash transfers (including how such measures should relate to EII projects or “cash for work” measures), the ILO needs to clarify its position on their use.

### Public Employment Services and Active Labour Market Programmes

In many countries, Public Employment Services (PES) and the Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) play a key role in governments’ policy response to the pandemic. In the initial phase, this support included **income supplementation for jobseekers** and workers (in some cases expanding such support to informal workers), **wage subsidies** for employers (to prevent retrenchments), and recruitment and training initiatives in support of **essential services**. In the recovery phase, PES facilitated **employment creation programmes** and other ALMPs, **re-hiring subsidies**, **self-employment initiatives** and **skills programmes**. The Call to Action recognized the importance of this and urged action to “strengthen national employment services...to mitigate crisis-induced economic and labour market disruption” (Para 11.A.f) and ALMPs (Para 13.a.i). In the P&B, related results were reported against indicator 3.5.1 (“member States with strengthened employment services”).

Nine of the 21 results reported against P&B indicators on strengthened employment services were flagged as relating to country COVID responses though this may have understated the relevant work done. Results included support to strengthen PES labour market analysis capability to develop programmes to support recovery (**Cameroon, Cuba and Mexico**<sup>132</sup>), to digitize PES services in the context of COVID (**Montenegro, Namibia**), to design wage subsidy programmes (**Namibia, Paraguay**), to extend employment services to informal businesses and workers (**Turkey**), and to improve employment services for youth and/or women (**Russian Federation, El Salvador, Thailand**). PES capacity to scale up PEPs was also reported (**Uzbekistan**).

Relevant knowledge products included an August 2020 Policy Brief, COVID-19: Public employment services and labour market policy responses<sup>133</sup> and, as a guide for important PES reforms in the recovery phase, a global report on technology adoption in PES<sup>134</sup> that was based on a global survey conducted in 2021.

An example from the case study countries is in **Montenegro**, where the project “Activate Women – Increased capacities for labour market inclusion of disadvantaged women as a COVID-19 response measure” promoted the participation of women in the labour market by supporting those with pre-school age children who were previously employed but who lost their job due to COVID-19 and remain inactive due to lack of access to childcare. The project provides a range of employment services, such as career guidance and job placement support, an unemployment allowance, a lump sum contribution to child-care costs, and subsidized on-the-job training to increase employability. A separate but complementary project, also with the EU, supports the country’s capacity to administer ALMPs through the digitalization of Montenegro’s PES.

**Skills** systems around the world were greatly disrupted by the pandemic while also having new demands placed on them that flowed directly from its effects. Skills development for young people making the transition from school to work was especially disrupted. The Call to Action committed the ILO to support Member States to “promote skills development opportunities that are responsive to labour market needs and support effective transitions for young people” (13.a.vi).

Priorities for ILO action included supporting systems to reskill and upskill workers in sectors hard-hit by the pandemic, facilitating the design and delivery of online and distance programmes due to the closure of schools, training institutions and workplaces, and the development of skills recognition systems, especially for returning migrants. To help shape action, early in the pandemic, the ILO conducted surveys to better understand the impact of the crisis on skills systems. These


included a global survey jointly launched by 10 international and regional development partners on the **impact of COVID-19 on staff development and training including apprenticeships and internships/traineeships**,<sup>135</sup> and a joint survey with UNESCO and the World Bank on **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Skills Development during the time of COVID-19**.<sup>136</sup>

A tool was developed and applied in 14 countries – Guidelines on Rapid Assessments of reskilling and upskilling needs in response to the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>137</sup> These informed ALMP design (for example, in Cambodia) and national and regional skills strategies designed to take advantage of opportunities in sectors with strong labour demand, for example, in the African Union Commission's Skills Initiative for Africa<sup>138</sup> (SIFA), the findings were subsequently supported by the donor, GIZ, which funded the retraining. In Latin America, ILO/CINTERFOR was a leader in researching and promoting role of vocational training in confronting the effects of COVID-19<sup>139</sup> and in supporting TVET institutions to adapt to the crisis (see **Box 3**).

In addition to developing numerous policy guides and papers on the **digitalization of skills systems**,<sup>140</sup> capacity building courses for teachers and trainers were delivered in partnership with ITCILO – for example, more than 400 teachers and trainers from Africa, the Americas, and Asia and the Pacific improved their capacities on digital transition of training programmes through an E-Learning Lab on Digital TVET. The Government of **Senegal** engaged the ILO to support more broadly the digitalization of its education and training systems with the ILO delivering capacity building to teachers and trainers on how to organize and run online programmes. In **Cambodia**, the ILO supported constituents and TVET institutions in digital transformation. In **Ukraine**, to maintain the continuity of vocational education during the pandemic through e-learning and blended learning, the ILO's E-TVET project (UKR/20/01/RBS) supported 708 TVET schools, 35,000 teachers and 139,800 students.

Supporting constituents in the digitalization of skills systems is clearly an important ongoing area of work for the ILO and the ILO's Skills and Lifelong Learning branch has institutionalized it in its operations by recruiting a specialist in this field. The ILO has also established a **Community of Practice on digitalization of TVET**. While this approach offers huge potential benefits in terms of scale, SKILLS staff also cautioned that there were potentially many people who stand to miss out on these benefits and that a blended approach will be needed:

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 **The crisis has led to two worlds – one that can telework and one that can't – and this is also reflected in the work of SKILLS. Hundreds of millions lack access to education and training because they have no access to the technology. How many agricultural workers in Africa can benefit from webinars? Are we just pretending to be reaching some people?"**

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133 [https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/areas/covid/WCMS\\_753404/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/areas/covid/WCMS_753404/lang--en/index.htm)

134 [https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS\\_840767/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/pubs/WCMS_840767/lang--en/index.htm)

135 [https://www.ilo.org/skills/Whatsnew/WCMS\\_743243/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/skills/Whatsnew/WCMS_743243/lang--en/index.htm)

136 [https://www.ilo.org/skills/Whatsnew/WCMS\\_742817/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/skills/Whatsnew/WCMS_742817/lang--en/index.htm)

137 [https://www.ilo.org/skills/areas/skills-training-for-poverty-reduction/WCMS\\_752822/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/skills/areas/skills-training-for-poverty-reduction/WCMS_752822/lang--en/index.htm)

138 <https://skillsafrica.org/>

139 <https://www.oitcinterfor.org/en/node/7765>

140 [https://www.ilo.org/skills/areas/skills-policies-and-systems/WCMS\\_822790/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/skills/areas/skills-policies-and-systems/WCMS_822790/lang--en/index.htm)




Work-based learning through apprenticeships was impacted by lockdowns and, in July 2020, the ILO ran, in conjunction with ITCILO, a **Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Quality Apprenticeships** which was designed to support policy-makers and practitioners in the design and implementation of quality apprenticeships to address the challenges posed by COVID-19. This attracted 1,300 participants.

The ILO also developed innovative approaches to skills recognition to facilitate job placement of people affected by the pandemic. In a project in **Sri Lanka** (LKA/20/02/RBS), for example, ILO supports recognition of prior learning (**RPL**) through assessment and documentation of skills through the "Skills Passport" programme and offers apprenticeship-based training for returnees, blocked and aspirant migrant workers, especially women migrant workers. In **Cambodia**, the ILO supported an "e-RPL" process that facilitated the redeployment of retrenched tourism and hospitality workers by recognising skills transferrable to jobs in demand. An online platform to enable the recognition of skills of returning migrants in **Bangladesh** was also established. In March 2022, a MOOC on RPL was run for constituents to share these and other innovations in RPL for which there were 2,400 registrations.

The vastly expanded participation in ILO Skills activities and capacity building is an important development and has the potential to increase the scale and impact of the ILO's work. It also makes it even more important for the ILO to find ways to better demonstrate the outcomes of this work in terms of ultimate beneficiaries. Training thousands more people via MOOCs is an impressive and easily measured output of the ILO's work. Systematically assessing the application of learning by constituents and its impact on people is harder. ITCILO indicated that it is working towards a system, based on Quality Assurance principles, to evaluate results of its capacity building over a much longer term. The ILO needs to embrace such an approach more broadly. As one informant said:

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 **We issue policy guides and manuals and run webinars but we need to go the extra mile and find out how they were applied. There's a fear about this in the ILO."**

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141 [https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS\\_815248/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_815248/lang--en/index.htm)

142 [https://www.ilo.org/budapest/what-we-do/projects/WCMS\\_753153/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/budapest/what-we-do/projects/WCMS_753153/lang--en/index.htm)

### ▶ Box 3: Case study – CINTERFOR

CINTERFOR is an arm of the ILO that works to develop vocational training at all levels. It coordinates a network of 66 entities in 28 countries mainly in Latin America, including TVET institutions, Ministries of Labour and Education and social partners. Its work includes capacity building and technical assistance for these entities, applied research on current priority issues, and incubating innovations in training and cooperation.

At the beginning of the pandemic, TVET institutions were at different stages of readiness for remote delivery – some already had experience and the challenge for them was to expand this while others had no experience at all. The challenges they faced included how to use technology, how to maintain contact with students, how to ensure equitable access for those who lacked connectivity and physical devices, and what content to use (for example, whether to buy it or develop it).

CINTERFOR acted quickly when the pandemic struck. In March 2020, CINTERFOR convened a videoconference with the leadership of the institutions to exchange information on the status of the situation in each country and institution and on their early responses. It also launched a survey of institutions to document and share their practices which led to the creation of the regional observatory "COVID 19: the response of the vocational training institutions", as a tool to share strategies, actions and resources.

Over the longer term, CINTERFOR realigned its capacity development services to meet the needs of its members, including through virtual courses and events, technical assistance, generation of spaces for cooperation, and producing new knowledge products. Examples include:

- ▶ Virtual courses on quality apprenticeships, National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), OSH in vocational training, and how to evaluate and certify virtual training. Virtual delivery enabled significant expansion in the numbers trained compared with face-to-face training (46 per virtual course on average compared with 15–20 face-to-face) as well as countries represented. In all, 690 people were trained in 2020–21 with 57 per cent being women.
- ▶ A total of 34 free and open virtual events were held, in which approximately 7,700 people participated. Topics related to both the immediate response to the crisis and the challenges of post-COVID recovery.
- ▶ Technical assistance, provided remotely, including NQF design (Panama), employability skills strategies (Nicaragua), and evaluating knowledge remotely.
- ▶ Approximately 40 events for the exchange of good practices and experiences were carried out, reaching more than 8,500 people from management, technical and teaching teams of the institutions.
- ▶ Support for six "Collaborative Innovation Projects", focused on developing products and solutions for shared use by institutions.
- ▶ A range of knowledge products linked to TVET in the context of the pandemic including, for example: The new normal and vocational education – the experience of four training institutions;<sup>143</sup> pre-apprenticeship programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean during and after the COVID-19 crisis;<sup>144</sup> the role of vocational training in the face of the effects of COVID-19 in Latin America;<sup>145</sup> and expanding the virtual world in vocational training – the potential of blockchain technology in skills certification.<sup>146</sup>

143 <https://www.oitcinterfor.org/nueva-normalidad-formaci%C3%B3n-profesional-aportes-experiencia-cuatro-instituciones-formaci%C3%B3n-0>

144 [https://www.oitcinterfor.org/publicaciones/cinterfor/PPA\\_ALC](https://www.oitcinterfor.org/publicaciones/cinterfor/PPA_ALC)

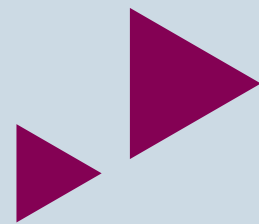
145 [https://www.oitcinterfor.org/publicaciones/oitcinterfor/FP\\_covid](https://www.oitcinterfor.org/publicaciones/oitcinterfor/FP_covid)

146 [https://www.oitcinterfor.org/publicaciones/notas/Blockchain\\_FP](https://www.oitcinterfor.org/publicaciones/notas/Blockchain_FP)

▶ **Box 3: Case study – CINTERFOR (cont'd.)**

CINTERFOR is a small organization with a staff of 15 who periodically teleworked (March–June 2020; December 2020–June 2021). According to the people interviewed, working during the pandemic meant more demanding hours and a significant increase in the number of daily (virtual) meetings, which "left little space to produce, to investigate". The office invested in technology to enable remote delivery of its services. Resources, including RBTC and XBTC funds were made available. All of the above allowed CINTERFOR to expand its response capacity and respond well to the complexities of the pandemic. As one informant put it:

"During the pandemic, we were able to take the pulse of the [TVET Institutions] and provide them with a rapid response. Our response capacity was tested in the pandemic and came out positive (...) we have come out of the crisis strengthened."



## Supporting enterprises

Countering the threat of enterprise failure brought on by the pandemic – especially among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) – and its potentially devastating effect on jobs and incomes was quickly seen as a priority by constituents. The Call to Action outlined how supporting enterprises should play a vital role in promoting inclusive economic growth and employment including by supporting “business continuity and an enabling environment for innovation, productivity growth and sustainable enterprises including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises” (Para 11.A.d); more resilient supply chains that contribute to decent work, sustainability of enterprises and environmental sustainability; and protection of human rights in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (Para 11.A.i). Enterprise formalization was also highlighted (Para 11.A.k).

Senior HQ staff said that initially a small team of researchers was engaged to scan global best practices in supporting enterprises and to distribute weekly updates on findings. Early in the pandemic, a survey<sup>147</sup> of 1,066 enterprises in eight countries (participants in the SCORE programme) was run to identify needs and to shape the ILO's response. More regular virtual meetings of the Global Technical Team (which, in the past, met only infrequently) facilitated the exchange of information and ideas across the Organization culminating in an innovative strategy development “marketplace” that ITCILO helped to run.

Over time, **enterprise support recommendations for policy-makers** were brought together on a dedicated web page/portal<sup>148</sup> which included sections with knowledge products on enabling business continuity, preparing for recovery, and COVID-19-related advice on informal enterprises, global supply chains, SMEs, and the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE).

Many COVID-19 **knowledge products were also developed for enterprises** to guide them through the crisis. These covered business resilience and diversification, OSH, teleworking, wages during COVID, managing employee work-life balance, and adhering to international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work. One HQ informant said that practical tips on adapting business operations to the crisis became a focus, for example, restaurants adapting to home delivery, manufacturers adapting to produce PPE, marketing tips to demonstrate COVID-safe practices. Such information was disseminated via social media and through IOE networks.

Developing such resources brought challenges. Given the urgency of the problems faced, “speed to market” for such resources became a challenge. Staff were reported to have been inundated by requests by constituents for support and that this led to working long hours and some morale problems. Resources developed for use by individual enterprises were often quickly developed in response to urgent needs identified in the field and with perhaps less than usual input from ACT/EMP in HQ. Some programmes of the Enterprises Department which normally relied on face-to-face contact, including social finance and cooperatives, could not as easily switch their work to remote delivery. Online delivery also presents other challenges – as one informant from the Department said, “the biggest challenge is that so many products are offered online and so many of them are free.”

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147 [https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/projects/WCMS\\_745097/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/emppolicy/projects/WCMS_745097/lang--en/index.htm)

148 [https://www.ilo.org/empent/areas/covid-19/WCMS\\_816493/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/empent/areas/covid-19/WCMS_816493/lang--en/index.htm)

Only a handful of enterprise-related **development cooperation projects** were developed as specific responses to COVID-19 have so far been evaluated, but of those that have, evaluations were generally positive about their relevance and effectiveness, noting some inefficiencies (for example, deploying staff) and the lack of some important impact data (such as, improvements to livelihoods). Examples include:

- ▶ “Healthy Socio-Economic Recovery of the Micro and Small Enterprise Sector”<sup>149</sup> project in **Sri Lanka** which achieved results in the procurement/distribution of PPE kits, OSH training, communication campaigns, access to finance (A2F) support through banking clinics and value chain financing (VCF), training of medium-sized enterprise (MSE) women entrepreneurs, and psycho-social support (PSS) activities.
- ▶ “Mitigating the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on the employment and income of self-employed women workers in the informal economy in **Bolivia**”<sup>150</sup> was found to have strengthened beneficiaries’ business management skills, improved their use of digital communication tools and social media marketing, and helped them connect to finance and formalization schemes.
- ▶ “Inclusive Economic Recovery through Sustainable Enterprises in the Informal Economies of **Fiji, Palau, Tonga, and Vanuatu**”<sup>151</sup>, supported by ILO, UNDP, IFAD, and UNESCO, responded to the pandemic-related needs of informal enterprises in the cultural and creative industries including via business development services. Sustainable results included the establishment of formal associations providing a voice to government on the needs of the informal sector in these industries.

The Enterprises Department administers **programmes and services** that closely align with the areas of activity outlined in the Call to Action. In response to COVID-19, these were adapted to meet the changing needs of constituents and new services were added to fill identified gaps:

## SCORE

The Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises (SCORE) programme was adapted so that training could be delivered either completely online or in a hybrid mode. All 10 SCORE implementation countries implemented the online programme which added new COVID-19-related modules in Business Continuity Planning (BCP) and COVID-19 OSH training. A total of 300 enterprises were reported as having completed the BCP training.<sup>152</sup> To enhance the ILO’s response, SCORE also conducted SME surveys on the impact of COVID-19 in eight countries.<sup>153</sup> Against planned CPOs, 13 countries reported that SCORE was part of their COVID-19 response under indicator 4.2.1.

Country-based adjustments to SCORE delivery were also made. For example, in China, the programme is delivered independently by the national organization, the SCORE Academy, under a Memorandum of Understanding with the ILO. Apart from switching to online training and consulting, the programme delivered country-specific services to better equip SMEs to adjust to COVID-19 (for example, Peru, Ecuador).

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149 LKA/20/50/UND

150 BOL/20/50/UND

151 RAS/20/53/UND

152 A report supplied by the SME Branch indicated that training had been delivered in Ghana, Bolivia, Tunisia, Georgia, and Myanmar

153 Bolivia, China, Colombia, Ghana, Indonesia, Myanmar, Peru, and Tunisia

154 Bangladesh (BGD101), Cambodia (KHM204), China (CHN253), Ecuador (ECU160), Indonesia (IDN129), Mauritius (MUS108), Myanmar, Peru (PER157), South Africa (ZAF101), Tunisia (TUN103), Turkey (TUR154), Vietnam (VNM129), and Zimbabwe (ZWE103)

## Value chain development

Sixty sectoral value chain analyses were conducted in 2020–21 to support recovery from the crisis and income generation for poor and vulnerable groups.<sup>155</sup> The potential of the Market Systems Development approach in creating more resilient SMEs and market systems was promoted in a guidance note – “Why settle for recovery? A guidance note on building back better micro and small enterprises and resilient market systems during crisis and after lockdown”.<sup>156</sup>

## Enterprise formalization

Guidelines for the conduct of rapid assessments of COVID-19 impacts on enterprises and workers in the informal economy were published in April 2020.<sup>157</sup> A Q&A document on how COVID-19 affects micro and small enterprises was published in September 2020.<sup>158</sup>

### ► Box 4: Case study – Bosnia-Herzegovina: EU for Business Recovery – adjusting a project to meet COVID needs

THE EU4BUSINESS project is jointly implemented by GIZ, UNDP and ILO. The implementation was planned from April 2018 to March 2022. With the aim of strengthening Bosnia-Herzegovina's economy, the EU4Business project stimulates the development of entrepreneurship, export-oriented sectors, tourism and agriculture. Final beneficiaries are companies, farmers and entrepreneurs, with a special focus on women and youth. The results will be measured by new jobs, increased exports and sales and strengthened use of EU funds in the future.

The project is worth EUR 16.1 million overall, out of which EUR 10 million is available in grants. It is jointly funded by the European Union (EUR 15 million) and the German Government (EUR 1.1 million). EU4Business is part of the Local Development Strategies – Local Self-Government and Economic Development Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

With the outbreak of COVID-19, the project was adjusted to new circumstances. An additional activity, THE EU4BUSINESSRECOVERY project, was established, extending the existing partnership between ILO, UNDP and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). This project is expected to run from 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023 and is partnered by the European Commission's EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a budget of EUR 3.250 million. It aims to reduce the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on agricultural and tourism enterprises, micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the metal, wood-processing, and textile/apparel/footwear sectors, as well as on entrepreneurs and farmers. The project aims to ensure business continuity to preserve existing jobs and thus to reduce negative social consequences, such as unemployment, poverty or migration.

According to ministries of the Republika Srpska involved with the recovery project, ILO's contribution was extremely important in the field of support to trade unions and workers, especially for the textile sector because of the high number of workers in it. On the project level, ILO played a cohesive role. Also, it was lead agency for the segment related to the textile/apparel/footwear sectors; and provided guidelines for safety and health at work for employers. Also, ILO disseminated the guidelines for a grant application and actively promoted the EU for Business Recovery among entrepreneurs.

155 Including in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Morocco, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, Egypt, Lebanon, Uganda, Zambia, Nepal, Moldova, Cameroun, Somalia

156 [https://www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS\\_757916/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS_757916/lang--en/index.htm)

157 [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/informal-economy/publications/WCMS\\_743032/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/informal-economy/publications/WCMS_743032/lang--en/index.htm)

158 [https://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS\\_755276/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS_755276/lang--en/index.htm)

### ► **Box 4: Case study – Bosnia-Herzegovina: EU for Business Recovery – adjusting a project to meet COVID needs (cont'd.)**

In terms of areas for improvement, ministries felt that the effects of the capacity building and grants were unclear and that this should be improved. Appropriate measurement systems should be introduced. This weakness may have been partly because of the pandemic.

Overall, For the ministries in Republika Srpska the ILO's actions were seen as very important, as the consequences of COVID-19 were extremely negative in this entity. In such types of projects, the ministries have only a supervisory role without any executive powers, and ILO has done its best to ensure that the projects meet the set targets and more. The ministry stakeholders described ILO as an independent entity, proactive, providing great knowledge transfer to its constituencies.

Source: HLE interviews, June 2022, Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Entrepreneurship training

The long-running Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) programme was adapted for online delivery in 2020.<sup>159</sup> This “e-SIYB” product was deployed in over 30 countries and includes modules to support SMEs to digitalize their own operations. The Women’s Entrepreneurship Development programme, GET Ahead, was also digitized. Recognizing how childcare accessibility affected women entrepreneurs during COVID, the ILO revised its assessment methodology for programme establishment to cover this dimension. Against planned CPOs, nine countries<sup>160</sup> reported that SIYB was part of their COVID-19 response under Indicator 4.2.1. Some region-specific entrepreneurship programmes (such as the activity-based C-BED product in Asia-Pacific and the Women Do Business tool in Jordan) were also linked to the COVID-19 response.

## Enabling environment for enterprises

The ILO worked with constituents to identify and address constraints in the enabling environment for sustainable businesses in the context of COVID-19<sup>161</sup> though demand for implementing the ILO’s existing EESE programme in new locations was reported to have diminished. Against planned CPOs, three countries<sup>162</sup> reported that work on the enabling environment was part of their COVID-19 response under Indicator 4.1.1.

## Small business resilience

A new training programme was developed in partnership with ACT/EMP to strengthen the resilience of small business in the face of crises. The Sustainable and Resilient Enterprises (SURE) programme was successfully piloted in Iraq, South Africa and Trinidad and Tobago in 2021 with employers’ organizations and business development services delivering the training. A tourism sector-specific application of the programme, funded by GIZ, will be rolled out in two countries adversely affected by the pandemic (see **Box 5**). ENTERPRISES also partnered with McKinsey and Company to develop a framework of initiatives that can help small firms in developing countries to navigate crises and build resilience.<sup>163</sup>

159 [https://www.ilo.org/empent/areas/start-and-improve-your-business/WCMS\\_759261/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/empent/areas/start-and-improve-your-business/WCMS_759261/lang--en/index.htm)

160 Bangladesh (BGD101), Cabo Verde (CPV101), Ecuador (ECU160), Honduras (HND801), Iraq (IRQ126), Mali (MLI103), Myanmar (MMR127), Senegal (SEN103), Uganda (UGA128).

161 For example, in Georgia (GEO126), North Macedonia (MKD105), Moldova (MDA104), Suriname (SUR127)

162 Costa Rica (CRI131), Georgia (GEO126) and Moldova (MDA104).

163 <https://www.mckinsey.com/about-us/new-at-mckinsey-blog/partnering-with-the-international-labour-organization-to-help-small-businesses-in-developing-economies>

### ► Box 5: The SURE programme

In the process of aligning its existing array of programmes and services to meet the needs of enterprises during the pandemic and in consultation with ACT/EMP, representatives of the Enterprises Department identified a significant service gap. There was nothing currently available that could support SMEs to be prepared for and effectively respond to crises – pandemics or otherwise. With funding provided by GIZ, in 2020–21 the ILO began developing a new pilot programme that was to become SURE – Sustaining Resilient Enterprises.

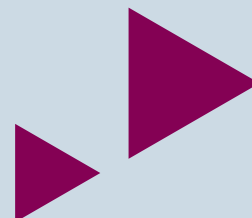
Bringing together an advisory group comprising experts in business resilience and risk management, the idea was to develop a training toolkit that would enable SMEs to apply the sort of business continuity planning used by bigger enterprises at an appropriate level for their operations. It would strengthen their resilience in the face of complex and compound natural, bio-environmental, techno-industrial, and socio-political hazards. Participating businesses develop a business resilience strategy tailored to their unique business context and environment. It involves group-based training and individual coaching and auditing services. It comprises six modules with 16 learning units taught via webinars or as eLearning modules.

The implementation model requires SURE trainers in local organizations (BDS providers, EBMOs, SME agencies etc.) to be trained by ITCILO and these in turn market and deliver training to small businesses. The target market are more advanced SMEs, with 5–10 employees and demonstrated business management skills.

In 2021, the programme was piloted in three countries – Iraq (through BDS providers in Kurdistan), South Africa (through a BDS and a Chamber of Commerce), and Trinidad and Tobago (through an EBMO).

Moving forward, the SURE programme is being adapted to the specific needs of enterprises involved in tourism, a sector that suffered badly in the pandemic and for which business resilience training is clear priority. Initial target markets will be South Africa and the Dominican Republic.

Staff from the Enterprises Department report that the programme, developed in close cooperation with ACT/EMP, is generating great interest from employers' organizations as a future value-added service for their members. It was seen as filling a gap in their existing service offerings for SMEs.



### Multinational enterprises

The ILO's work in promoting the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) contributed to its COVID-19 response, advancing the principles of Responsible Business Conduct (RBC) by MNEs during the crisis. The joint EU-ILO-UN Women project – "Promoting women's economic empowerment at work through responsible business conduct in G7 countries" produced COVID-19 resources<sup>164</sup> related to RBC (for example, responsible purchasing practices in times of COVID-19, childcare in the COVID era). The ILO Helpdesk for Business also added guidance on Business and COVID-19 to its website.

164 <https://www.empowerwomen.org/en/resources>



## Cooperatives and the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)

The Think.COOP training programme was adapted for online use,<sup>165</sup> resources on the crisis response were consolidated on an ILO webpage to aid constituents and SSE partners,<sup>166</sup> and webinars were conducted on the role of SSE in the recovery.<sup>167</sup> The UN Inter-Agency Taskforce on SSE, chaired by the ILO, also created a resource repository on COVID-19 responses.<sup>168</sup> An example of a recovery development project included the elaboration of a public policy proposal to create an incubator of cooperatives of self-employed female workers to facilitate the transition towards the formal economy in Bolivia.

## Social finance

The ILO's financial education programme has long relied on face-to-face training and technical support activities to its poor and vulnerable targets. Training of trainers switched to online delivery and some training, such as Making Microfinance Work course, was delivered online. To expand its audience during the pandemic and beyond, the Social Finance Programme also began podcasts<sup>169</sup> in May 2020 on financial inclusion, impact insurance and sustainable investing. It also used the pandemic to promote the transition from cash to digital payments, which improves the financial inclusion of vulnerable groups.<sup>170</sup>

## Global Programme on Employment Injury Insurance and Protection

The Global Programme on Employment Injury Insurance and Protection (GEIP) provides advisory and capacity-building services to enterprises and social security schemes to assess employment injury insurance systems. The programme is relevant to the ILO's pandemic response because infection by COVID-19, if contracted as a result of work, can be considered as work or employment injury. Access to health care and compensation, as set out in Conventions No. 102 and 121, become entitlements. Responses by GEIP included research into international practice on COVID-19 infection as a work-related injury.<sup>171</sup>

## Green Jobs and Just Transition

The Green Jobs Programme was established in 2008 to build commitment within ILO to the concept and to generate a range of international partnerships in the field. Its contribution to the COVID-19 response centres on promoting Green Jobs and the guidelines for a Just Transition as part of the recovery. The Call to Action reinforced this stressing the need to "leverage the opportunities of just digital and environmental transitions to advance decent work" (Para A.j) (see **Box 6**).

The HLE's staff survey suggested that perceptions of the relevance of the ILO's work in this policy area were relatively low with less than half rating this work as "relevant" or "very relevant" – the lowest rating of all listed policy areas. Its rating was also relatively low in response to the question "Do you think that the ILO is taking the necessary steps to design and implement recovery actions that are relative to the needs of constituents?" with 56 per cent answering "yes" and 29 per cent "no" (noting a high number of "don't know" responses). A meta-analysis of decent work results and ILO operations for 2020–21 also identified environmental sustainability as an area of overall weak performance, noting that while there were some elements in certain projects that promoted environmental sustainability, the majority "did not take this cross-cutting policy driver into account in design and implementation." In a development project example, re-purposing the project's activities to mitigate the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 implied compromising its green jobs' long-term agenda (Mozambique).

165 [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/news/WCMS\\_746363/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/news/WCMS_746363/lang--en/index.htm)

166 [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/areas-of-work/WCMS\\_740411/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/areas-of-work/WCMS_740411/lang--en/index.htm)

167 [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/events/WCMS\\_749256/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/events/WCMS_749256/lang--en/index.htm)

168 UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy, "SSE responses to COVID-19: information from the members and observers of the UNTFSSE".

169 ILO, "Social finance podcast".

170 ILO, "The ILO intensified its efforts to accelerate the transition from cash to digital wage payments", News, 17 December 2020.

171 ILO, State practice to address COVID-19 infection as a work-related injury, 2021.

## ► Box 6: Findings from evaluation of SIDA support to ILO work in the field of the green economy 2020–22

The Green Jobs function has received relatively little funding from internal ILO sources. However, it has benefitted greatly from a number of external partners. One such example is the SIDA-ILO partnership, which has worked to develop policy-oriented knowledge, recommendations and entry points for interventions on emerging issues in the just transition thematic or sectoral areas. According to its evaluation, during 2020–2021, the green economy component worked on:

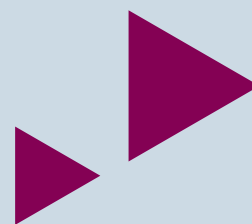
- Informality and climate change/environmental challenges – research and develop knowledge materials advancing formalisation and environmental sustainability.
- Just Transition financing – work to produce knowledge with the aim of mapping the current state of just transition financing, identifying gaps and needs for support and defining the ILO's added value and potential entry points for technical assistance.
- Market system development and environmental sustainability – development of two guides, drawing on experience of environmentally sensitive market system analysis in the United Republic of Tanzania, conducted under the previous phase of the SIDA-ILO partnership.
- Just Energy Transition – development of a guide and communication and training events to build understanding, strengthen commitments, and provide support to policy-making around transition in the context of energy system changes.
- In the African region – support to strengthen technical and delivery capacity in the region by contributing to a regional green jobs specialist based in Abidjan (eight months). This specialist supported national interventions funded by the SIDA-ILO Partnership Programme (SIPP) in Ghana and Tanzania and other interventions by mobilizing or leveraging complementary resources in Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Madagascar and Algeria.

In terms of flexibility, the SIPP allowed interventions to adapt to constituents' needs by strategically identifying opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and by incorporating environmental sustainability as a transversal principle in developing the labour market, employment and labour relations.

The health, social, economic, and labour market crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic created a global need for countries to develop policies focused on economic recovery and growth. This created the opportunity to rethink the productive system and existing value chains, generating greater openness in constituents, especially government representatives, when contemplating alternatives to stimulate national economic and labour market development. The SIPP promoted this reflection and contributed to incorporating sustainability in a transversal way to generate a more resilient, qualified and sustainable industry.

Specifically, the SIPP supported identification and development of frameworks of green employment and qualifications, strengthening an approach focused on the needs of individuals and communities in contexts of productive transition and transformation, while considering the impact on employment of environmental policies. Examples include the development of the study on green recovery from COVID-19 in West Africa and the production of a document to analyse priorities for economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic in Colombia.

Source: ILO, Final independent clustered evaluation of outcome-based funding support to ILO projects in the field of employment and skills, social dialogue and labour relations, protection for all at work, gender equality and equal opportunities, and just transition to the green economy for the period 2020–21. SECTION III: Case Study: GREEN ECONOMY AND JUST TRANSITION (outcomes 3 & 4). (Bangkok: ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific; 2022).



## Addressing gender equality

Actions addressing gender equity in this policy response area included:

- ▶ A joint ILO-UN Women project, “Promoting decent employment for women through inclusive growth policies and investments in care”, which supported governments, women’s organizations, development and social partners in implementing gender-sensitive policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis and ensuring an inclusive recovery.
- ▶ Policy tools on “How to assess fiscal stimulus packages from a gender equality perspective”; “Assessing the gendered employment impacts of COVID-19 and supporting a gender-responsive recovery”; and “A guide to public investments in the care economy”.
- ▶ The “Rebuilding Better: Fostering Business Resilience Post-COVID-19” project, supported by JPMorgan Chase Foundation, which supports women entrepreneurs in Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and adopt more sustainable and resilient business models.
- ▶ The joint EU-ILO-UN-Women “WE Empower” project which promoted women’s economic empowerment through responsible business conduct in G7 countries. Its Empowering Women at Work interventions and capacity development platform promoted a “gender-transformative policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis”.

In the case study countries, in **Argentina**, the project “Innovative solutions for an inclusive employment recovery and with gender perspective oriented to the transition to the formal economy in Argentina” aimed to support the ILO constituents in the design and implementation of employment recovery strategies that, among other characteristics, prioritize the sectors most affected by the crisis, including feminized sectors such as care (more than 95 per cent of workers in this sector are women). The Activate Women project in **Montenegro** aimed to support the reintegration of women who lost their job due to COVID-19 (see 274).

## ► Box 7: Case study – Green Jobs and Just Transition in the ILO's response to COVID-19

*"I agree strongly that at a time when the world is focusing its efforts on overcoming the multiple challenges of COVID-19, the ILO must not lose sight of the reality that climate change remains the defining global challenge of our time, and that we must act accordingly."* ILO Director-General<sup>172</sup>

Since early in the pandemic, the Green Jobs Unit has tried to raise awareness among ILO and its partners on the importance of interlinkages between humans, the environment and health. It is encouraging an integrated approach to COVID recovery, encompassing climate change, biodiversity, forest loss and health. If economies and societies are weakened by the pandemic, climate change could be worsened, with yet greater impacts. The 2021 ILO Users' Manual for Just Transition places it "as an integral part of the recovery process".<sup>173</sup>

Early in the pandemic, the ILO released a *Policy Brief*, "COVID-19 and the world of work: Jump-starting a green recovery with more and better jobs, healthy and resilient societies". It highlighted how existing ILO activities offered a platform for green recovery including through the Partnership for Action on the Green Economy (PAGE),<sup>174</sup> the Climate Action for Jobs Initiative,<sup>175</sup> the EEIP (see Para.264), cleaner production training for SMEs via SCORE (see Para.290), as well as the ILO's work in promoting international labour standards. Some new activities (for example, in South Africa: Modelling an Inclusive Green Economy COVID-19 Recovery Programme for South Africa. Under the PAGE programme) related to a green COVID recovery were also initiated and online training modules for constituents were developed.

The ILO enhanced its profile in this area during COVID-19. In 2021, the International Renewable Energy Agency jointly published with the ILO its Renewable Energy Jobs Report which showed the sector's continued growth despite COVID. At COP 26, the COP Energy Transition Council, United Kingdom (on which the ILO is the only UN member) brought together fossil producers in Africa and other regions with potential funders to reduce this energy source. ILO also helped the United Kingdom to put together the Declaration on Just Transition signed at COP.

Despite ILO's high-profile advocacy efforts regarding Just Transition, performance on this dimension in its own projects has remained poor. A recent evaluation review<sup>176</sup> reported that "integration of just transition to environmental sustainability in ILO interventions evaluated in 2020 and 2021 was poor" and that "the majority of interventions did not take this cross-cutting policy driver into account in their design and implementation." Similarly, a recent MOPAN assessment<sup>177</sup> of ILO summarizes as one of the main areas needing improvement: "The ILO has yet to prioritise the 'green recovery' or serving the world of work by addressing the climate crisis." Resources – human and financial – are a barrier.

Recovery from the pandemic presents new opportunities for real action on Green Jobs and Just Transition. At the February 2022 Global Forum for a Human Centred Recovery, the ILO Director-General "urged the international community to close the gap between visionary statements of ambition and the collective action that's needed to address the social and economic fall-out of the COVID-19 pandemic".

172 ILO, Programme and Budget for the biennium 2022–23. The DG's response to the Governing Body's discussion (Geneva: 2021; p. 11).

173 ILO, User's manual to the ILO's Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all. (Geneva: 2021; p. 14).

174 PAGE is a collaboration between five United Nations agencies and aims to share knowledge between UN agencies and country offices, funding partners and partner countries to accelerate progress towards inclusive, green and sustainable development.

175 ILO, "[Climate action for Jobs Initiative unites global efforts on the environment and decent work](#)".

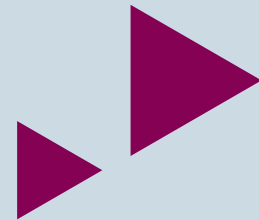
176 Decent work results and effectiveness of ILO operations: Ex-post meta-analysis of development cooperation evaluations, 2020 and 2021 (partial). ILO Evaluation Office. 2021

177 MOPAN Assessment Overview, 2021, p. 5.

### ► Box 7: Case study – Green Jobs and Just Transition in the ILO's response to COVID-19 (cont'd.)

Such a gap is evident too in the area of Just Transition. The Just Transition Session of the Global Forum<sup>178</sup> concluded that the concept is severely challenged by the major disconnect between pledges, statements of intention and limited financial flows. Many stakeholders referred to previous substantial gaps between pledges and actual funds delivered for climate change purposes.

There is no shortage of ideas, calls for action and bold ambitions. However, there are far too few funds to allow all (or possibly even a fraction) of them to be implemented. It will, therefore, be essential to introduce an increased focus on results measurement and evaluation to track the degree of disconnect between stated intentions and outcomes delivered and to promote any necessary corrective measures.



Other country case study examples of work in inclusive economic growth and employment

#### Mexico

In Phase 1 of the project "Recovery of employment in the face of COVID-19 in Mexico with a just transition approach": Studies analysed possible strategies for reactivating employment post-pandemic economic in Mexico City; on market systems development and value chains in five green sectors in Mexico City; on the identification of labour demand and supply in green sectors and retraining and skills upgrading needs. A training course on Green Enterprises was also run for employers' organizations and a guide for greener production in cooperatives was produced.

#### South Africa

Under the Skills Initiative for Africa Project, ILO worked with Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) to conduct a rapid assessment of reskilling and upskilling needs arising from COVID-19. This identified a number of new priorities requiring responses from the skills system including OSH-related skills and the need for training centres for women, especially in rural areas.

#### Iraq

As part of COVID recovery through the development of new enterprises, ILO entered into partnership agreements and built the capacity of 35 organizations including the Iraqi central and private banks, NGOs and financial institutions. This included the creation of a pool of 30 SIYB and financial education trainers to support primarily Iraqi youth to start their businesses. ILO is also working with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to accredit 50 of their staff to deliver SIYB to their beneficiaries before they access their Enterprise Development Fund. At a sectoral level, the ILO has supported farmers affected by COVID and the armed conflict with ISIS – 200 farmers (50 female) have been trained to enhance their production and 20 Department of Agriculture employees have been trained in coaching and mentoring of farmers. Financial support for another 41 female farmers to establish agribusiness projects are currently underway. The new SURE programme was also piloted in Iraq (see **Box 5**).

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178 Global Forum for a Human Centred Recovery – Just Transition Session, 24 February 2022.

### Indonesia

ILO implemented the Indonesian element of the Global Surveys on Youth and Covid-19 and reskilling and upskilling needs in response to the COVID-19. ILO provided training for TVET instructors on adapting training material for online delivery and, in cooperation with the Australian Embassy, organized a series of webinars on the design and delivery of online TVET. In support of enterprises, a survey was conducted to assess the impact of the pandemic on enterprises and a report was published with key results and policy recommendations. Training was delivered to MSMEs on business continuity management and coping strategies and productivity improvement training videos, based on proven modules, were developed for SMEs. In collaboration with the Indonesian Retailers' Association (APRINDO), ILO provided online training courses on the creation of online shopping applications and e-commerce administration.

### Viet Nam

ILO Viet Nam's contribution to employment development strategies following the COVID-19 outbreak focused on support to the General Statistics Office (GSO) providing guidance on including a COVID-19 module within the Quarterly Labour Force Survey. This built the capacity of the GSO to produce up-to-date analyses of the impact of COVID-19 on the labour market from as early as May 2020 and throughout 2021. Informants from GSO highly valued ILO's support in building their capacity to produce high quality reports, that were validated by the ILO's Senior Economist. The reports contributed to raising awareness of the government and the Central Economic Commission on informal economy issues.

### Western Balkans

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ILO worked on the TVET dimension of a joint project with UNICEF, UNDP and UNESCO on a project called "Business Unusual: Reimagining Education for Marginalized Girls and Boys during and post COVID-19" to address deficiencies revealed during the pandemic related to access to online platforms, quality learning resources, teachers' capacities and provisions for leaving no-one behind. Another project used the ILO's STED methodology to address post-COVID skills deficits in the IT sector.

## ACTION PROMOTING PROTECTION OF ALL WORKERS

### KEY POINTS

- ▶ The promotion of labour standards to protect workers' rights was crucial and ILO made significant contributions to their reinforcement, playing a facilitating role in social dialogue and coordinating action promoting adherence to international labour standards.
- ▶ ILO strongly supported constituents' OSH work during the pandemic, culminating in OSH's confirmation as one of the FPRW at the 2022 ILC. ILO's established authority in OSH was reinforced among stakeholders and UN agencies, and the ILO facilitated coordination between ministries of labour and health on infectious disease control measures.
- ▶ The flagship programmes, Better Work and Safety and Health for All – through its Vision Zero Fund subprogramme, successfully pivoted to guide COVID-19 workplace safety and mitigation measures, reaching the garment, agriculture, construction and other sectors.
- ▶ The ILO contributed to global estimate reports on both child labour and forced labour, warning of a reversal of progress on child labour within already vulnerable populations and called for universal social protection to help end child labour. Ongoing child labour programmes provided immediate support to affected communities.
- ▶ Assessments of the impact of COVID-19 on informal economy workers were conducted in 15 countries, and guidance was disseminated on reaching informal workers with COVID-19 safety measures. ILO capitalized on the elevated attention to the issue to accelerate national policy action on formalization.
- ▶ ILO re-focused its migrant worker support services to increase safety and human rights protection at destination and strengthened reintegration supports, notably through its programmes in Asia and the Pacific.
- ▶ ILO documented the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on women and vulnerable groups (for example, research and advocacy briefs on the care economy, violence and harassment and the inclusion of diverse groups in COVID-19 mitigation). However, resources devoted to mitigating the pandemic's impacts on women workers and vulnerable groups at country level were mainly delivered through existing programmes, such as OSH and labour standards compliance projects, rather than new initiatives.

### Context

The onset of the pandemic brought a host of issues associated with the protection of workers around the world, including pre-existing gaps in protection of some groups of workers that came into sharper relief. The impacts of COVID-19 also called for increased vigilance on compliance with ILO's decent work compass, the international labour standards – due to sudden lockdowns, lay-offs, and adverse impacts on working hours and wages around the world. As workplaces are often the site of transmission of the virus, with varying risk factors, measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace became the most pressing issue for many countries. Constituents in many countries sought guidance on how to facilitate a safe return to work, notably in high-risk sectors such as manufacturing, construction, transport, and agriculture. **Table 2** describes some of the key global protection issues and trends.

From a protection as well as an employment perspective, the crisis was experienced differently by sectors and their workforces, differentiating sectors with a high demand and risk exposure, including essential workers in health, transport, and care work, and those with decreased demand, such as tourism, retail and hospitality, where leave and termination conditions were critical concerns.<sup>179</sup>

**TABLE 2: PROTECTION IN THE WORKPLACE AND EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC – GLOBAL ISSUES AND TRENDS**

Issue	Global effects and trends
International labour standards	Workers' rights to safe and decent work conditions as defined in ILS were threatened in diverse ways by the crisis – including wage protection, working hours, health and safety, non-discrimination. The Committee of Experts report of 2020 highlighted numerous concerns regarding ILS contravention, especially the Maritime Labour Convention and the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 206). <sup>180</sup>
Child labour and other Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work	Globally, child labour increased by million in absolute terms, while the rate remained the same, but the ILO-UNICEF global survey predicted that the recent progress in eliminating child labour could be reversed by the poverty impacts of the pandemic. <sup>181</sup>
Occupational safety and health	Countries, sectors, and enterprises needed urgent guidance on health systems and assessment of COVID-19 risk and prevention and mitigation measures in workplaces. Mitigation measures were especially needed to protect the health and safety of key and frontline workers, including in the health care, transport and waste collection sectors.
Wages and working conditions	Protection of workers' income during the pandemic became critical, increasing requests for minimum wage setting. <sup>182</sup>
Informal economy workers and other vulnerable groups	The pandemic hit certain categories of workers disproportionately, especially those in the informal economy, home workers and domestic workers, who were often excluded from OSH protection as well as social security measures. <sup>183</sup>
Emerging forms of work	High demand from countries for guidance on regulating teleworking conditions, and those of delivery platform workers, which proliferated during the pandemic. <sup>184</sup>
Migrant workers	COVID-19 exposed the lack of protection of migrant workers, revealing various forms of exploitation, including non-payment of wages and lack of employer mobility <sup>185</sup> as hundreds of thousands of workers, particularly from Africa and Asia lost their jobs, were stranded in destination countries or were suddenly sent home. <sup>186</sup>
Women, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities	Women workers were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, with the double burden of work and family care responsibilities. The vulnerabilities of diverse disadvantaged groups including indigenous communities, people with disabilities and people living with HIV/AIDS were exacerbated. <sup>187</sup>

179 ILO, [Sectoral Policy Department 2020–2021 highlights](#) (Geneva: 2022).

180 ILO, CEACR. General Observation adopted by the CEACR at its 91st Session (Nov–Dec 2020).

181 GB.344/PFA/1 (Rev.1)

182 GB. 344/PFA/1 (Rev.1)

183 ILO, [Working from home: From invisibility to decent work](#). January 2021; ILO, [Making decent work a reality for domestic workers: Progress and prospects ten years after the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 \(No. 189\)](#), 2021, pp. 230–236.

184 ILO, [Teleworking during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond. A Practical Guide](#), 2020.

185 ILO staff interviews; GB.344/PFA/1 (Rev.1)

186 Katherine Jones, Sanushka Mudaliar and Nicola Piper, [Locked down and in limbo: The global impact of COVID-19 on migrant worker rights and recruitment](#) (Geneva: ILO; 2021).

187 ILO, [“The COVID-19 response. Getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work”](#), Policy Brief, May 2020.



## ILO Action

### OVERVIEW

The action areas defined in the Call to Action and in the initial four-pillar framework aimed to protect workers' **fundamental rights, health and safety, and working conditions** affected by COVID-19, and build back better towards a more inclusive world of work. The *Call to Action*, put a spotlight on the transformative strategies required towards inclusion of vulnerable groups in the recovery. The Protection of Workers narrative in the *Call to Action* aligns with the 2020–2021 P&B outcomes and output areas of Outcome 7 (Adequate and effective protection at work for all), Outcome 6 (Gender equality and equal opportunities and treatment for all in the world of work), and Outcome 2 (International labour standards and authoritative and effective supervision).<sup>188</sup>

The following sections discuss the actions to address the myriad labour protection issues brought with the pandemic, including the application of international labour standards, preventing the escalation of child labour and forced labour, promoting OSH, reaching vulnerable groups, regulating the conditions of emerging forms of work, and providing protection against gender-based violence and discrimination. The discussion parallels the priorities highlighted in the Call to Action, and links with P&B outcomes 7, 2 and 6 with respect to protection issues.<sup>189</sup>

According to the P&B Implementation Report 2020–2021, “countries’ actions and needs focused on the sectors and supply chains that were either hardest hit by the pandemic or became essential in the crisis, and the ILO therefore increased its guidance and cooperation to provide multidimensional supports in key sectors such as hospitality, tourism, transport, health, education, care, manufacturing, and construction”.<sup>190</sup>

Overall, the HLE staff survey showed that effectiveness ratings of “satisfactory” or “highly satisfactory” were highest for the Protection of Workers policy domain, at 60 per cent of responses. This perception was also borne out by ILO P&B results for the biennium, where results exceeded targets for OSH policies, protection of informal workers and protection of migrant workers. In addition, the HLE analysis of COVID-19 reporting in CPO monitoring shows that Outcome 7 accounted for 21 per cent of COVID-19 reports, the highest among all outcomes.

### Reinforcing international labour standards

Trends in ratifications of international standards were affected by the pandemic according to the P&B 2020–2021 report on Outcome 2. Ratifications dropped in 2020 but increased significantly in 2021 once the backlog was addressed. The increased relevance of OSH to the COVID-19 response led to increased country ratifications of the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), and there was also a high number of ratifications of the recently adopted Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and the Domestic Workers’ Convention, 2011 (No. 189).<sup>191</sup> In the CPO monitoring, few entries reported COVID-19 related responses on labour standards at the country level, but this may reflect the long term nature of ongoing ratification efforts.

With the onset of the crisis, the International Labour Standards Department (NORMES) rapidly received many requests from Member States regarding the application of international labour standards to the new circumstances. For example, there were many questions related to teleworking and the application of ILS. In response, NORMES developed a set of FAQs on ILO Standards and COVID-19 to equip the Member States and constituents, including anticipating questions beyond those that were received.<sup>192</sup> The FAQs included a wide scope of 46 issues raised by the pandemic, and provide relevant ILS guidance. The key message was that the standards

<sup>188</sup> The international labour standards provide the normative foundation for the full spectrum of decent work, while the Call to Action highlighted COVID-19 action on ILS under the protection policy theme.

<sup>189</sup> Our analysis adds the sectoral, multi-dimensional response of the ILO, which is not fully captured in the P&B structure.

<sup>190</sup> GB 344/PFA/1 Rev.1) p. 14.

<sup>191</sup> GB 344/PFA/1 Rev.1) p. 14.

<sup>192</sup> ILO. [ILO Standards and COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) – Version 3.0, FAQ](#) (Geneva: 13 April 2021).

prevail despite the conditions created. Further, the document advises that force majeure could be claimed by parties as grounds to disregard ILS in rare circumstances, where there was a physical impossibility to act otherwise. The FAQ document has been downloaded 37,563 times according to the evaluation analysis; and according to NORMES staff, various countries used the FAQs extensively.

ILO's NORMES department acts as secretariat to the infrastructure for the supervisory system of the ILS, including the regular scrutiny of compliance and response to complaints by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Regulations (CEACR).<sup>193</sup> The secretariat guided the focus of the Committee of Experts to ensure the impact of COVID-19 on labour standards was captured in the annual reporting during the two years. The CEACR devoted attention to the impact of COVID-19 in its general survey report of 2020, and in the 2021 addendum to the report.<sup>194</sup> This report highlighted several critical concerns in the wake of COVID-19, including working time, informal economy, discrimination, and compliance in the maritime sector, described in detail below.

Social dialogue is a cornerstone of international labour standards, most of which refer to the involvement of employers' and workers' representatives in shaping and implementing policies for the world of work.<sup>195</sup> The Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205), is especially relevant, calling for all crisis response measures to be developed through gender-inclusive social dialogue, recognizing the vital role of employers' organizations in this respect. The two main OSH standards – Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), both call for consultations with representative organizations of employers and workers. ILO's support to social dialogue in developing OSH and other measures is discussed below regarding the maritime sector, OSH interventions in general and other sectoral interventions.

As extensively documented, maritime workers' rights as defined in international labour and maritime standards were severely threatened by the pandemic. The ILO's interventions to reinforce the standards, in collaboration with the tripartite partners and UN agencies, had a significant impact on immediate and longer-term protection of seafarers. **Box 8** describes how the ILO contributed to building consensus and coordinating urgent action in the maritime sector.

One of the lessons arising from the response to the maritime workers' situation is the critical relevance of international labour standards in a crisis response. NORMES staff observe that internally, as well as from some government constituents, they encountered the view that in a crisis context, strict vigilance of international labour standards can wait until the emergency issues have been addressed. This view was echoed in the Synthesis Review of evaluations during the period – one constituent observed that “at the moment we have bigger fish to fry”. Yet, as the workers' fundamental rights were threatened on many fronts, it is evident that in times of crisis the ILO needs to insist on adherence to ILS. Further, the role and capacity of the ILO to take direct action in a crisis was highlighted as raising ILO's institutional reputation among the social partners.

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193 The supervisory system comprises regular scrutiny and complaints-based inquiry responding to complaints brought by the social partners/constituents.

194 ILO. Application of International Labour Standards 2021. Addendum to the 2020 Report of the CEACR. International Labour Conference, 109th Session, 2021. Report III/Addendum (Part A).

195 ILO Standards and COVID-19, V. 3.0, FAQ. 13 April 2021.

## ► Box 8: Case study – support to maritime workers

### Background

The maritime industry was unprepared for the impact of COVID-19, which was more global in its reach than other contagious disease outbreaks (Ebola, Avian Flu, SARS). COVID-19 border closures and travel restrictions hindered the industry's ability to repatriate seafarers following their tours of duty, and to effect crew changes in line with the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006). The ongoing challenge was that countries gave precedence to public health regulations over their obligations under the Convention. As documented by the ILO and the social partners, at the height of the pandemic, over 400,000 seafarers were stranded on board ships, serving beyond their contracts for up to 17 consecutive months as governments refused to prioritize them for vaccination, immigration and travel purposes, denied disembarkation rights, and access to urgent medical treatment.<sup>196,197</sup>

### ILO's policy and coordination response

The ILO's response to the needs of seafarers illustrates the effective use of its tripartite and UN convening powers, the supervisory mechanisms of the Maritime Labour Convention (2006)<sup>198</sup>, international labour standards, and the extraordinary initiatives of officers of NORMES and SECTOR. The key ILO actors were the NORMES Department, and particularly its Maritime Unit, and the Transport and Maritime Unit in SECTOR, who worked closely together.

Interviewed stakeholders of the Special Tripartite Committee for the Migrant Labour Convention (STC-MLC) were unanimously impressed with how quickly and flexibly the ILO responded to the sudden needs, through the adaptation of the ILS supervisory mechanisms, convening consultative processes, and direct international facilitation efforts at the request of the social partners.<sup>199</sup>

**"It was quite amazing to see how ILO quickly adapted to this completely unforeseen situation ... Typically we meet among the STC officers once a year at best, we began meeting weekly, and were in almost daily contact." (Shipowners representative.)**

As an early response, the ILO issued an **Information Note** responding to Member States' requests for advice on how to apply the MLC, initially in February 2020, updated several times as the situation evolved.<sup>200</sup> This became a chief reference for the industry, cited by multiple UN documents and the social partners (Web download analysis shows 14,416 downloads). As well as documentary guidance, given the urgency of the situation, the ILO responded to social partners' requests to intervene via the *informal opinion mechanism* (a letter written by the Director of ILS department to a state/partner), but also through the **Urgent Intervention** mechanism, issued by the ILO Director-General.

The seafarers' situation was the focus of a general survey of the Committee of Experts (CEACR) in 2020 which issued a **General Observation** in its December 2020 session, expressing in strong terms that Member States had contravened their obligations in denying seafarers their rights to access medical attention and disembarkation rights.<sup>201</sup> It was welcomed by the industry and widely quoted in the press.

**Coordinated tripartite and UN action.** When the situation of seafarers began to emerge in early 2020, ILO quickly convened meetings of the Special Tripartite Committee (STC) officers, first on

196 Hamburg School of Business Administration. The Perfect Storm: The Impact of COVID-19 on Shipping, Seafarers and Maritime Labour Markets. International Chamber of Shipping, April 2022.

197 ILO Standards and COVID-19, Version 3.0, FAQ. 13 April 2021.

198 The Maritime Labour Convention (2006) represents the consolidation of a body of pre-existing maritime regulatory instruments (effective 2013).

199 Evaluation interviews with STC-MLC officers from shipowners, seafarers' organizations, government and the IMO.

200 ILO, [Information note on maritime labour issues and coronavirus \(COVID-19\), Revised version 3.0](#). (Geneva: NORMES/SECTOR, 2021).

201 ILO CEACR, General observation adopted by the CEACR at its 91st session (November–December 2020).

### ▶ Box 8: Case study – support to maritime workers (cont'd.)

a weekly basis, to discuss the issues and find solutions. The meetings continued for almost two years. The STC issued several joint statements and resolutions in support of seafarers' rights and compliance with the MLC and International Maritime Organization (IMO) conventions. The social partners' dialogue throughout this process was noted as exceptional by all informants. According to the industry and UN partners interviewed, the existing mature relationship of the shipowners and seafarers trade unions was strengthened more than ever with ILO facilitation. The social partners spoke with one voice on several proposed amendments of the MLC arising from the COVID-19 crisis, subsequently approved at the May 2022 ILC.

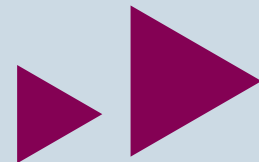
The STC meetings were soon expanded to include the IMO, the lead international agency in maritime safety regulation. The ILO's relationship with the IMO was strengthened significantly through this process according to the representatives. ILO also engaged WHO in the consultative process. The coordinated strategy brought the plight of seafarers to the attention of the UN Secretary-General who placed the issue on the UN Secretary-General's Executive Committee agenda in 2020. The outcomes included **Resolutions** adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2020,<sup>202</sup> the ILO Governing Body, and **multiple joint UN and Global Compact statements** urging Member States to designate seafarers as key workers to permit crew changes and address the humanitarian crisis faced by the shipping sector.<sup>203</sup> Eventually many countries recognized seafarers as key workers, though not all countries have done so.

A joint UN agenda has been established to address the ongoing issues, including the recent formation of two UN working groups: the **Joint action group to review the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on transport workers and the global supply chain (JAG-TSC)**, convened by ILO and WHO in December 2021, and the **Ad-hoc UN inter-agency Task Force on the impact of COVID-19 on seafarers** – established by the UN Secretary-General's Executive Committee on 14 January 2022. Social partner representatives indicated they are awaiting the deliberations of the latter group.

Numerous informants highlighted the ILO's direct role in support of the social partners in the repatriation of **Kiribati seafarers**, who were stranded in ports around the world, when the country closed its borders to prevent COVID-19.<sup>204</sup> As highlighted by a social partner: "the ILO really took charge and pressed the Kiribati government... They would not be home until today without the ILO. After months and dozens of meetings, the combined efforts managed to bring all of these 400 seafarers home, the last ones returning in May 2022".<sup>205</sup>

#### Key outcomes

- ▶ Improved response of Member States allowing crew change, shore leave and seafarer repatriation rights.
- ▶ While the MLC contained protective provisions that stood up to the COVID-19 crisis, the ILC 2022 amendments provide improved protection in crisis and pandemic situations, including repatriation (Standard A 2.5.1), access to internet communications (Regulation 3.1), medical care on board and ashore (Standard A 4.1), investigation and registration of deaths at sea (Standard A4.3).<sup>206</sup>
- ▶ ILO's reputation among the social partners and the UN agencies was enhanced, as was the trust of social partners in UN system.



202 See United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/75/17 on international cooperation to address challenges faced by seafarers as a result of COVID-19, 1 December 2020.

203 Joint statement by ILO, UNCTAD, IOM, FAO, OHCHR, ICAO, WHO, UN Global Compact and IMO, September 2020.

204 Seafaring makes a key contribution to the economy of the Pacific island state of Kiribati, with a training school established by the German shipping industry.

205 Safety4Sea, "[Over 600 i-Kiribati trapped seafarers repatriated 2 years after the beginning of the pandemic](#)", editorial, 10 May 2022.

206 STMLC/Part11/2022. Amendments to the MLC document.

## Preventing child labour and forced labour

Among the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, most results reported during the biennium were focused on strategies and action plans on child labour. Results for P&B Output 7.1 (Capacity on fundamental principles and rights at work) were under-target for the biennium for all indicators, but especially the indicator for countries with integrated programmes on FPRW (Indicator 7.1.1). The HLE analysis of COVID-19 reports against CPO reporting showed that only nine out of 79 entries for Outcome 7 were associated with this output, suggesting relatively low perceptions of COVID-19-specific activities among rapporteurs.

From a variety of ILO, UN and constituent perspectives, there is an emerging consensus that progress in ending child labour has likely been reversed by the pandemic, as deteriorating economic conditions may have forced more families to engage their children in work. This concern was noted by the CEACR in 2020 and echoed in the 5th Global Conference on Child Labour in May 2022 with the Durban Call to Action to End Child Labour.<sup>207</sup> Over the biennium, the ILO was able to maintain momentum on the global alliance towards the achievement of the SDG target 8.7 on child labour, where ILO as secretariat to SDG Alliance 8.7 saw the number of Pathfinder countries increase from 19 to 25.

In 2020, ILO and UNICEF collaborated to produce the Global Estimates on Child Labour, with data collected until the start of 2020.<sup>208</sup> Given that data for the COVID-19 period was not included, an update is in progress with data from 2021. The global estimates show a downward trend in absolute and percentage terms in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, while Africa has seen a continuous rise since 2012. In the chapter devoted to the impact of COVID-19, the report warns that poverty-driven child labour could rise dramatically by 2022 if social protection measures for vulnerable families and children are not put in place.

In May 2020, the IPEC+ Flagship Programme<sup>209</sup> provided an initial framework for responding to the pandemic including leveraging the field presence, mobilizing global and regional networks, producing knowledge and data, investing in gender-responsive monitoring and compliance solutions, building resilience through social dialogue, re-purposing and innovating our operations. The document indicated the intention to re-purpose US\$21 million of existing development cooperation funding towards the COVID-19 response. As part of this effort the IPEC+ programme initiated a series of child labour situation assessments in 15 countries. However, the evaluation was not able to identify a review of the actual effort over the past two years.

The synthesis review of evaluations of child labour projects cited several projects in which progress in the elimination of child labour had been threatened by the pandemic. An evaluation focusing on the decent work deficits in the tobacco sector in the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, noted how school closures during the pandemic had a negative effect on eliminating child labour.

The HLE identified some COVID-19 responses within child labour programmes, though not significant course changes or re-purposing of funds. The HLE country case studies in Argentina and Viet Nam for example, found that ILO's child labour prevention and elimination projects made some small-scale efforts to adjust strategies to respond to the impact of the pandemic.

207 ILO, Press release on "[Global Child Labour Conference agrees Durban Call to Action to end child labour](#)", 20 May 2022. The ILO is responsible for organizing the global conference.

208 ILO and UNICEF. "[Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward](#)", 2021.

209 ILO, IPEC+ Flagship Programme is the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour.

In **Viet Nam**, the ENHANCE child labour prevention capacity-building project re-purposed some of their funds to support their community beneficiaries with material assistance in the form of PPE and education supplies; following the recommendations of the final evaluation in 2021.<sup>210</sup> This mainly revolved around COVID-19 OSH awareness and additional school supplies rather than a course-change, given the advanced stage of the project. According to project staff the project had not explored with its government partners in the Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs whether there was any change in child labour during the period that might be attributed to the impact of COVID-19.

In **Argentina**, the “Offside” project on eliminating child labour in agriculture included COVID-19 prevention awareness in its child labour interventions with agricultural workers. Notably, it also took a livelihood sustainability approach to mitigate child labour among households in the food production sector in the wake of the pandemic. This involved an inter-agency and institutional coordination body, a campaign to promote health, safety and decent work conditions in the Buenos Aires Central Market, and a “decent work observatory” initiated in the market to promote fundamental rights.<sup>211</sup>

Child labour is a traditional part of Iraqi culture, contributing to its persistence in the country. ILO enabled communities in **Iraq** to address child labour during the COVID-19 recovery era by conducting a series of awareness-raising campaigns to counter child labour. The ILO partners organized field visits to 300 business units, raising their awareness on child labour and conducted trainings for teachers, government employees, NGO representatives, police officers and 50 religious leaders, who transmitted the message during Friday prayer in the mosques.

The recent Durban Call to Action to Eliminate Child labour focused increased attention on social protection to address child labour, suggesting that the major work is yet to come in shifting strategies to address the causes of child labour that were exacerbated by the pandemic.

### Occupational safety and health measures

As OSH measures became an urgent priority in the COVID-19 response everywhere, OSH guidance and mitigation measures rose to the top of ILO's response agenda. This culminated in the landmark decision made at the ILC 2022 to recognize OSH as a fundamental principle of decent work, as advocated since the Centenary Declaration.<sup>212</sup> **Reviewing the body of ILO's response, most of the action has concentrated on immediate crisis response to safety in the workplace, while by mid-2021, the guidance narrative shifted to crisis resilient systems.**

The growth in demand from Member States and level of effort on OSH responses to COVID-19 is reflected in P&B reporting, which saw responses surpass the results targets for Output 7.2 (contributed mainly through Indicator 7.2.1– Member states with OSH policies or programmes – 32 compared with the target of 26). The analysis of COVID-19 reports in CPO monitoring aligned with the global attention to OSH issues, in which Output 7.2 accounted for 28 of 79 COVID-19 entries (35 per cent).

210 United States Department of Labor, *Final Performance Evaluation. Technical Support for Enhancing National Capacity to Prevent and Reduce Child Labour in Vietnam*, 2021.

211 Argentina project: OFFSIDE Marking the field. Improve the capacity of labor and agricultural actors to address child labor in agricultural areas of Argentina.

212 ILO, “[International Labour Conference adds safety and health to Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#)”, Press Release, 10 June 2022.

Globally, ILO's early response was to develop guidance on preventive measures in the workplace, including social distancing guidance and risk assessment measures. It collaborated with WHO on developing guidelines, as the lead UN agency on public health. LABADMIN/OSH staff noted that it took some time to develop agreement on guidance policies between the ILO and WHO, where WHO's guidance was initially less stringent based on initial evidence, while ILO responded to the requests of constituents. Other ILO staff were of the view that ILO overstepped its technical mandate in determining matters of physical distancing that differed from those of WHO. Nevertheless, the collaboration between ILO and WHO grew as further guidelines were jointly developed.

As pointed out by a senior ILO officer, the highest priority was to address the protection and health risks of "people who have to go to work" such as essential workers and those in high-risk sectors – health workers, care workers, transport workers and waste collectors. The ILO produced OSH guidance documents across all these areas, but its direct support interventions did not necessarily prioritize the frontline groups, being shaped as they were by existing project opportunities and donor interests.

Both LABADMIN/OSH and SECTOR produced a multitude of guidance documents<sup>213</sup> and action checklists on OSH and COVID-19 mitigation in specific sectors, some of which were produced jointly.<sup>214</sup> The implementation report of the SECTORAL policies department on highlights of the biennium notes 19 sectoral COVID-19 briefs developed through tripartite engagement, documenting the impacts on diverse sectors and actions taken by constituents, as well as ILO tools and responses at the sectoral level for diverse sectors including agriculture, transport, care workers, health and emergency services.<sup>215</sup> Some of these briefs were among the highest downloaded publications of the ILO. Some of these policies and guidelines were adapted and applied by ILO development cooperation interventions in the field. Others were developed in the field and adapted for global application, such as the guide for COVID-19 mitigation in agriculture, originally developed in Mexico.

By 2021, the ILO's policy guidance was more oriented towards establishing public health systems that are resilient to crisis. Marking the World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2021, ILO published a guide on health system response, *Anticipate, prepare and respond to crises*, emphasizing the importance of setting up solid OSH systems and institutional frameworks and consolidating a body of ILO and other agency OSH guidance available to date.<sup>216</sup>

At the field level, ILO's efforts supported the development of national OSH risk assessment systems in coping with the pandemic,<sup>217</sup> and delivering tailored support to constituents and beneficiaries in specific sectors, primarily through development cooperation projects. ILO staff observed that one of the early challenges was the mismatch between the advice health ministries and labour ministries were giving on transmission prevention, which was a critical obstacle to crisis management. The ILO worked to bridge this gap and several HLE country case studies demonstrate ILO's role in strengthening the capacity of labour ministries on COVID-19 OSH interventions, and in helping to build the relationship between ministries of labour and ministries of health.

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213 ILO, "A safe and healthy return to work during the COVID-19 pandemic", Policy Brief. May 2020.

214 ILO, Sectoral Policies Department highlights, 2020–2021 (Geneva: 2021).

215 The sectoral briefs are not restricted to OSH issues and responses. Some of the cross-policy sectoral responses are discussed in the following section addressing sectoral approaches protecting teleworking and platform workers.

216 ILO, "[World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2021](#)", Event, 28 April 2021.

217 ILO, [Protecting workers: OSH in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Rapid needs assessment and response plans: Preparation guidelines for country level interventions](#) (Geneva: 17 April 2021).

In **Viet Nam**, for example, ILO joined WHO in supporting the Health and Environment Management Agency under the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) to develop a guideline on *COVID-19 risk assessment for enterprises and dormitories* primarily aimed at the industrial sector. ILO Viet Nam, through its Better Work programme, assisted the Health and Environment Management Agency to train Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry members in applying the risk assessment tool across various industry sectors. An informant from MOLISA observed that this was the first time that MOLISA and HEMA has collaborated.

ILO also collaborated with WHO in **Madagascar** to facilitate closer engagement between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour to urgently respond to the pandemic in implementing OSH measures. Through ILO's Vision Zero Fund (VZF) leadership, the institutional capacity and position of the Ministry of Labour's OSH policy was significantly strengthened, including through training within the labour inspectorate in the application of the policy on inspection, and the revision of the Labour Code to update OSH articles.<sup>218</sup>

In **Madagascar**, through the VZF project, the ILO made a key contribution to strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Labour's OSH policy on COVID-19, together with labour inspectorate training on the application of the policy. The ILO and WHO collaborated to facilitate the relationship between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour on OSH guidance, resulting in increased relevance of the Ministry of Labour on these issues. The ILO built the capacity of the social partners on the OSH COVID-19 response by training 406 workers' representatives from the Madagascar Workers' Conference (CTM). It also supported the Grouping of Free Enterprises and Partners (GEFP) in coordinating the implementation of COVID-19 OSH measures in member companies together with labour administration. Informants said that the COVID-19 context accelerated the revision of the Labour Code with ILO's support and the inclusion of an OSH chapter.

In **Iraq**, COVID-19 accelerated the need for an OSH policy and a labour inspection policy. ILO utilized a tripartite strategy, engaging the representatives of employers and workers in developing both labour inspection regulations and OSH policy, which are in a final draft version, waiting for the approval of the new Iraqi cabinet.

A large part of the **ILO's support to COVID-19 OSH interventions in the field was carried out sectorally, for example**, in garments and textiles, agriculture, and construction. Two of the ILO's flagship programmes, **the Safety and Health for All** programme and Better Work were especially proactive in adapting and re-purposing to address OSH in specific supply chains.

In the **garment sector**, the **Better Work global flagship programme** delivered wide-ranging COVID-19 OSH messaging and built social partner capacity on OSH across 12 countries. Better Work also took a lead role in the multilateral *Global Call to action to protect workers in the garment sector*, with the goal of protecting workers from the ravages of the pandemic on their jobs and working conditions (see Box 9).

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<sup>218</sup> HLE Madagascar case study.

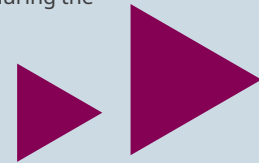


### ► Box 9: Better Work OSH interventions in the garment sector

ILO's flagship programme, 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 make the sector more competitive. Based on HLE interviews in Indonesia, and Viet Nam, as well as evaluations of Better Work programmes in countries and regions during the period, the programme was highly proactive in responding to the impacts of COVID-19, not only in adapting and shifting to remote service delivery, but in producing wide-ranging COVID-19 safety guidance and addressing broader working conditions, such as wages, hours of work, leave, and retrenchment conditions.<sup>219</sup> Better Work's adaptations were based on needs assessments and engagement with employers and workers at enterprise and national sectoral levels. One of Better Work's global initiatives was to set up a COVID-19 portal to provide updates and advice to its industry partners in employers' and workers' organizations.<sup>220</sup>

In **Viet Nam**, Better Work worked with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) and the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) to develop, pilot and disseminate a new app called "GOPY" (which in Vietnamese means to "share ideas"), to spread COVID safety messaging targeting the workforce as well as employers. This is gradually being adopted and used by ILO constituents and workers. The VZF COVID-19 BMZ-funded project also contributed to the dissemination of the app and other training activities on enterprise level COVID-risk assessments in the garment and other sectors.

**Better Work Indonesia** developed online stress management training to create a positive working and living environment for workers and management of the garment industry during the COVID-19 outbreak.



The **VZF** is a G7 initiative, coordinated by the ILO under the **Safety and Health for All** flagship programme, with active country-level and regional projects focusing on garments and textiles, agriculture, and construction supply chains in **Ethiopia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Mexico, Myanmar and Viet Nam**. The project's first response to the COVID-19 outbreak was to carry out a rapid assessment of each country's needs and, based on these, to meet donors and country-level authorities to adjust project plans.

VZF delivered COVID-19 OSH adaptations both through "classic" VZF projects and through a new garment sector COVID-19 response project implemented jointly by SOCPRO and LABADMIN/OSH in collaboration with Better Work. This project was implemented in seven countries – **Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Madagascar, Myanmar and Viet Nam**.<sup>221</sup> This project arose from donor interest in providing further support to the garment sector through both OSH interventions and cash transfers. Supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the project was implemented jointly by ILO Social Protection Department (SOCPRO) and VZF (LABADMIN/OSH). In the early stages of the pandemic, BMZ approached the VZF to take up this project. The OSH component was delivered by Better Work in the countries where Better Work was already on the ground (the cash transfer component is discussed under the **social protection policy section: 4.5**). The OSH component and the cash transfer components were delivered independently. The HLE team interviewed project coordinating staff and partner representatives in **Indonesia, Madagascar and Viet Nam**, and also reviewed the interim and final evaluations of the project. One of the final evaluation findings was that while ILO's contribution

219 ILO, ILO Cluster Evaluation of the RMGP in Bangladesh, 2020; Ruth Bowen, [Independent interim evaluation of Better Work Phase II in Bangladesh](#) (Washington DC: US Department of Labor; 2021).

220 BW COVID-19 portal: <https://betterwork.org/1-better-work-response-to-covid19/>

221 GLO/20/20/MUL. Protecting garment sector workers: Occupational safety and health and income support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

to improving COVID-19 safety as well as wages and working conditions in the garment sector is undeniable, some countries felt that the garment sector already had enough attention.

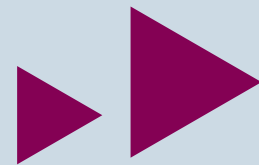
**In agriculture**, the VZF made notable achievements in protecting workers from COVID-19 transmission, both by re-purposing its existing programmes on coffee and other food supply chains, and through new Covid-19 response funding. **Box 10** provides an insight into the COVID-19 interventions in the coffee sector.

### ► **BOX 10: COVID-19 mitigation in the coffee supply chain: Mexico and Viet Nam**

According to the evaluation interviews, the Vision Zero Fund's projects promoting OSH in the coffee sector value chain in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Southeast Asia implemented timely and practical adaptations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>222</sup> While infection waves varied globally, coffee harvesters and processors, often working in close proximity, faced high transmission risks, and workers in remote and indigenous communities have less access to traditional messaging.

In Mexico, the coffee project quickly assessed the needs for COVID-19 prevention awareness in the context of the outbreak early in 2020. The project was instrumental in developing the **Practical Guide for Mitigating and Preventing COVID-19 in Agriculture**, which was adapted and applied in other parts of Latin America and internationally.<sup>223</sup> The project also produced a series of COVID-19 safety protocols and videos, distributed in partnership with **women's coffee growing cooperatives**, larger coffee consortiums and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The interactive nature of the campaign was based on the adaptation of ILO's traditional WIND and WISE methodologies.<sup>224</sup> The protocols for coffee were successfully expanded to other crops – peppers and tomatoes. Constituent interviewees highly valued the attractive nature of the campaign materials.

Viet Nam's OSH intervention in the coffee supply chain, through the German funded project, "Improving Safety and Health in cooperation with the private and public sector in the coffee supply chain in Vietnam) partnered with the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Global Coffee Platform in Viet Nam to integrate preventive COVID-19 awareness in OSH training. This COVID integration into the training materials included both specific references to COVID-19 prevention measures, and also prevention of communicable diseases in general. One of the challenges noted was that the government regulations on distancing and other precautions were constantly evolving during the pandemic, therefore it was difficult to make very specific guidelines. The project was able to reach both larger producers and community-based cooperatives through its partnerships. Viet Nam drew on the guidance materials from Mexico, while benefiting from the later peak of infections in the country. The Global Coffee Platform representatives found the hybrid training approach, including online learning and field testing of the tools engaging, and sees wider application by its members world-wide for the prevention of communicable diseases in the coffee sector beyond COVID-19.



222 RLA/08/EUR. Safety and health in the global coffee value chain, with emphasis on Latin America – VZF.

223 ILO-VZF, [Practical guide for the mitigation and prevention of COVID-19 in agriculture, Version 1.0](#) (Geneva: April 2020).

224 WIND – Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development and WISE – Work Improvement in Small Enterprises.

**As far as reaching MSMEs with COVID-19 guidance** is concerned, ILO provided significant support to enterprise-level OSH protection among MSMEs, including those in the informal economy. The evaluation noted examples in countries across South Asia where ILO contributed significant efforts to **advising enterprises and constituents** on a safe return to work. In **India**, for example, ILO supported small enterprise owners in selected states with hands-on COVID safety advice using flip-books, guidelines and videos explaining how to prepare the workplaces to return to work after lockdown, under the guidance of the regional OSH specialist. In **Sri Lanka**, the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund (UNMPTF) joint ILO–United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) project delivered much needed PPE and psychosocial support services to MSMEs in hard hit districts. The evaluation of this project highlighted the importance of mental health care as part of an OSH response, which is also reflected in the ILO's recent OSH policy narratives.<sup>225</sup>

Indonesia secured funding from Japan to deliver capacity building for OSH at a variety of national, enterprise and community levels. This project strengthened the capacities of relevant government officials, enterprises, OSH professionals, and workers to respond to the present COVID-19 pandemic and future public health crises, and to address other OSH challenges. The project also assessed COVID-19 infection risks and prevention measures at 1,500+ workplaces. OSH doctors advised enterprises based on the assessment results and helped generate action plans to improve COVID-19 prevention measures at the workplaces. It also reached out to informal economy women street vendors with video-based awareness campaigns.<sup>226</sup>

### Protecting wages and working conditions in emerging and non-standard work

The COVID-19 outbreak exposed wages and working condition vulnerabilities for workers in various sectors. The ILO's **Global Wage Report 2020–2021** analysed the trends during the first year of the pandemic and predicted a massive downward trend in wages, and emphasized the importance of collective bargaining and minimum wage setting in the formal sector, while pointing to the biggest impacts on workers in the informal economy.<sup>227, 228</sup> Overall, P&B reporting for the biennium on Output 7.3 (Increased capacity of member States to set adequate wages and promote decent working time) was on target, with 16 Member States reporting measures on minimum wages. However, COVID-19 reporting associated with this output was minimal, with only three entries in the HLE's CPO analysis.

In the formal economy, the **Better Work** programme was proactive in promoting compliance with workers' wages, leave and retrenchment conditions through national level social dialogue and services to member factories, amid the challenges of reduced demand, shrinking production and intermittent closures in the garment industry.<sup>229</sup> Working time and wage issues were specially exposed for workers in new and expanding forms of work during the pandemic, to which the ILO devoted considerable attention.

As documented by the ILO, the public health and social distancing measures introduced because of the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically accelerated work trends such as **teleworking and platform work** (such as Deliveroo, Grab and a multitude of other platform services) in many sectors and regions around the world.

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225 LKA/20/50/UND. Healthy socio-economic recovery of the micro and small enterprise sector of Sri Lanka.

226 ILO, "[Enhancing COVID-19 prevention at and through workplaces](#)", Project Brief, 2022

227 ILO, "[Global Wage Report 2020–2021. Wages and minimum wages in the time of COVID-19](#)", ILO Flagship report, 2021.

228 P&B biennium reporting showed that results on capacity of Member States to set adequate wages and promote decent working time (Output 7.3) reached the target of 16 countries, suggesting the importance that some countries placed on introducing or improving minimum wage systems.

229 For example, US Department of Labor. [Interim evaluation of Better Work Bangladesh Phase II](#) (Washington, DC: 2021),s

Many staff informants<sup>230</sup> highlighted the elevated concern in the Office about the regulation of teleworkers' working hours, wages and OSH concerns, as well as about gendered impacts where women shoulder the greater responsibility for childcare combined with teleworking. There was also an increased demand for advice from national constituents during the crisis on how to regulate teleworking, which was confirmed by the HLE case studies in the Americas.

In response, the INWORK branch produced a comprehensive **guide on teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond** in July 2020 that incorporated best practices, and was downloaded from the web 15,249 times.<sup>231</sup> According to ILO staff this guide was widely utilized, which was confirmed most notably by stakeholder interviews in Mexico. Subsequently, in 2022 the ILO and WHO collaborated in a jointly produced a technical brief on **Safety and Health in Telework**,<sup>232</sup> which was coordinated on the ILO side by LABADMIN/OSH, with support from the Working Conditions and Equality Department during the analysis of working time and work organization issues.

At the national level, ILO support to the regulation of teleworking culminated in legal amendments in several LAC countries, including **Chile, Colombia and Mexico**, where ILO supported the governments to develop new codes on teleworking conditions and wages. In Mexico, for example, in response to demand from the social partners' during the pandemic for teleworking to be regulated, ILO promoted discussion with the government and contributed to developing a teleworking standard. According to the interview with the **Mexican National Consultative Commission on Safety and Health at Work (COCONASST)**, the teleworking standard is almost complete, and a proposal is underway for ILO to provide advice on implementing the standard.

The ILO also highlighted the expansion of digital labour platforms and the risks to rights of workers in the **World Employment and Social Outlook** report on digital labour platforms in 2021.<sup>233</sup> The report raised the risk of exposure to COVID-19 of platform workers and their need for both OSH and social protection. The report received considerable attention, as implied by its 38,238 web downloads, but action on the issue has been slow globally, especially as there are unresolved questions on the classification of platform workers as employees or self-employed, with implications for the regulation of their work. While some governments have introduced regulations to address various working conditions, in many countries their fundamental rights at work are not governed by national legislation, and their situation is complicated by the transnational nature of the industry, with operators/workers falling under multiple international jurisdictions. As argued in the report, "Ensuring that all workers, irrespective of their contractual status, are covered by key labour standards will be critical, as will social dialogue." While multiple policy action recommendations were made, staff informants were of the view that ILO has not sufficiently advanced advocacy at country and transnational levels on decent work for platform workers.

### Protecting informal economy workers and other vulnerable groups

Informal economy workers were thrown into precarious situations by the pandemic and were harder for governments to reach with COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures than workers with formal employment contracts. In P&B reporting against Output 7.4 (Increased capacity of constituents to provide adequate labour protection to workers in diverse forms of work arrangements, including on digital labour platforms, and in informal employment) results exceeded the target for Member States with diagnosis of the informal economy – 25 countries, compared with the target of 14, indicating the elevated attention to the issue. Analysis of CPO reporting and COVID-19 identified only 13 such reports for Output 7.4.

230 Representatives from WORK QUALITY, INWORK, LABADMIN/OSH, SECTOR

231 ILO, [Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. A practical guide](#) (Geneva: 2020).

232 ILO/WHO, [Healthy and safe telework: Technical brief](#) (Geneva: 2022).

233 ILO, [World Employment and Social Outlook 2021: The role of digital labour platforms in transforming the world of work](#), 2021.

INWORK led cross-department coordination on ILO's response in support of informal economy workers through policy briefs, knowledge products and country-level assessments to guide national policy on OSH and social protection measures for informal economy workers (see section 4.5 on social protection).

In early 2020, INWORK initiated a cross-department Task Team on COVID-19 response in support of informal workers and enterprises to assess the impact of COVID-19 on informal workers and develop responses.<sup>234</sup> The team documented the impact of the pandemic on informal economy workers, producing several research and policy briefs.<sup>235</sup> To support the field-level response on informality, the task team also surveyed field officers to gather inputs on the country-level priorities in response to the needs of informal workers and enterprises impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

ILO developed a methodology for impact assessment at country level, in collaboration with UNDP and UN Women, including informal workers' participation in the data collection via a WhatsApp and blog for informal economy workers. The team led the production of 15 country-level assessments of the impact of COVID on informal economy workers, and Q&A guidance to constituents on how to reach informal economy workers, including a joint brief between INWORK and LABADMIN/OSH on OSH guidelines for street workers and vendors.<sup>236</sup> According to several regional and HQ ILO informants, ILO was able to capitalize on the elevated attention paid to informal workers during the period to boost the ongoing drive toward increased formality in countries with high informality.

Examples of direct assistance to informal economy workers included outreach to street vendors in **Indonesia** with COVID-19 prevention awareness, applying the OSH guidelines for street workers. As part of this effort ILO Indonesia ran a video competition on reaching market vendors, which was won by a team of young women whose families belong to these communities.

ILO's work in **India, Nepal and Sri Lanka** through the project "Towards fair and sustainable global supply chains" was significant in channelling direct support to homeworkers in the lowest tier of supply chains in the form of PPE and awareness-raising of the risks of COVID-19 transmission, which was described by ILO informants at HQ and the South Asia region.

At the research and policy level, two major publications were released in 2021, mapping the working conditions of homeworkers and domestic workers worldwide.<sup>239</sup> Both reports describe the impacts of the pandemic on these feminized groups of workers and provided guidance on addressing workers' direct needs as well as policy directions. The report "**Making Decent Work a Reality for Domestic Workers**", released to mark the 10th anniversary of the Domestic Workers' Convention, 2011 (No. 189), highlighted the precarious position of the majority of domestic workers in the wake of the pandemic, whether migrant workers or in their own country, noting that "many being obliged to go to work despite the health risks, others losing their jobs, with no access to income-support measures, putting them and their families at risk of falling into poverty or deeper poverty". The report reviewed government efforts around the world to support domestic workers and made recommendations for their immediate needs and long-term occupational formalization.

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234 Recognizing informality as a cross-cutting issue, INWORK Branch, within the Working Condition Department, coordinates across ILO department on informal economy issues.

235 ILO, "COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy: Immediate responses and policy challenges", ILO Brief, May 2020.

236 ILO Guide. OSH for street workers and vendors.

237 RAS/17/06/JN. Towards fair and sustainable global supply chains: Promoting formalization and decent work for invisible workers in South Asia Project.

238 ILO, [Working from home. From invisibility to decent work](#) (Geneva: 2021).

239 ILO, [Making Decent Work a Reality for Domestic Workers. Progress and Prospects ten years after the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 \(No. 189\)](#) (Geneva: 2021).

Overall, though, the HLE identified little evidence of ILO support at country-level to protect domestic workers following COVID-19, other than the support to **migrant domestic workers** discussed in the following section. Looking to the future, the CEACR report to the 110th session of the ILC in 2022 focused on the need to secure decent work for domestic workers as well as nursing personnel, paving the way to accelerate action to support workers in both sectors.<sup>240</sup>

### Protecting migrant workers and refugees

**▶▶ The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the critical role migrants play as essential workers, including in healthcare, food supply and other key sectors. It has also exposed their vulnerability to the devastating health, economic and social impacts of the pandemic.**

▶ [ILO Migrant workers webpage](#)

### Overall contribution

The landscape of labour migration was dramatically changed by the pandemic, as migration essentially ceased, and many workers were thrown into precarious situations in countries of destination, were repatriated or forced to leave. In this context, migrant workers' needs shifted from recruitment assistance to access to accommodation, legal advice at destination, repatriation support and reintegration. Drawing on ILO staff interviews and country case study interviews (including **Mexico, Thailand and Viet Nam**), as well as existing project evaluations, **the HLE found that ILO was able to substantially pivot its labour migration portfolio to provide relevant protective assistance to migrants affected by COVID-19 at destination and on return.** This builds on the conclusions of the HLE on labour migration for 2016–2020, which assessed the ILO's early response as highly relevant, both in terms of addressing existing needs and priorities that increased in importance (at destination), and in terms of adjusting interventions to the growing importance of returnee migrant issues.<sup>241</sup>

Based on P&B reporting of results achieved under Output 7.5 (Capacity on labour migration), countries providing protective services during the biennium exceeded the target with 29 countries reporting services. According to P&B reporting most of the results were achieved in Asia and the Pacific, while results were also prominent in the Arab States – countries of destination. From the HLE's analysis of CPO results matched with COVID-19 reporting, Output 7.5 represented 32 per cent of COVID-19-related reports for the Outcome, reflecting the robust response to COVID-19 on services to migrant workers.

### Country-level situation assessments

At the global level, ILO's response to the needs of migrant workers was delivered through situation assessments, policy guidance and tools to support evidence-based policy-making and the inclusion of migrant workers and refugee workers in COVID-19 responses. Numerous related policy briefs and research reports were released in 2020 and 2021.

<sup>240</sup> ILO, CEACR. 2021. Committee of Experts on Application of Conventions and Recommendations. 2020 Survey. [Securing decent work for nursing personnel, domestic workers, key actors in the care economy](#). ILC, 110th Session, 2022.

<sup>241</sup> ILO, *High-level independent evaluation of ILO's strategy and action for promoting fair and effective labour migration policies, 2016–2020*, 2021.

ILO developed a “COVID-19 rapid assessment tool and questionnaire”, adapted for 17 rapid assessments covering countries, subregions or areas of work (for example, recruitment). It published a global analysis of these assessments in 2021, including impacts on migrant workers’ rights and recruitment.<sup>242</sup> ILO also launched a dedicated website with all briefs and statements on protecting migrant workers in the workplace during COVID-19.<sup>243</sup>

**At regional level** in South-East Asia, ILO published a brief on the impact of migrant fishers, in collaboration between the Ship to Shore Rights Project and Cornell University: [Rough seas: The impact of COVID-19 on fishing workers in South-East Asia](#). The research provides an empirical analysis of the short-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the region's fishing and seafood trade. It also analyses changes in employment and working conditions for fishers during the pandemic and the relevance of policy responses to the industry and fishers' health and livelihoods.

At the field level, ILO reprogrammed much of its resources across the globe towards direct services in response to COVID-19 for tens of thousands of migrant workers who kept working, were stranded, or were repatriated or forced to leave. These services included PPE, cash transfers, legal aid, shelter, job counselling and reintegration information and skills recognition.

In regions across the world, ILO's migrant worker programmes delivered some of the following protective services during 2020 and 2021:<sup>244</sup>

- ▶ In **Asia and the Pacific**, the regional migrant worker programmes directed their services toward the emergency response. In total an estimated 286,000 migrant workers were reached with food, PPE, and legal support. Over 100,000 received information online. For example, the **TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme** supported 67,070 migrant workers across the six countries of the programme in 2020–2021 with emergency and legal advisory services through the Migrant Resource Centres. The **Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia** project, in partnership with the Migrant Workers Group in Thailand, provided survival kits and information on prevention of COVID-19 to shrimp processing workers in Samut Sakhon province, where 3,000 workers had contracted the virus. The **SAFE and Fair** project,<sup>245</sup> jointly implemented with UN Women in partnership with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), targeting migrant workers in ASEAN countries delivered advisory support and direct support in several ASEAN countries including Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam. In Thailand, the project worked with the State Enterprises Workers Relations Confederation (SERC) to provide services through the Migrant Resource Centre in Songkhla, and COVID-19 assistance to migrant workers in the construction sector in Bangkok. In 2021, the project supported women and men migrant workers with access to COVID-19 vaccinations and over 690 migrant workers were supported with COVID-19 PPE and survival kits.

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- ▶ In **the Arab States**, several thousand migrant workers received emergency food and PPE kits (Kuwait), education/training on OSH (Bahrain) and training on social security, legal advice, PPE and OSH guidance (Jordan) (see **Box 11**).

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- ▶ In **Africa**, ILO supported 182 Ethiopian migrant workers to claim unpaid wages, and the Tunisia trade union helped 5,000 migrant workers with PPE kits. Cash transfers reached 1,700 returning migrant workers in Ethiopia, Lesotho and South Africa.

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- ▶ In **Latin America**, Venezuelan migrants, refugees and nationals in Ecuador and Peru received business start-up capital, Credit and Savings Groups were created in Peru for loans to entrepreneurs, and Colombia gave skills certification to hundreds of migrants and nationals.

242 ILO, [Locked down and in limbo: The global impact of COVID-19 on migrant worker rights and recruitment](#) (Geneva: 2021).

243 See: ILO, [“Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic”](#), Policy Brief, 30 April 2020.

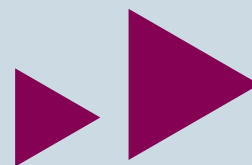
244 Case study material and MIGRANT note provided to HLE.

245 RAS/17/12/UND. Safe and fair: Realizing women migrant workers’ rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region. Funded by the EU and implemented by ILO and UN Women in collaboration with UNODC.

### ▶ **BOX 11: Assistance to migrant workers in Jordan's garment factories**

Prior to the crisis, some 24,000 migrant workers from Bangladesh, Egypt, China, India, Madagascar, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Syrian refugees work in the Al-Hassan industrial zone in Jordan, along with 6,000 local Jordanian workers. Under the ILO's **Work in Freedom project, the Workers' Centre** established in the Al-Hassan industrial zone delivered a wide range of support to women and men migrant workers during 2020 and 2021 in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Some thousands of workers were laid off by their employers when the pandemic struck as orders were dropped or became uncertain. Employers arranged chartered flights and embassies arranged evacuation flights to send these workers back.

With the demand for assistance, the Al-Hasan Workers Centre served workers from five industrial zones, as there were no other avenues for support. Workers who remained to work in Jordan were provided with guidance on wages and leave conditions, PPE, OSH and COVID-19 prevention guidance, while workers returning home were assisted with legal advice, and practical help on transport to the airport during restrictions on movement.<sup>246</sup>



The **HLE Thailand case study** learned from staff and project partner informants that the migration programmes in Thailand and South-East Asia have been very active in ensuring migrant workers were provided with assistance responding to their urgent needs. The programmes used their strong existing components on direct support to migrant workers and revised their activities towards emergency response. The programmes have been working closely with their CSO partners in key provinces across Thailand to deliver emergency assistance to Thai workers.

However, the partners shared observations that "although the programmes are willing to provide assistance and are very supportive, the (ILO) approval process, financial regulations, M&E framework and reporting become burdensome to the partners' beneficiaries". In addition, in terms of **policy advocacy during the crisis**, despite the ILO effort, it appears that the tripartite plus approach became fragmented. Partners said that the ILO should have taken a lead in policy advocacy and **where possible tripartite-plus engagement should have been strengthened, especially during the crisis when migrant workers became more vulnerable.**

As highlighted in **Section 4.3** of the report, ILO also supported returning migrants with **skills recognition** in several South Asian countries, as well as skills development programmes targeting returning migrants and refugees in Indonesia under the COVID-19 response project.

#### **Collaborative action on the future protection of migrant workers**

Looking forward, as labour migration begins to rise again, ILO is participating in various regional networks around the world as well as multilateral agency efforts to guide future directions for fair and rights-based labour migration. On the research front, this includes ILO's collaboration in the joint publication by ADB institute, OECD and ILO, on [Labour migration in Asia. COVID-19 impacts, challenges and policy responses](#), which draws on discussions between policy makers and experts at the 11th ADBI-OECD-ILO Roundtable on Labor Migration: Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic and Building Back Better, held in April 2021.

<sup>246</sup> Project Coordinator communication.



### Protection efforts promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion

The ILO's four pillar COVID-19 policy called for gender and diversity inclusion as a cross-cutting issue, spanning employment, skills, protection and social protection policies, while the 2021 Call to Action on COVID-19 went further in emphasizing the importance of gender-transformative and inclusive path to recovery. (Para I.B.h.)<sup>247</sup>

The ILO made concerted efforts to document the many adverse impacts of the pandemic on the world of work at the intersection of gender and forms of marginalization. It also undertook advocacy on addressing the specific needs of women workers and vulnerable groups in a transformative way. Against this backdrop, the P&B biennium reporting records the lowest expenditure against Outcome 6 (Gender equality and equal opportunities and treatment for all in the world of work) compared with other outcomes, accounting for 2 per cent of total expenditure. Key ILO informants suggested that the relatively low resourcing of gender and diversity concerns reflects the relative interest of the constituents in investing in and seeking resources for these responses, as well as reduced human resources within units of the Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) branch itself.<sup>248</sup> Nevertheless, gender responses to the pandemic are also reflected across other policy outcome areas, including employment and skills development, a range of protection issues, and social protection. Significant attention to gender equality concerns in the ILO COVID-19 response was also reflected in the HLE's analysis of CPO reporting.<sup>249</sup> Major global programmes such as Better Work and the VZF devoted resources to gender equality in sectors where women predominate. ILO achievements on promoting gender equality, equality and inclusion in the pandemic response are discussed further below.

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247 ILO COVID-19 Call to Action.

248 HLE analysis of CPO reporting and COVID-19 reports identified 20 on COVID-19 activities associated with Outcome 6 out of a total of 375 entries.

249 The HLE analysis of COVID-19-related interventions under Outcome 7 showed that 68 per cent of the projects (54/79 entries) were gender-tagged as making a significant contribution to gender equality and non-discrimination or had gender equality as the principal objective. Similarly, the HLE analysis of COVID-19-related actions under social protection, where more than half of reported actions contributed to gender concerns.

## Gender policy actions

From the onset of the pandemic, the ILO's GEDI branch documented the adverse effects on women workers, not only in terms of job loss, but also the gendered impacts of the pandemic on conditions at work including OSH, violence and harassment, and hours and wages in feminized sectors, and the additional unpaid care burdens in the face of lockdowns and work-from-home regulations. At the global level, policy briefs were produced on:

- ▶ Gendered impacts on the labour markets and the need for gender equal national employment policies. These briefs also pointed to the intersectionality of employment impacts on women in informal work and vulnerable groups.<sup>250</sup>

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- ▶ **The phenomenon of increased violence and harassment towards women at work following COVID-19, including towards essential workers in health, where women predominate.** The GEDI branch published a policy brief regarding the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), pointing to its elevated relevance to the impacts of the pandemic.<sup>251</sup> ILO national-level advocacy on the importance of this convention saw increased ratifications during the period.

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- ▶ **Gendered impacts on workers in the health and care sectors and advocacy on investment in the care economy.**<sup>252</sup> ILO's advocacy on increased investment in the care economy post-COVID included improved wages and conditions of workers in healthcare, long-term care facilities, and domestic work. The July 2021 policy brief called for "Promotion of appropriate public and private investment in the care sector, which has the strong potential not only to expand decent work opportunities – especially for women – but also strengthen the resilience of economies and societies and enable workers with family responsibilities to engage in employment." In 2022, ILO's policy work continued to raise the profile of the care economy and health sector, and the need to protect the conditions of workers in these feminized sectors. The CEACR report to the ILC in 2022 called for urgent attention to improve employment opportunity and working conditions in these essential sectors.<sup>253</sup>

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While the policy briefs set out a blueprint for action on all these issues, ILO action on the ground took place through gender mainstreaming in existing programmes, COVID-19 projects targeting women and beneficiaries, as well as through advice to constituents. The **Better Work programme** made intensified efforts in several countries to protect garment sector workers from COVID-19 impacts on women's rights and equality, including discrimination, violence and harassment. In **Indonesia**, for example, where women account for 80 per cent of workers enrolled in factories under Better Work Indonesia, a key concern was to continue protecting workers and women's rights and the continuity of employment. Advice and guidance issued by Better Work Indonesia during this period reflected gender considerations; while specific awareness raising, and campaigning efforts focused on women's rights and issues related to managing work-life balance during COVID-19.<sup>254</sup> As discussed in **Section 4.3**, several employment generation projects targeting women in the COVID-19 recovery were also initiated with COVID-19-response funding.

250 ILO, "[The COVID-19 response. Getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work](#)", Policy Brief, May 2020. ILO, "[Building forward fairer. Women's rights to work and at work at the core of the COVID-19 recovery](#)", Policy Brief, July 2021.

ILO, "[An uneven and gender unequal COVID-19 recovery. Update on gender and employment trends 2021](#)", Policy Brief, October 2021.

251 ILO, [ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\): 12 ways it can support the COVID-19 response and recovery](#), ILO Brief, May 2020.

252 WHO and ILO, [The gender pay gap in the health and care sector. A global analysis in the time of COVID-19 Geneva: 2022](#).

253 ILO, CEACR, Report III. [Part B. ILC 2022, Report of the CEACR to the ILC, Securing decent work for nursing personnel and domestic workers – key actors in the care economy](#), March 2022.

254 ILO, [Better Work Indonesia Annual Report 2020](#), 2021.

## Inclusion and protection of marginalized groups

As an early response, ILO produced a series of briefs assessing the potential impact of the pandemic on several disadvantaged and marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities,<sup>255</sup> indigenous peoples<sup>256</sup> and people living with HIV/AIDS and affected communities. Looking to the recovery, and the rapidly increasing digitization of work, ILO has made efforts to include persons with disabilities in training on e-commerce, for example, through the joint-UN Employment and Livelihoods (EGLR) COVID-19-response project in Indonesia. The ILO Global Business and Disability Network and the Foundation for the Cooperation and Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (Fundación ONCE), partners of the initiative Disability Hub Europe, prioritized the topic of participation by persons with disabilities in digitalization.<sup>257</sup>

The ILO's contribution to countering **discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS and affected communities** were delivered mainly through the partnership with UNAIDS and the global HIV/AIDS programme. Reflecting this partnership, in Indonesia, ILO partnered with UNAIDS and local NGOs to train people from a range of backgrounds affected by HIV/AIDS to reach out to the private sector to conduct awareness raising on equal opportunity rights and for people and communities affected by HIV/AIDS. Informants to the evaluation of the project conveyed their increased sense of empowerment through the training.

The HLE learned of valuable initiatives to assess the needs of indigenous communities in the face of the pandemic, frequently isolated from COVID-19 information, and whose livelihoods are threatened by mobility restrictions. The ILO's **Indigenous Navigator initiative** used a participatory community-based methodology to gather rich understanding of the impacts of the pandemic on indigenous communities in 11 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The report published in October 2020 makes recommendations on how to best support their inclusion in COVID-19 mitigation and a resilient recovery.<sup>258</sup> The initiative also prepared a specific study on the impacts of the pandemic on women in indigenous communities, highlighting their specific vulnerabilities.<sup>259</sup> The HLE was not able to identify the extent to which the recommendations have been applied overall, but specific projects under the LABADMIN/OSH portfolio addressed the needs of ethnic minority people working in plantation crops such as coffee in the Americas and South East Asia, ensuring that information was accessible in local languages and by visual media.

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255 ILO, "[COVID-19 and the World of Work: Ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities at all stages of the response](#)", Policy Brief, 4 June 2020.

256 ILO, "[COVID-19 and the world of work. A focus on indigenous and tribal peoples](#)", Policy Brief, May 2020.

257 ILO and Fundación Once. [An Inclusive digital economy for persons with disabilities](#), February 2021.

258 WGIA and ILO, [The impact of COVID-19 on indigenous communities: Insights from the Indigenous Navigator](#), 2020.

259 WIGA and ILO, [Indigenous women's realities: Insights from the Indigenous Navigator](#), 2020.

## ACTION PROMOTING UNIVERSAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

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**▶▶ The pandemic has exposed pronounced gaps in social protection coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy across all countries. These have left a number of population groups, including women, children and workers in different forms of employment and in the informal economy, very vulnerable.**

▶ World Social Protection Report 2020–22

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### KEY POINTS

- ▶ The pandemic has exposed the urgency of maintaining and increasing efforts to build universal, comprehensive, adequate, and sustainable social protection systems. Some 1,891 social protection measures were introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, but many of these were temporary and insufficient. The crisis has also impacted countries' resources, creating additional challenges.
- ▶ With social protection elevated on the agenda of governments, demand for ILO's support has greatly increased – for example, annual requests to strengthen unemployment protection schemes increased from five pre-pandemic to 29 in 2020.
- ▶ The ILO supported Member States to identify needs and gaps and to conduct impact assessments in all regions, ensuring that developments were guided by social dialogue and the ILO normative framework.
- ▶ Existing programmes were adapted, and new support mobilized to reflect a shift in priorities from long-term system building to immediate support for affected people.
- ▶ Although the ILO is not normally involved in delivering emergency cash transfer, during COVID they sometimes allowed the ILO to be at the table during the humanitarian phase, giving it an entry point for the design of longer term approaches in the recovery. However, working in this area requires speed and agility that the ILO may not always be able to offer. Working with other UN partners, the ILO did play a central role in shaping joint COVID-19 cash transfer and temporary wage subsidies in 20 Member States.
- ▶ The pandemic highlighted how social protection systems needed to be sustainable, resilient and responsive to shocks. The ILO supported national social protection strategies or legislation, promoted the integration of contributory and tax-funded measures to extend coverage, improved information management systems, supported financial sustainability checks of social security schemes and feasibility studies on the extension of coverage, including workers in the informal economy.
- ▶ The crisis exposed the precarious situation of marginalized groups and vulnerable populations, and the ongoing relevance of the ILO's work in supporting these groups. Women were disproportionately affected and, in more than 50 per cent of the countries, the ILO responded to the pandemic by implementing social protection interventions contributing primarily or significantly to gender equality.

## Context

More than 4 billion people in the world are still not covered by any social protection system.<sup>260</sup> Only a third of the world's working-age population have their income security protected by law in the event of sickness. Only 35.4 per cent of the global labour force have effective access to employment injury protection. Only 18.6 per cent of unemployed workers worldwide have effective coverage for unemployment and thus actually receive unemployment benefits.

The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated pre-existing labour market and structural socioeconomic inequalities within and across countries.<sup>261</sup>

- ▶ The crisis had a disproportionately severe impact on low- and medium-skilled workers and on self-employed workers, and on those who could not work from home.

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- ▶ More than 60 per cent of the global employed population – some 2 billion men and women – make their living in the informal economy. Most often they are neither affiliated with contributory schemes nor reached by narrowly targeted social assistance.

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- ▶ Migrants and the forcibly displaced were among the first to lose their jobs and faced significant barriers to re-entering the workforce. They also confronted many challenges in accessing social protection due to the lack of citizenship or legal residency status, and in many cases the informal nature of their employment.

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- ▶ Pre-existing barriers and inequalities faced by indigenous peoples and people with disabilities were further accentuated by COVID-19. Ethnic minority communities and lower income groups have also accounted for disproportionately high rates of infections and fatalities.

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- ▶ Women were also more adversely affected by the crisis, either from losing their job more often as being proportionally employed in sectors more impacted by the pandemic, or by facing heavier workload such as in the health sector where women make 70 per cent of the workforce. Closure of schools, childcare services, and long-term care homes brought disproportionately additional tasks on to women.

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- ▶ More than 800 million children and young people were also affected by the closure of schools, universities and childcare services.

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<sup>260</sup> The right to social security and an adequate standard of living is recognized in a range of human rights conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 22 and 25). The ILO promotes policies and supports countries to set adequate levels of social protection to all members of society. The ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), and the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) are among the key international social security standards adopted by the ILO's tripartite constituents.

<sup>261</sup> ILO, [World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social protection at the crossroads – in pursuit of a better future](#), 2021.

To protect health, jobs and incomes, the pandemic led countries into unprecedented policy responses. According to the ILO Social Protection Monitor,<sup>262</sup> since February 2020 a total of 211 countries and territories introduced 1,891 social protection measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Social protection measures adopted in response to the pandemic addressed inter alia:

- ▶ income protection, such as sickness benefits, old age, survivor and disability benefits, social assistance, cash transfers and other support;
- ▶ unemployment protection, such as preventing job losses and supporting those who lost their jobs;
- ▶ access to health care, including for vulnerable groups, such as migrants;
- ▶ family leave and care policies, such as childcare and other social services;
- ▶ protection of jobs and the liquidity of enterprises through job retention schemes, waiver of contributions, modifying temporarily the payment of social security contributions and tax payments for enterprises;
- ▶ adapting administrative procedures and delivery mechanisms.

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the urgency to maintain and increase efforts to build universal, comprehensive, adequate, and sustainable social protection systems. However, many measures were temporary and not sufficient to respond to peoples' needs. The crisis has also impacted countries' resources and created additional challenges for the adoption and implementation of universal social protection systems.

### ILO Action

The need to respond to the crisis has put social protection high on the agenda of governments and has also increased the demand for ILO's support in designing and implementing emergency social protection responses. Irrespective of the countries' social protection systems, the ILO received in particular a large number of requests to build and strengthen unemployment protection schemes. The annual number of such requests increased from five (pre-COVID-19 pandemic) to 29 in 2020.<sup>263</sup>

### Assessing social protection gaps and needs

Overall, the ILO was agile in responding to the demands of constituents. Conversations were promptly held by SOCPRO with regional specialists in the four regions. At global level, the Office developed tools and guidelines, such as the rapid social protection calculator for COVID-19 to support countries in making rapid adjustments to social protection systems in response to the pandemic.<sup>264</sup> At country level, the Office provided support to **needs, gaps and impact assessments** in all regions. For example, the project teams of the EU-funded Improving Synergies between Social Protection and Public Finance Management (SP&PFM) programme engaged with governments, social partners and civil society organizations on the COVID-19 pandemic responses. The programme supported **impact assessments**, focusing on workers in the informal economy in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Togo and Uganda as well as the development of options to build back better in the recovery phase post-pandemic in Ecuador, Myanmar, Peru and Togo. In Jordan, the Office conducted an **analysis of social protection gaps** to inform the development of an ILO–Social Security Corporation Emergency Unemployment and Employment Stabilization Fund. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the ILO contributed to the government

262 ILO, "[Social Protection Monitor: announced measures throughout the world](#)", SPM database, updated 30 September 2022.

263 ILO, [Global Flagship Programme: Building social protection floors for all. Report of the first phase 2016–2020](#), October 2021.

264 ILO, "[Resource: Rapid social protection calculator for COVID-19](#)", 2020.

report entitled “Examining the Social Impact of COVID-19” and supported the Government in exploring options for an unemployment insurance scheme. In Lebanon, assistance was provided for a **quantitative assessment** of social protection needs and gaps. In Madagascar, the ILO jointly with UNIDO published a **rapid assessment** of the impact of the COVID-19 on jobs and production and possible recovery actions including extending social protection coverage. In West Africa, the ILO launched rapid assessment surveys to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work, focusing on the informal sector. Rapid assessments were conducted through WhatsApp and telephone interviews. In several countries the ILO provided support to national statistical offices to build capacities in conducting these types of surveys.

### Developing social protection responses through social dialogue

While the crisis required the ILO to redirect resources to COVID-19-related deliverables, support to the Member States continued to be guided by **social dialogue** and the ILO normative framework. The ILO facilitated national dialogues and evidence-based costing, fiscal space and impact analyses for the assessment and design of unemployment insurance and universal health protections, which were at the heart of COVID-19 responses in many countries. In Mozambique for example, ILO participated in the **Technical Advisory Group** also involving the Northern Ireland Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Sweden, the World Bank, UNICEF and WFP, created to support Government of Mozambique (through the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Action) to design and implement an adequate response to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations. Effective social dialogue informed the national social protection strategy and emergency response plans. In garment-producing countries most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and with limited fiscal space, the ILO mobilized resources from development partners in support of the immediate needs of affected workers. Governments were simultaneously assisted in developing rights-based social protection systems guided by international labour standards. The evaluation synthesis noted the “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. This required consultation with global brands, manufacturers, and employers’ and workers’ organizations”.<sup>265</sup> The ILO’s involvement ensured that **social partners were included** in the process of designing and implementing job retention programmes in Bangladesh and Ethiopia, as well as income-support measures, in countries such as Indonesia and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, reaching more than 45,000 beneficiaries.

### Re-purposing social protection projects and developing new interventions

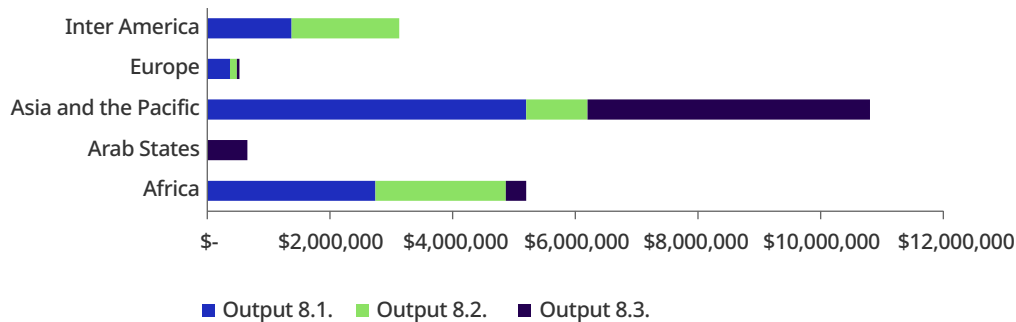
To respond to these renewed and pressing demands for support, the ILO **adapted ongoing programmes and mobilized additional support**. The pandemic led national governments to a shift priorities from the traditional delivery chain focusing on long-term system building to creating immediate impacts on people in order to mitigate the socioeconomic effects of the crisis. The evaluation found that more than US\$20.3 million in development cooperation projects under Outcome 8 were (re-)directed to the COVID-19 response. The Asia and the Pacific and the African regions re-purposed or mobilized higher development cooperation resources for social protection in response to the crisis (**Figure 9**). Overall, re-allocations supported more frequently policy-related interventions (Output 8.1.), but with some variations across regions. In the Arab States for example, the ILO primarily focused on social protection interventions to build the capacities of constituents (Output 8.3). According to the evaluation survey, constituents in Asia and the Pacific found the ILO more effective than in other regions in responding to the crisis through social protection interventions. Informants from Africa pointed out the ILO’s limited staffing capacity in

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<sup>265</sup> 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. A synthesis review](#), 2021.

the region, with one social protection specialist covering sometimes more than 15 countries. As noted earlier, social protection coverage in the region also has a very low baseline. To address these issues, in November 2021, the ILO launched a regional social protection strategy with a view to achieving a target of 40 per cent social protection coverage for Africa by 2025 (Figure 21).

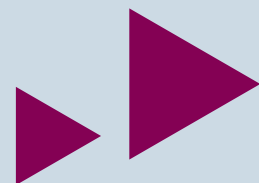
**FIGURE 21: RE-PURPOSED OR NEW RESOURCES (IN US\$) PER REGION FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION PROJECTS UNDER OUTCOME 8.**



According to informants, **donors proved flexible** and willing to re-orient activities to support new priorities. In the Arab States for example, the Regional Office relied strongly on development cooperation projects to mitigate the lack of internal resources to support countries on social protection. These projects were used to supplement the DWT expert with an array of international experts. This applied to both adapting existing projects and starting new projects. A number of UN SDG Fund projects (in Costa Rica, Mexico, and Sao Tome and Principe) also re-purposed funding to better respond to the socioeconomic needs arising from COVID-19. Another example of adaptive management is provided by the EU-funded SP&PFM programme.

**▶ BOX 12: Improving synergies between Social Protection and Public Finance Management**

The EU-funded “Improving synergies between Social Protection and Public Finance Management” programme provided the flexibility to respond to countries’ needs. Funds were re-purposed for the eight countries receiving three-years of support from the programme (Angola, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Nepal, Paraguay, Senegal and Uganda). These projects were able to rapidly engage with the government and social partners and provided technical support to assess the impact of the crisis and design the social protection related COVID-19 response. In addition, a total of EUR 2 million were allocated to support 10 countries (Bangladesh, Cabo Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, Ecuador, Malawi, Myanmar, Nigeria, Peru, Sri Lanka and Togo) in strengthening their social protection systems in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.






### Mobilizing and delivering emergency cash transfers

Emergency cash transfers and income support are not normally the core mandate of the ILO. Emergency cash transfers are most often a short-term option that do not look into longer term system and policy changes which are required to establish and implement a functioning social protection system. However, according to informants and previous evaluations, it is important for the ILO to be at the table during the humanitarian phase as response plans are elaborated, decisions taken, and resources committed, which will influence recovery. According to informants, the ILO has the capability to bring social partners into these consultations and can seize emergency cash transfers as an entry point for the design of long-term contributory (for example, unemployment insurance, sickness benefits) or non-contributory social protection systems as well as to extend social security coverage to workers in the informal economy.

With support from BMZ, the ILO supported the design and implementation of **emergency wage subsidies** and cash transfers targeting about 210,000 workers in the garment sector in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The project started in September 2020 but faced some challenges and remains at different stages of progress. Funds were released in Ethiopia, Indonesia (for a first phase) and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. However, tripartite consultations are still on-going in Bangladesh and beneficiaries have still to be selected in Cambodia. Cash transfers have not yet been operated in those two countries.<sup>266</sup> Evaluation informants expressed the dual view that, on the one hand, emergency cash transfers were relevant to influence social protection transformations, but, on the other hand, this modality challenged limited capacities and institutional agility in the ILO. As one staff member said: "Some other conditionalities may apply to deliver cash transfers, such as the willingness of the government to implement this modality, the scale of the intervention, institutional capacities in the country, partnerships."

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 **We developed the concept note in 2 or 3 days, but it took months to get the first dollars through and then we needed to recruit etc. In a crisis you need speed but we had to contend with a bureaucratic process to release the funds - supplier forms, sending off to Lima... Meanwhile weeks and months are passing by. The ILO needs to be there on the ground when the crisis is really big and happening.**

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Initially, the lack of a policy and operational framework as well as divergent opinions about the opportunity to engage the Office in cash transfers brought staff into a vacuum. To address this gap, PARDEV developed in 2-3 weeks a guidance brief on the development of cash transfers that some staff found useful in the COVID crisis context as signalling the ILO's willingness to operate such modality. However, the note has remained internal and was neither widely circulated nor institutionally endorsed. The evaluation synthesis and informants reported a lack of corporate policy framework on emergency cash transfers in the ILO. SOCPRO has recently commissioned a position paper on this matter.

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<sup>266</sup> L. Nycander, Stakeholder Workshop. 10 March 2022. Preliminary findings of the Independent final evaluation of "Protecting garment sector workers: Occupational safety, health, and income support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic" project. PowerPoint presentation, 2022.

### Supporting countries in setting up and delivering emergency cash transfers

In countries where there was no comprehensive social protection system in place, the ILO also **supported governments in implementing ad hoc mechanisms to deliver emergency cash transfer** programmes, sometimes in addition to contributing to a delivery of emergency cash transfers. The ILO played a central role in shaping UN joint COVID-19 responses that led to the delivery of cash transfers and temporary wage subsidies in 20 Member States, benefitting, for example, almost 680,000 households in Cambodia, where 350,000 workers also benefited from a temporary wage subsidy scheme.<sup>267</sup> Some of the ILO's interventions and achievements include:<sup>268</sup>

- ▶ Timor-Leste: With the support from the COVID-19 Multi Partner Joint Trust Fund, the ILO led development partners on the UN side and provided direct technical assistance throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of the COVID-19 social cash transfer. The cash transfer programme provided US\$100 a month for two months to 300,000 households.

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- ▶ Mozambique: The ILO supported the upscaling of an existing cash transfer programme, benefitting 592,000 households, and the establishment of a new cash transfer programme targeting 990,000 beneficiaries not previously covered. The first phase of a new income support programme for vulnerable groups attracted over US\$75 million.

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- ▶ Zambia: The ILO supported the implementation of the emergency cash transfer programme in collaboration with other UN agencies – UNICEF, WFP, UNDP and other non-profit organizations. The ILO supported studies to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the informal economy and recovery needs assessments for populations in the informal economy.

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- ▶ Malawi: The ILO supported the implementation of the COVID-19 pandemic urban cash intervention, which targeted more than 300,000 Malawians who participate in small-scale trade to address the escalated urban poverty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This was an extension of the existing social cash transfer programme, which targets rural dwellers. The Office contributed to the development of a rapid assessment and registration criteria with a methodology involving innovative targeting techniques that applied a blend of geographical mapping and vulnerability assessment exercises on the ground. The initiative used electronic payment system (mobile money).

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- ▶ Pakistan: The ILO conducted a rapid assessment of income and job losses as a result of the pandemic, which helped the Government set up an emergency cash transfer programme that provided 12 million poor and vulnerable households with a one-off payment of 12,000 Pakistan rupees (US\$75).

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- ▶ Jordan: The ILO supported the design and implementation of the Emergency Unemployment and Employment Stabilization Fund (EUESF) for the COVID-19 pandemic to provide immediate social protection benefits to vulnerable workers and gradually integrate them into the national social security scheme.

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- ▶ Nigeria: The ILO supported an increase of cash transfer programme beneficiaries from 2 million to 3 million people by contributing to the extension of the national social registries.

267 GB.344/PFA/1(Rev.1)

268 ILO, [Global Flagship Programme. Building social protection floors for all. Report of the first phase 2016–2020](#), 2021.

### ► BOX 13: Innovating with a “Basket Fund” in Madagascar

In response to the crisis and its effects on the informal sector, the ILO joined forces with the Groupement des Entreprises Malgaches (GEM) to set up a “Basket Fund” project to support workers in companies in this hard-hit sector affected by the health crisis. This innovative approach consisted of opening an account to which candidate companies could subscribe and contribute in cash or in kind (food, fuel, etc.) to support workers made redundant and on technical unemployment without insurance. The ILO formulated and presented the idea to the GEM and recruited a consultant for coordination, contacting companies, collecting donations. WFP provided storage and distribution for the ILO. The Basket Fund was in operation for one year, from August 2020 to July 2021. The overall effect of the operation is estimated at nearly 430 million Ariary, divided into cash donations, food and non-food items, medical equipment and medicines, and services. As a result, 3,402 working families were able to benefit from cash assistance through a money transfer by mobile money; 559 families with food and non-food items, and 134 families of workers from companies located in the southern part of Madagascar received a 50 kg bag of rice per family. Respirators for medical use were also given to public hospitals and private clinics. This initiative has also enabled the GEM to better know the ILO, which gained in visibility, and bring the WFP closer to the GEM. The Secretary General of the Workers’ Representatives (CTM) was invited to join this process and bipartite CTM-GEM conferences were organized.

### Formulating policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis

The ILO’s approach to social protection is based on **international instruments and normative standards**, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 22 and 25), the Convention 102 on minimum standards of social security, and the ILO’s Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202). In 2016, the ILO launched the *Global Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection for All* to propose concrete measures and activities to support the design and implementation of sustainable national social protection systems, including floors, in target countries. The first phase of the programme (2016–2010) articulated four pillars: (i) in-country support; (ii) cross-country policy advice; (iii) knowledge development and sharing; and (iv) strategic partnerships. Evaluation informants indicated that the **conceptual framework** of the programme proved robust and remained valid during the pandemic. Building largely on its original design, the programme’s ToC and priorities were refined for the second phase (2021–2025), including by adding a thematic area on “Adaptation of social protection systems to new and emerging challenges”.

At global level, the ILO integrated Social Protection in all four pillars of the **policy framework** for tackling the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic also informed the discussions and conclusions of the **ILC** in June 2021, which noted that the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis “[...] add further urgency to establishing universal social protection systems adapted to the developments in the world of work that are resilient, effective, inclusive, adequate and sustainable over the long term.”<sup>269</sup> The ILC requested the Director-General to submit an action plan on social protection (social security) to the GB at its 343rd Session. Universal social protection – including access to unemployment protection, adequate paid sick leave and sickness benefits, and health and care services – was also put forward in the **Global Call to Action**.<sup>270</sup> In March 2022, the GB requested the Office to prepare future programme and budget proposals “with a view to furthering measures aimed at securing and extending social protection for migrant workers and their families through all relevant ILO means of action”.<sup>271</sup>

269 ILO, [Resolution concerning the second recurrent discussion on social protection \(social security\)](#), ILC.109/Resolution III (19 June 2021).

270 ILO, [Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient](#), ILC.109th Session (2021).

271 ILO, [Decision on securing social protection for migrant workers and their families: Challenges and options for building a better future](#), GB.344/POL/1 (2022), para. 27.

At country level, the COVID-19 crisis also highlighted the urgency of strengthening social protection systems to ensure that they are sustainable, resilient and responsive to shocks. The ILO's response entailed promoting the development of social protection systems that are anchored in sound legal frameworks and backed by sustainable financing. In response to the crisis and to constituent's demands, the Office emphasized the integration and coherence between contributory and non-contributory schemes, coordination with social, economic and fiscal policies, and support to extending coverage to workers in the informal economy. In Thailand for example, the Office advised the Government to not allow drawing on pension funds for emergency needs and to strengthen contributory social protection. Over the course of the biennium, the ILO reported P&B results in 25 countries (Output 8.1) in designing and developing **national social protection strategies or legislation**, promoting the integration of contributory and tax-funded measures that led to extensions of coverage and the comprehensiveness and adequacy of protection in relation to health and unemployment.<sup>272</sup> The ILO also assisted in the development of legislation encompassing several social protection branches or an overarching framework for the sector, and in the design and implementation of new benefits and schemes – and the extension of existing ones – to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Sri Lanka for example accelerated plans to work on income security focused on tourism workers, which will serve as a pilot for other sectors.

### Strengthening the governance and financial sustainability of social protection systems

The ILO reported results in 32 countries on strengthening the **governance and financial sustainability** of systems (Output 8.2) during the biennium.<sup>273</sup> Interventions increasing the capacity of Member States to improve the governance and sustainability of social protection systems in response to the crisis covered several dimensions.

- ▶ **Governance, institutional coordination, and administrative capacities:** The ILO contributed to improvements of information management systems and technological infrastructure in 15 countries. In Nigeria, for example, the Office supported the increase in the number of cash transfer programme beneficiaries from 2 million to 3 million people by contributing to the extension of the national social registries. In Mozambique, the ILO also helped build a registry system for informal workers that was transitioned to the social security institution for sustainability. In Senegal, the Office has supported the development of the Dashboard for monitoring the performance indicators of social security institutions. This digital tool allows the Ministry of Labour to have real-time information on the efficiency and performance of social security institutions and to produce aggregated statistics on the social security sector. The impacts of COVID-19 on the performance indicators of social security institutions were analysed from November 2020 to March 2021, using this tool in particular, and recommendations were made for better resilience of these institutions in the face of shocks.
- ▶ **Financial management and fiscal, financial and economic sustainability:** The ILO supported financial sustainability checks of social security schemes, advised on investment management, as well as on feasibility studies on the extension of coverage through actuarial valuations. Some of the countries that were supported include Ghana, Malaysia, Nigeria and Thailand. In Nepal, for example, government officials lauded the ILO's support in 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.<sup>274</sup> In Swaziland, through a RBSA project, the ILO provided support to the establishment of an unemployment benefit fund.

272 GB.344/PFA/1(Rev.1)

273 GB.344/PFA/1(Rev.1)

274 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 - A synthesis review. (Evaluation Office, 2021).

- ▶ **National statistical capacities and monitoring the SDGs:** As many as 15 countries improved the availability and quality of their social protection data, including the monitoring of SDG indicator 1.3.1. Constituents' capacity building was conducted virtually, including through the Turin Centre's Social Security Academy. The social protection component of the course "Work and Employment for a Sustainable Future" was launched in an effort to expand outreach.

Interventions aimed also at strengthening the resilience of countries. In Eswatini for example, the Government requested the ILO's support for the establishment of an Unemployment Benefit Scheme (UBS) as part of measures towards comprehensive social security reforms and efforts to mitigate the impact of future crises. In response, the ILO developed a RBSA project aimed at the establishment of the UBS as part of social protection system building in the country. Despite such achievements, supported by a body of conventions and recommendations (for example, R205<sup>275</sup>), several informants expressed the opinion that the ILO has had limited engagement in the past on building the capacities of national constituents to prepare and confront systemic shocks.

▶▶ **"Being hit by a war is not the same thing as being hit at work individually. If your entire community is hit as well, and nobody else can help you, and the government systems and the government capacity to help is also overwhelmed, because of the scale of the shock... Obviously covariant shocks versus idiosyncratic shocks are different than I think we need to make provision for. What do we do specifically for covariant shocks? I think the theory of change of the ILO is around idiosyncratic shocks throughout the lifecycle. But it doesn't take into account these risks that hit communities at large and obviously jeopardize even the government capacity to develop social protection for the regular contingencies."**

### Increasing capacities to integrate social protection in comprehensive policy responses

The ILO also contributed to results in relation to the adoption of comprehensive **integrated responses to address COVID-19** that included social protection in 13 countries.<sup>276</sup> The ILO provided technical expertise on integrating social protection policies, several of which seek to expand social protection coverage to workers in the informal economy. In Pakistan, the ILO focused on extending social protection coverage to informal workers and has also been working towards the design of Pakistan's first unemployment insurance programme. Knowledge products were also developed to provide technical guidance and share country experiences.

275 ILO, [ILO Standards and COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) FAQ – Version 3.0](#), 13 April 2021; ILO, [Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 \(No. 205\)](#).

276 GB.344/PFA/1(Rev.1)

## Developing capacities and knowledge products

SOCPRO developed 12 **policy publications** concerning social protection. The Regional Office in Bangkok also published a first brief as early as 24 March 2020.<sup>277</sup> A policy brief was published in April 2020 to share experiences and response measures from countries to inform upstream policy options for constituents and partners.<sup>278</sup> The Office also promoted unemployment protection<sup>279</sup> as well as child and family benefits, old-age pensions, disability benefits and social assistance.<sup>280</sup> Other briefs addressed issues such as income support and health protection,<sup>281</sup> migrant workers,<sup>282</sup> or the informal economy.<sup>283</sup> The ILO's *World Social Protection Report 2020–2022* was launched in September 2021 and was downloaded more than 13,000 times. The findings of the report, together with the ILO estimates on the financing gap for a social protection floor, supported the case for social protection in the UN Secretary-General's initiative on a Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection (see Section 406 below). Altogether, the number of policy publications produced by SOCPRO has been moderate compared to other departments, such as EMPLOYMENT which released 33 COVID-related policy publications, WORKQUALITY which delivered 32, or SECTOR which produced 31 sectoral briefs. Furthermore, the average number of downloads per policy publication was much lower for SOCPRO than for other departments (for example, more than 9,000 downloads on average per publication from the Research department, more than 8,000 for EMPLOYMENT as well as for SECTOR, and slightly over 2,600 for SOCPRO).

More than 70 country pages with a section on COVID-19 were created on the Social Protection Platform.<sup>284</sup> Knowledge products and tools were made available on a COVID-19 portal installed on the Social Protection Platform.<sup>285</sup> Furthermore, the Office set up the ILO Social Protection Monitor interactive dashboard which presents an overview of more than 1,600 national social protection response measures announced in 209 countries and territories.<sup>286</sup> The tool was used for advocacy to showcase countries reacting to the crisis through social protection measures, and for learning and uptake by presenting how they were responding. The Office also developed a range of tools and policy advice with regard to the costing, financing, and long-term sustainability of social protection schemes, including a Rapid Social Protection Calculator<sup>287</sup> to help cost and scope cash transfer interventions.

Capacity building of constituents was conducted virtually, including through the Turin Centre's Social Security Academy. The social protection component of the course "Work and Employment for a Sustainable Future" was launched to expand outreach.

277 ILO-UNESCAP, [Social protection responses to the Covid-19 crisis. Country responses in Asia and the Pacific. The story so far and future considerations](#), 2020.

278 ILO, "[Social protection responses to the COVID-19 crisis: Country responses and policy considerations](#)", ILO Brief, 23 April 2020.

279 ILO, "[Unemployment protection in the COVID-19 crisis: Country responses and policy consideration](#)", Policy Brief, 16 September 2020.

280 ILO, "[Social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in developing countries: Strengthening resilience by building universal social protection](#)", ILO Brief, 14 May 2020.

281 ILO, "[Sickness benefits during sick leave and quarantine: Country responses and policy considerations in the context of COVID-19](#)", ILO Brief, 14 May 2020.

282 ILO, "[Social protection for migrant workers: A necessary response to the COVID-19 crisis](#)", ILO Brief, 23 June 2020.

283 ILO, "[Extending social protection to informal workers in the COVID-19 crisis: country responses and policy considerations](#)", ILO Brief, 8 September 2020.

284 ILO, "[Social Protection News](#)".

285 ILO, "[Social Protection Response to the COVID-19 Crisis](#)".

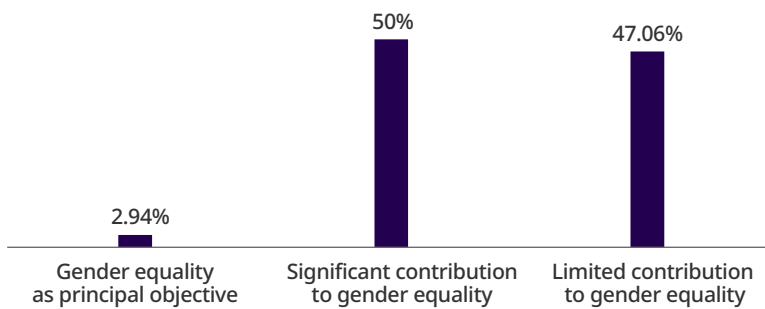
286 ILO, "[Social Protection Responses to COVID-19 Crisis around the World](#)".

287 ILO, Resource: [Rapid social protection calculator for COVID-19](#) database, accessed 12 October 2022.

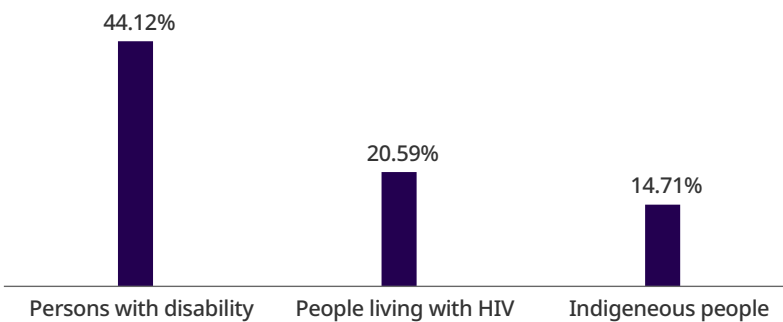
**Targeting vulnerable groups, including migrants and informal workers.**

The COVID-19 crisis exposed the precarious situation of **marginalized groups and vulnerable populations** around the world including: women with home-care needs who were dropping out of the labour force; migrants returning to their home countries without revenue or social protection, or finding themselves stranded, jobless and without social protection in destination countries; informal workers without income support or savings making lockdowns impossible to follow; and disabled people and people living with health conditions confronted with difficult access to health care. The pandemic exposed these vulnerabilities and the ongoing relevance of ILO's work in supporting these groups, and in guiding improvements in national policy frameworks and social protection systems. In more than 50 per cent of the countries,<sup>288</sup> the ILO responded to the pandemic by implementing social protection interventions contributing primarily or significantly to gender equality (Figure 22). Persons with disabilities were among the beneficiaries of COVID-19-related social protection interventions in more than 44 per cent of the country programmes (Figure 23).

**FIGURE 22: PERCENTAGE OF ILO COUNTRY PROGRAMMES WITH COVID-19-RELATED SOCIAL PROTECTION INTERVENTIONS CONTRIBUTING TO GENDER EQUALITY**



**FIGURE 23: PERCENTAGE OF ILO COUNTRY PROGRAMMES WITH COVID-19-RELATED SOCIAL PROTECTION INTERVENTIONS TARGETING VULNERABLE GROUPS**



<sup>288</sup> Based on the analysis of the CPO database. The sample identified 34 countries implementing COVID-related interventions under Outcome 8.

In targeting or supporting vulnerable populations, the ILO's interventions adopted various forms, three of which are highlighted below.

- ▶ **Women:** In Madagascar, the Office facilitated the affiliation of 100 households headed by vulnerable women in two regions of southern Madagascar to the Basic Health Centers by paying their subscription in order to be able to benefit from health care and medicines for a period of 12 months. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the ILO ensured that constituents nominated women representatives and raised constituents' awareness on specific gender concerns that needed to be considered while proposing recovery policies. Women were the priority in the cash transfer for a mother and early childhood programme and formed more than 80 per cent of garment workers who received the wage subsidies. In Mozambique, the COVID-19 Social Protection Response Plan, which was developed with the support of the Technical Advisory Group that includes the ILO, incorporated a strong gender component in the eligibility criteria of the Direct Social Support Programme – Post Emergency COVID-19. The programme was created to address the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic on the most vulnerable and prioritized households headed by women. In Eswatini, the ILO's actuarial valuation considered the employment situation of women when modelling the Unemployment Benefit Scheme.

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- ▶ **Informal workers, refugees, and migrants:** In South Africa, the Office re-purposed project funds in dialogue with the Government and donors. Financial relief was provided to migrant domestic workers from Botswana in South Africa as they were among the most disadvantaged groups and could not access any of the relief packages from the host government. In Thailand, the ILO provided migrant workers with PPEs, food, and legal assistance to file for unemployment benefits and other services. In Jordan, the ILO delivered a study on "Opportunities for extending social security coverage in Jordan" which was key to inform the refinement of the Emergency Unemployment and Employment Stabilization Fund (EUESF) design. Through social dialogue, a broader discussion was also engaged on the extension of social security coverage to informal workers, including refugees and migrant workers. In May 2022, the Jordanian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC), the Social Security Corporation (SSC) and the ILO signed an agreement for the implementation of a new initiative titled Estidama++ Fund – Extension of Coverage and Formalization. The project will promote formalization in the most vulnerable sectors in the Jordanian economy by providing income support and subsidizing contributions of Jordanian and non-Jordanian workers, including refugees, so as to promote their registration and participation in the SSC.

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- ▶ **People living with HIV and persons with disabilities:** In India, activities on HIV/AIDS/TB and Disability Inclusion remained on-going in collaboration with constituents. The ILO and the Gujarat State AIDS Control Society implemented an integrated service delivery approach under which informal migrant workers received information and services on COVID-19 as well as HIV. In Madagascar, the National Council to fight HIV and the ILO worked together to identify the needs of people living with HIV. This informed a plan of action to tackle the effect of COVID-19 on informal economy workers living with HIV and tuberculosis (TB).



## Collaboration and partnerships

Internally, SOCPRO leveraged and engaged the Social Protection (SP) **Global Technical Team** (GTT) in formulating and delivering initiatives contributing to the crisis response. Since its creation in 2015, the SP GTT has grown to comprise 200 members including the SOCPRO team, regional social protection specialists based in subregional decent work teams as well as project staff in programme countries. In 2020, SOCPRO organized five online sessions with the GTT focusing on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>289</sup> In order to identify countries' challenges and responses, SOCPRO relied on HQ informants' consultations with members. However, the GTT lacked a network and a mutual support capability to channel direct requests from members and to facilitate exchanges and discussions originating from the field. Some stakeholders indicated that the ILO was currently exploring the option to turn the GTTs into communities of practice in order to increase their added value.

Informants also mentioned increased **collaboration between SOCPRO and other departments** during the crisis. In April 2020, SOCPRO and Better Work launched a *Call for Action in the Global Garment Industry* to catalyze action from across the global garment industry and support manufacturers to survive the economic disruption caused by the pandemic by protecting garment workers' income, health, and employment. This initiative also called for work to establish sustainable systems of social protection for a more just and resilient garment industry. It triggered support from VZF/ILO and from BMZ (EUR 14.5 million) to garment and textile factories and workers (direct beneficiaries) and their family members (indirect beneficiaries) in five countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic). Informants considered the call successful in bringing social dialogue actors together at the country level but less in raising capital. However, it created closer collaboration between SOCPRO, EMPLOYMENT and ENTERPRISES and improved coherence between the departments which "in the past had very different viewpoints" according to an informant. Furthermore, from a longer term perspective, it also proved promising. The three departments are now engaged in developing the Global Accelerator - which "would not have happened without COVID" according to a senior staff member.

During the biennium, the ILO was able to enhance its global visibility and its influence in the multilateral arena. SOCPRO contributed to shaping the UN's socioeconomic response to COVID-19,<sup>290</sup> which placed social protection and basic services as one of the five pillars of the United Nations Development System response. In April 2020, the ILO jointly with SPIAC-B<sup>291</sup> published a Statement on the Role of Social Protection in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic calling for urgent action to ensure access to health services and income security and to prioritize the most vulnerable.<sup>292</sup> The ILO also developed a new approach on "invest more and invest better" in social protection which aims to increase domestic/international resources for social protection through closer interactions with ministries of finance, IFI's and donors at the country level, while promoting the application of ILO guiding principles in the choice of policy and financing options for social protection. As part of this process, collaboration was increased with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on social protection and social spending. In Togo for example, the ILO collaborated with the IMF and the World Bank (WB) to determine the content of social spending as part of the process of signing a Credit Facility Agreement between the IMF and the Government of Togo. Collaboration on social protection extension, financing and good governance was also one of the areas of focus of the ILO-UNDP global agreement signed in July 2020.

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289 Online sessions covered, 26/02/2020: Working together on social protection; 26/03/2020: Working as one GTT on COVID 19; 02/04/2020: ILO social protection response to COVID 19; 14/04/2020: Adapting social protection delivery mechanisms in the context of COVID-19; 12/05/2020: Opportunities to increase fiscal space for social protection and build longer-term social protection systems.

290 UN Sustainable Development Group. A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, April 2020.

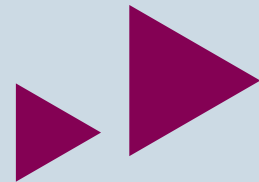
291 SPIAC-B is composed of 25 intergovernmental agencies and 10 governmental bodies; 11 civil society organizations act as observers.

292 SPIAC-B, A Joint Statement on the Role of Social Protection in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020.

In countries such as Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, the ILO collaborated with the **UN Country Teams** to provide policy advice to the respective governments in assessing announced social protection policy responses, identifying gaps and proposing additional measures. In Myanmar, the Office contributed to the "UN Socio-Economic Response Framework to COVID-19 in Myanmar" (UN-SERF).<sup>293</sup> The UN-SERF was organized into five pillars and combined downstream support to delivery systems and communities and upstream support to policy and programme management by government, business associations, labour unions and civil society. The ILO in Myanmar contributed actively to the development of UN-SERF and due to its active participation and leadership, ILO became co-lead of three pillars (Pillar 2 – Protecting People: Social protection and basic services; Pillar 3 – Economic Recovery; and Pillar 5 – Social Cohesion and Community Resilience) among the five pillars. As a co-lead, ILO drafted the social protection section which emphasized how to scale up and expand resilient and pro-poor social protection systems including suggested policy measures and mitigation actions. In Cambodia, UNCT collaboration was important in supporting the launch of a new cash transfer, covering around 600,000 households and impacting more than 2 million persons. In Thailand, this collaboration prompted the Government to include old-age, disability and child allowances in a package representing an extraordinary increase in benefits, which impacted more than 11 million people (Box 14). Several informants highlighted the importance of developing such strong UN partnerships on social protection and of reinforcing the ILO's leadership in this area due to its comparative advantages, including normative instruments and expertise, systemic approach, long-term perspective, and networks of constituents and social dialogue.

#### ► **BOX 14: Jointly advocating for Leaving No-one Behind in Thailand**

In response to the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) stimulus package announced on 5 May 2021, the UN Joint Programme (UNJP) on Social Protection for All in Thailand sent the RTG a "Technical Note on Protecting the Most Vulnerable from Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19", providing recommendations to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the economy and requesting the RTG to take into account the vulnerabilities of the most affected communities, families with children, people with disabilities, older adults, and migrant workers who were left out or have difficulties in accessing the proposed stimulus package. The UN Resident Coordinator in Thailand submitted the technical brief note to the Prime Minister, and members of the Cabinet. The technical note along with a cover letter signed by heads of all four UN agencies in Thailand – the ILO, IOM, UNICEF and UN Women – was also sent to the Labour Minister, Finance Minister, Social Development and Human Security Minister, and the Secretary-General of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council.



293 [UNSDG | A UN Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 in Myanmar](#)

### The Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection.

The UN Secretary-General's initiative of a Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection has also placed the ILO in a lead role in joint efforts to support countries in building universal social protection systems, based on additional domestic and international financing (see also Section 4.6 on UN collaboration). The Global Accelerator<sup>294</sup> is an initiative to enhance multilateral cooperation, bringing together different stakeholders to create a new era of universal social protection, green and job-rich growth, and put the world back on track to reach SDG 1 and SDG 8. Building on existing initiatives, the Global Accelerator aims to **create at least 400 million jobs**, primarily in the green and care economies, and **extend social protection floors** to the 4 billion people currently not covered, with a focus on low- and middle-income countries, small island developing states and nations in fragile situations. This is intended to be achieved by mobilizing financial resources for fiscal stimulus measures and for social protection floors, developing a technical support facility that brings together the expertise of the UN system and by creating a high-ambition coalition of countries to promote job creation in the digital economy, support transitions to the formal economy and increase women's employment. Bringing the World Bank and the IMF into play with the Accelerator is also expected to build stronger coherence across the multilateral system and help to reconcile disparate visions of social protection.

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294 ILO, "[Press release: The world needs a global accelerator for jobs and social protection](#)", 14 October 2021,

## ALIGNING ILO ACTION WITH UN AND GLOBAL RESPONSE AND SDGS

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From the onset of the pandemic, the Office stepped up its engagement with other UN agencies considerably. The Office made significant contributions to the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19... led the production of the UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief on the World of Work and COVID-19... [and] partnered with other agencies to produce a statistical perspective on how COVID-19 is changing labour markets and the collection of labour statistics. The Office also contributed to the UN Policy brief on Human Rights and COVID-19 and to the Joint Statement on a disability-inclusive response to the COVID-19 crisis. At country level, the ILO's national officers and decent work teams worked in UNCTs around the world to assist in the design and delivery of COVID-19 national response programmes.

▶ ILO Director-General

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## KEY POINTS

- ▶ Initiatives and partnerships launched in response to COVID-19 require an unprecedented level of funding but so far funding received by ILO has not reflected this need. The high profile of UN reform and multilateral collaboration expressed in policy statements and calls for action have so far generated only a small proportion of the UN funding required to target COVID recovery.
- ▶ Increased calls for new models of development financing highlight the ILO's relatively limited capacity in this area. It lacks the large finance hubs present in such organizations as UNDP. The UN Secretary General has emphasized the need to move forward for "whole government" approaches; not just engaging ministries covering social, labour and environmental areas, but ensuring that ministries of finance are fully engaged in the recovery process. To pursue this new direction, ILO will need greater finance expertise.
- ▶ ILO also lacks the human resources required to work more effectively with other UN agencies, especially at the country level where the pandemic's expansion of cooperative agreements and partnerships with UN and other multilateral bodies has greatly increased the workload.
- ▶ Various mechanisms for enhancing multilateral collaboration and coordination were initiated in response to the pandemic, including the UNDP-ILO Framework for Action, which prioritized actions between UNDP and ILO in selected areas that would increase synergy, and global and regional partnerships with other UN entities (for example, UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO). ILO also played a prominent role in high-level meetings of the G7, G20, and BRICS and in drafting the Just Transition Declaration, endorsed by more than 30 nations at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Scotland.
- ▶ At the country level, the ILO was reported to have influenced more than 120 UN Socio-Economic Response Plans (SERPs) although it is difficult to substantiate this or to estimate the degree of influence achieved.
- ▶ Despite the new impetus provided by the pandemic for improved collaboration, coordination and policy coherence between multilateral agencies, significant barriers and disincentives remain.
- ▶ The Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection, launched by the UN Secretary-General and ILO, aims to create at least 400 million jobs and extend social protection floors to the 4 billion people currently not covered. The scope and scale of the initiative has huge resource implications for the ILO.

## Context

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) established the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 Targets, which guide overall UN efforts to address global poverty. The Agenda aims to be universal, inclusive, transformative and based on the normative framework of the UN system. The UN Development System (UNDS) has primary responsibility for promoting and supporting global efforts to attain the SDGs. The UNDS includes 15 specialized agencies, 23 funds, programmes, research institutes and other entities, as well as numerous functional and regional commissions and subsidiary bodies. In this context, the ILO is responsible for assisting Member States to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 – to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, social justice and decent work for all – while also contributing to the realization of all the SDGs and targets.

Since 2017, the UN has been undergoing a reform process that aims to strengthen the cooperation, coherence and results-based orientation of the UNDS at the country, regional and global levels in support of the 2030 Agenda. The ILO is actively involved in UN reform, ensuring that the Decent Work Agenda remains integrated in new policy frameworks and that tripartism and social dialogue are promoted throughout the process. These efforts aim to ensure that ILO collaborates with other members of the UN system to “deliver as one”, while also fully valuing the unique and complementary contributions of each member of the UNDS.

From 2017 to 2019, the UN system contributed nearly US\$89.7 million to ILO interventions, making it the third largest contributor of voluntary funding to the ILO for this period. ILO projects implemented with the financial support of organizations in the UN system accounted for around 9 per cent of the ILO's total active development cooperation projects as of April 2021. The ILO also plays a key role in a range of Joint UN Programmes and draws on the potential of UN Multi-Partner Trust Funds to bring decent work to all.

The foundations of ILO's current approach to its mandate were laid by the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, which enables priorities to be set for the ILO's work, as outlined in the P&B. In September 2019, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution welcoming the Centenary Declaration and calling on bodies in the United Nations Development System to consider integrating its policy proposals into their work. In the context of the pandemic response, the Call to Action requests multilateral institutions to increase coherence and support for human-centred recovery strategies and emphasizes the need for the ILO to assume a leadership role.

In 2020, the GB endorsed the ILO Development Cooperation Strategy and Implementation Plan (2020–2025). The strategy seeks to integrate development cooperation more effectively into the programme and budget processes with a view to increasing the coherence of ILO action in delivering services to constituents and ensuring an optimal use of all ILO resources to achieve sustainable results and impact. In this framework, the ILO has initiated structured funding dialogues as a new way of securing predictable and adequate funding for ILO priorities.

## ILO Action

### ILO contribution to the financial architecture of the global pandemic response

A major policy area to emerge as an ILO priority during the pandemic was Financing for Development, particularly focusing on socioeconomic recovery financing. **ILO has emerged as one of the lead UN agencies in this area**, which contributed to the 2021 Global Accelerator and later the UN Socio-Economic Framework. By spring 2020, ILO was already involved in a Socio-Economic Framework with UNDP, which helped formalize relations, which had been called for in the Framework of Action. In parallel, there were many Member State meetings with the IMF and the World Bank, attempting to influence them to move their emphasis from austerity to an expanded role for public finance.

On 28 May 2020, the Prime Ministers of Canada and Jamaica and the UN Secretary-General launched the Initiative on **Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond (FfDI)** to identify and promote concrete financing solutions to the COVID-19 health and development emergency. After several High-Level Events, a roadmap was created to continue the work on the FfDI track and promote implementation of priority policies. Six clusters were established with the **ILO leading the cluster on socioeconomic response, social protection, gender, youth, health, education, and human rights**.

The ILO Call to Action built upon a substantial body of international discussions and decisions on financing. It recognized that ILO needs more resources to advance its programmes and policies. **ILO also promoted a high-level policy forum, which led to a September 2021 forum with the UN Secretary-General's Office.** After this, in the General Assembly, the **UN Secretary-General launched jointly with ILO, the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection** with the aim of creating at least 400 million jobs by 2030, primarily in the green and care economies, and extending social protection floors to over 4 billion people currently not covered. He also gave the lead on this Accelerator to ILO, a decision which ILO respondents observed had not been expected by UNDP.

Despite some progressive steps, for which ILO has played an influencing role, **performance of the IFIs in response to COVID has so far been limited.**<sup>295</sup> While the IMF and the World Bank quickly committed substantial resources to new and rapid financial assistance for up to 100 developing countries, this represented new debt, issued predominantly on non-concessional terms, but with a larger share of policy-unconditional lending. Debt relief was limited to the cancellation of US\$851 million in debt service payments due to the IMF between April 2020 and the end of 2021 for 29 of the poorest developing countries.

**ILO delivered numerous studies projecting the costs of labour market growth for recovery.** It also convened meetings with Member States, civil society, workers' and employers' organizations, which fed into *Policy Briefs* and, later, the launch of the Global Accelerator. **ILO also influenced an IMF Special Drawing Rights decision in 2021;** whilst a Special Envoy on Financing from the IMF helped design the Global Accelerator. ILO now needs to deliver on its enhanced profile as a major player in financing to aid labour market recovery.

### Financing the ILO's work with UN and multilateral partners

The rich and complex environment of initiatives and partnerships launched in response to COVID-19 required an unprecedented level of funding to be channelled through the UN system. In the 2020–21 biennium, which included the immediate response period of the pandemic, **funding received by ILO did not reflect this need.** The ILO recorded US\$666.4 million in total approvals during 2020–2021, as well as US\$34.4 millions of voluntary core funding for the RBSA. While the targets set for the biennium were not reached, the contributions in 2020–21 were viewed positively considering that many key resource partners faced fiscal and budgetary challenges related to the COVID-19 response and recovery costs. Funding partners also showed considerable flexibility in re-purposing their contributions from earlier years to support national COVID-19 responses.

Some new and additional contributions were received, including from the UN multi-partner **COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund.** ILO is a member of the Advisory Committee for this Fund established by the UN Secretary-General to help support low- and middle-income programme countries to respond to the pandemic and its impacts. The Fund targets those most vulnerable to economic hardship and social disruption<sup>296</sup> and has served as an essential finance mechanism towards operationalizing the United Nations Framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19. Shared responsibility, global solidarity and urgent action for people in need are key principles of the UN system response and provide a roadmap for global social and economic recovery from the pandemic.<sup>297</sup> An example from Indonesia is described in **Box 15.**

295 UNCTAD, [Financing for development: Mobilizing sustainable development finance beyond COVID-19. Note by the UNCTAD secretariat](#), January 2022 (TD/B/EFD/5/2).

296 ILO, "[ILO and the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund](#)".

297 United Nations, [Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19](#) (New York, NY: March 2020).

The Fund issued its first call in April 2020. **ILO participated in eight joint UN Programmes** developed in response to the first round of proposals. ILO's involvement in these Joint Programmes covered social protection and support to MSMEs as well as promoting OSH, including for vulnerable workers, and rapid assessments on the impact of COVID-19 on labour markets.

The Fund was established with an initial target of US\$1 billion for 2020 and a further US\$1 billion for 2021. However, by the end of 2021, only US\$86 million had been received, suggesting substantial under-resourcing, with associated limitations on the range and scope of initiatives, which could be implemented. This is supported by the fact that Fund expenditures by this time were only US\$50 million globally. **Although SDG 8 is covered by the fund, ILO has not been a major recipient from this source.** By the end of 2021, it had budgeted resources from the fund of just US\$6.56 million, of which US\$4.37m had been spent, with a delivery rate of 66 per cent.

After its initial phase, the Fund's second Call for Proposals received 250 proposals, only 19 of which were initially funded. This suggests serious challenges for multilateral activities at country level moving forward, since the proportion of successful proposals is sufficiently low to discourage further applications. This is particularly so given the reported high transaction costs of putting together joint proposals in the UNCT system. Although the call for greater multilateral collaboration expressed in policy statements has stimulated such partnerships from field-level to high-level agreements, these have so far generated only a small proportion of the UN funding required to target COVID recovery.

An area in which ILO has become increasingly engaged during the development of global responses to Covid is development financing. DDG Policy has been pushing the need for countries to **develop national financial frameworks and considering how ILO can best promote these** through national dialogue under the tripartite approach.

An Internal challenge raised by some senior respondents concerns what they regard as the **relatively limited capacity of ILO on financing.** It lacks the large finance hubs present in such organizations as UNDP. The UN Secretary-General has emphasized the need to move forward for "whole government" approaches; not just engaging ministries covering social, labour and environmental areas, but ensuring that ministries of finance are fully engaged in the recovery process. To meet this new direction, ILO and its constituents will need greater finance expertise. ILO has already begun training Member States' ministries of labour on how to access finance. As ILO's engagement in global Covid-19 recovery expands, it will **need enhanced specialist expertise in development financing, enabling the formulation of new policy approaches in this area.**

### Staffing the ILO's work with UN and multilateral partners

In terms of the **human resources** required to work more effectively with other UN agencies, **weaknesses at a country level have been exposed** and reported to the GB. COVID-19 has led to a major expansion of cooperative agreements and partnerships with UN and other multilateral bodies. As these have moved into implementation, ILO's **workload has substantially increased, especially at country level**, where collaboration with UNCTs has become more intense. Pressures of COVID responses gave rise to extensive ad hoc work to develop specific approaches for countries with particular challenges. The workload became exhausting and is regarded as unsustainable in the long term. Headquarters teams also reported greatly increased workloads, often dealt with by the addition of short-term expertise.

Reflecting on these trends, the HLE interprets ILO's position as one that will require substantive action. As response transitions into recovery (at different rates across partner countries), ILO will need to make a detailed comparison of its staff resources globally with the greatly increased workload implied by the numerous multilateral agreements it has concluded as part of the wider UN response to COVID. If these agreements are to deliver on the bold projected development results, it is inevitable that ILO will need to scale up its operations, particularly at country level. It appears unlikely that this can be achieved efficiently through the widespread use of short-term contract staff or consultancies. This suggests that pressure will fall on the GB to review resources and staffing projections, in the light of the existing policies.



A recent MOPAN Assessment reported<sup>298</sup> that the “zero-growth budget upheld by the GB requires any changes in funding priorities to be accommodated within the existing budget range through cost-savings and efficiency measures. These trade-offs have negatively affected the ILO’s performance at the field level and hamper the efficiency of key processes due to insufficient human resources, as evidenced in documents and underlined by many partners”. If the ambitious intentions of the various calls for action, agreements, etc., of the UN system in general and ILO in particular are not to dwindle to isolated advances of limited scale, it seems inevitable that the GB will need to revisit its staffing and budgetary policies.

### Enhancing collaboration and coordination with UN and multilateral partners

Various mechanisms for enhancing multilateral collaboration and coordination were initiated in response to the pandemic. Through a joint letter dated 16 September 2020, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the ILO’s Director-General established the **UNDP-ILO Framework for Action**. This laid out the principles for strengthening the collaboration between the two entities and reaffirmed their willingness to pursue joint efforts to maintain close and continuing working relationships in order to achieve their respective mandates as well as their individual and common purposes.

The Framework presented prioritized actions between UNDP and ILO in selected areas that would increase synergy, given the shared policy space and mandates – enhancing support to least developed countries (LDCs) and crisis countries and having greater impact at scale. The aim was also to move forward actions that demonstrated how the ILO and the UNDP coming together can be more efficient – focusing on gains from joint work and policy coherence, starting with a limited number of countries to be jointly identified and vetted by their respective regional directors.

Other **global and regional partnerships with UN entities** during the pandemic, as reported to the GB, have included<sup>299</sup> UNICEF, UN Women, WHO and UNESCO, covering such issues as OSH, skills development,<sup>300</sup> and women’s entrepreneurship.

ILO also played a prominent role in high-level meetings of the **G7, G20, and BRICS**, focusing on topics such as the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on labour markets, building back greener, financing of social protection, remote work, impact on women and on platform workers in the gig economy. In terms of ensuring that pandemic recovery is environmentally sustainable, the ILO played a key role in drafting the Just Transition Declaration, endorsed by more than 30 nations at the UN Climate Change Conference in Scotland, which recognizes the need to ensure that no one is left behind in the transition to net zero economies.<sup>301</sup>

At country level, the ILO’s contribution to multilateral responses to the pandemic can be seen in the extent to which it brought tripartite partners into UN Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERP) processes. It is reported that 120+ SERPs were influenced by ILO, although it is difficult to substantiate this or to estimate the degree of influence achieved. Nevertheless, it is evident that the combined effects of support and promotion from the UN Secretary-General’s Office and the heightened appreciation of ILO’s labour market expertise, building on COVID Monitor and other products, have given ILO a “place at the table” both with UNCTs and governments in many countries where this was not previously the case. The ILO also contributed to UN Common Country Analyses and UN Sustainable Cooperation Frameworks, facilitating constituent engagement in their development, and incorporating decent work elements. The 10 DWCPs developed in the period aligned with these cooperation frameworks, increasing the potential for synergies with UN agencies in their implementation.

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298 MOPAN Assessment Overview, p. 7.


299 GB.344/PFA/1(Rev.1)

300 For example, a new partnership that brings together the UN Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth (DJY), led by the ILO, and Generation Unlimited (GenU), led by UNICEF, and capitalizes on the multi-stakeholder memberships of both agencies to bring scale and impact to efforts for and with young people.

301 ILO, “Press release: ILO welcomes COP26 Just Transition Declaration”, 5 November 2021.

To further promote collaboration and coordination in the recovery from the pandemic, in 2021, the UN Secretary-General released a report, *Our Common Agenda*,<sup>302</sup> designed to strengthen and accelerate multilateral agreements. The centrality of the ILO's work to key elements of this agenda were highlighted – especially in relation to decent work for all, universal social protection, rights and protections for all workers, and the transition to the green economy – as were key policy instruments such as the Centenary Declaration, and the Guidelines for a Just Transition. The ILO's work exploring the establishment of a Global Fund for Social Protection was also highlighted and it was in this context that the ILO was to take the lead in the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection (see below).

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 **While the UN agencies have acquired solid experience in working together through the diverse mechanisms at country levels... that have been put in place, the entire system still tends to incentivize UN agencies to work in silos. In other words, while there is a strong accountability system within each individual organization, there is little horizontal accountability across UN entities that would incentivize cooperation among them. This evaluation confirms that collaboration tends to rely on the goodwill and personal motivation of the staff within each partner organization.**

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Despite the new impetus provided by the pandemic for improved collaboration, coordination and policy coherence between multilateral agencies, **significant barriers and disincentives remain**. For example, a 2021 evaluation of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth<sup>303</sup> noted that, although the project aimed to increase coherence and collaboration between partners around youth employment issues, evidence showed that other major actors also launched their own initiatives on youth employment. Evaluators also found that collaboration in this context was not straightforward.

Similar concerns were expressed in an assessment of the UN's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund.<sup>304</sup> It found that, while progress in UNDS reforms in 2019 had helped to enable rapid implementation of the COVID-19 MPTF and had contributed to a more cohesive response through the SERPs, there were still limitations due to UNCTs not being able to collaborate at country level – limitations that suggested there is considerable work left to fully realize the reforms.

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302 UN Foundation, Report: *Our Common Agenda*. Report of the Secretary-General, 2021.

303 ILO, Support to the preparatory activities of the ILO to launch the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth – independent final evaluation, 2020.

304 UN, Early Lessons and Evaluability Assessment of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, 2021, p. v).

## The Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection

The Global Accelerator is an initiative to enhance multilateral cooperation, bringing together different stakeholders to create a new era of universal social protection, green and job-rich growth, and put the world back on track to reach SDG 1 and SDG 8. Building on existing initiatives, the Global Accelerator aims to create at least 400 million jobs, primarily in the green and care economies, and extend social protection floors to the 4 billion people currently not covered, focusing on low- and middle-income countries, small island developing states and nations in fragile situations.

The financial implications of the Accelerator are huge: at least US\$982 billion in fiscal stimulus measures is needed to respond to the immediate labour market shocks of the COVID-19 crisis and to support a just transition, as well as US\$1.2 trillion annually for social protection floors in low- and middle-income countries. The Accelerator was launched at a High-level Meeting, convened jointly by the UN Secretary-General and ILO and was attended by heads of the IFIs, heads of states and government and international organizations. It was later presented at the 76th UN General Assembly under the aegis of the Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond Initiative (FfDI), which is supported by ILO as well as by the ITUC, which published recommendations on Financing Recovery and Building the Economy of the Future on its website.

For ILO, the intended scope of Accelerator activities raises the “need for additional temporary RB resources to absorb the additional workload under the Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection which is directly linked to the Flagship programme.” ILO is hosting technical support for the Accelerator. Activities are already under way but face the challenge of scaling up at country level.

Accurate and timely data were one of the most pressing needs for all stakeholders during the pandemic. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the UN System usually meets twice a year, but during the pandemic it met more regularly. It issued a UN statistics report, which built on the work of ILO STAT. During COVID, there was stronger UN Coordination than usual on statistics. Even the Secretary-General noted the need for a UN-wide data strategy in this area.

*ILO Monitor* rapidly gained a pre-eminent position as a source of reliable statistics on the labour market effects of the pandemic and of responses to these around the world. The pandemic brought ILO offices generating and using labour market data together with greater coherence than usual and gave rise to much new work. Going forward, this enhanced approach needs to be formalized through development of an overall ILO statistical strategy.

## The Global Forum for a Human-Centred Recovery

In February 2022, a three-day Global Forum addressed the need for multilateral policy coherence, which catalysed additional commitments from various parts of the UN and multilateral system. Commitments to the objectives of a human-centred recovery were made by the WHO, UNDP, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), International Monetary Fund (IMF), the OECD, Asian Development Bank (ADB), European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, WTO, World Bank, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), UNICEF, African Development Bank (ADB), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN Special Envoy on Climate and Finance.

Emerging from the Global Forum were many new partnerships and multilateral agreements involving the ILO and intended to advance human-centred recovery including:

- ▶ A new partnership with UNDP to develop a common roadmap for the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection, and to launch and implement the joint Global Initiative on Fostering Pathways to Formality.

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- ▶ An agreement with WHO to strengthen the links between health sector and world of work institutions, aimed at better protecting workers from mental health risks and occupational injuries and diseases and preparing workplaces for health crises.

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- ▶ A new framework agreement to be developed with the EBRD to strengthen cooperation on projects, and technical assistance in such areas as gender equality, a just transition and climate action for jobs.

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- ▶ A new Memorandum of Understanding to be signed with the IsDB to support a human-centred recovery, which envisages cooperation in such areas as youth economic empowerment, gender equality, decent work in crisis settings, and fostering South-South Triangular Cooperation

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- ▶ Collaboration with the ADB to improve social protection system capacity and data harmonization, in support of the Bank's climate change financing.

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- ▶ Cooperation between OECD and ILO on just transition and productivity growth.

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- ▶ Collaboration with the African Development Bank in the areas of skill development and youth employment.

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- ▶ Partnerships with UNICEF and the wider UN family to ensure progress in the achievement of universal social protection.

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- ▶ A strong commitment by the World Bank to the Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (USP2030), chaired jointly with the ILO.

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## ► **BOX 15: Case study – Indonesia – economic empowerment of women and vulnerable populations**

This joint ILO, UNDP, UNHCR and UNAIDS initiative (ELJP) aimed to improve employment and livelihoods among women and vulnerable groups that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis in Indonesia. It received US\$1.7 million funding from the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (UN COVID-19 MPTF). An independent evaluation of the initiative has been completed and some of its key findings are reported here.

ELJP had national coverage with a focus on disadvantaged areas of the country, particularly the Eastern region. There were three intended outputs:

- Output 1: 2,000 women and vulnerable groups have their entrepreneurship skills enhanced and their essential business development support increased.
- Output 2: People living in disadvantaged regions (Eastern part of Indonesia and rural areas) have their economic potential improved or recovered.
- Output 3: Government, employers and workers have heightened awareness of the importance of gender equality at the workplace.

The ELJP was highly relevant to the need to re-build employment and livelihood prospects in Indonesia after the COVID-19 pandemic struck, particularly with regard to the needs of women and people from vulnerable groups in the population.

Both the design and implementation of the programme reflected a high level of collaboration and cohesion among the four UN agencies. This was verified by collaborative actions by UNAIDS and UNHCR in support of the ILO and UNDP training interventions, through their networks with the beneficiaries and expertise, as well as collaboration in advocacy. At the level of donor reporting and government communications, coherence was also well supported by the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO).

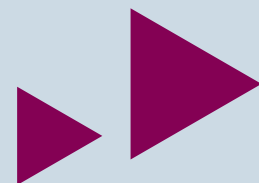
The UN Resident Coordinator's Office oversaw management of the programme as a whole, supported by a management and coordination team of focal points from each of the UN partners. This structure worked efficiently, especially benefiting from ILO's strong coordination efforts. Staffing provision per agency was effective and efficient overall.

The programme's Results-based Monitoring (RBM) framework and its indicators applied the principles of results-based monitoring to a moderate extent, but some indicators were not well defined, and monitoring of outcomes and initial impacts was not consistently applied.

At the individual and community level, the short-term interventions of the programme generated important changes in people's livelihood opportunities, demonstrated by the early signs of increasing income found in ILO's closing survey. The programme indirectly improved the capacity of implementing partners, including capacity to deliver online, wider partnerships and increased knowledge. Overall, the programme helped a significant number of people to adapt to the economic impacts of the pandemic and shift to new and emerging digitized jobs.

The central sustainability strategies of the programme were founded in advocacy interventions towards fairer and more inclusive workplaces. Sustainable results are evident in the heightened capacity of the key actors – media, government, employers' groups and trade unions – to improve gender and inclusion in the workplace. The programme generated some sustainable training resources that can be accessed by a wider audience or re-used by the partners in the future.

Source: ILO. 2022. Employment and livelihood: An inclusive approach to economic empowerment of women and vulnerable populations in Indonesia (COVID-19). Independent joint final evaluation.



## ANALYSIS OF CPOS AND FINANCIAL DATABASES

### KEY POINTS

- ▶ Total expenditure related to the ILO's COVID response was over US\$180.6 million.
- ▶ Based on the HLE's analysis, the largest expenditures on COVID-19 response actions by region were in Asia and the Pacific and Africa (each over US\$58 million), followed by Europe and Central Asia (US\$31.1 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (US\$23.4 million) and the Arab States (US\$9.4 million). Highest expenditures at the country level were Turkey, Timor-Leste, Egypt, Bangladesh and Colombia and these were also the top five countries with gender-related responses to COVID.
- ▶ COVID-19 response actions provided as a UN joint response were particularly concentrated in Nepal, Madagascar and Viet Nam.
- ▶ Concerning global products, most focused on social protection and OSH, and were linked to a flagship programme.

### Analytical strategy

Data from the ILO's Decent Work results dashboard and the ILO FINANCE Department were used to undertake the CPO analysis and to determine related expenditure figures. The analytical strategy developed by this HLE for the CPO analysis has two main phases. Phase 1 refers to the analysis of data on the ILO's Decent Work Results dashboard to identify reports on COVID-19. Phase 2 refers to the financial analysis of expenditures associated with the selected CPOs and GPs that reported on COVID-19 responses.

Phase 1 encompassed a series of screenings of the dashboard information, followed by tentative analytical strategies seeking to find and solve inconsistencies between planned and actual responses to the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>305</sup> The HLE found five categories of narratives:

- ▶ Narratives on **actions taken** to incorporate COVID into the work that was in progress, such as including COVID modules in OSH guides and trainings.
- ▶ Narratives on **adapting delivery**, such as trainings and meetings, to online formats because of COVID-19, without reference to responses to the impacts of the pandemic included in these activities.
- ▶ Narratives on **institutional flexibility** to attend to immediate needs, such as the distribution of protective equipment to staff and migrant workers to allow the continuation of ILO's work.
- ▶ Descriptions of **actions attributed to constituents** without clear reference on the role of the ILO to support or guide such actions. These cases were excluded from further analysis.
- ▶ References to **COVID as a challenge to delivery**, causing delays or cancellations, without descriptions of actions taken to respond to it. These cases were also excluded from further analysis.

<sup>305</sup> The complete database contains reports on results achieved by 585 CPOs and GPs with their respective outputs and indicators, totalling 875 entries. An analysis of the COVID-19 tag indicated that 370 of these entries were COVID-tagged (42 per cent). A text analysis of the two description boxes indicated that 493 entries contained the descriptors COVID\*, pandem\*, or coron\* (56 per cent). This signalled that there were more results achieved in responding to COVID-19 than planned. To make this finding more accurate, a content analysis of these narratives determined to what extent these descriptors referred to actual ILO's achievements.

The COVID-19 tag (corresponding to planning) was matched with these narratives and the HLE found mismatches between planning and reporting, with planned responses lacking reports on achievements, and achievements not previously planned. In the former case, interviews with field officers suggest that it may be too soon to see the results of some of the actions taken. In the latter, this may indicate that the dynamics of project implementation imposed unplanned adaptations that generated reportable results. However, the content analysis revealed that an additional explanation may be the emphasis on reporting against targeted results rather than on the work involved in achieving each target. The final database for the analysis of the effectiveness of the ILO's policy actions contains 375 entries (43 per cent of the original database), of which 247 are tagged as planned to respond to the pandemic (66 per cent of them).

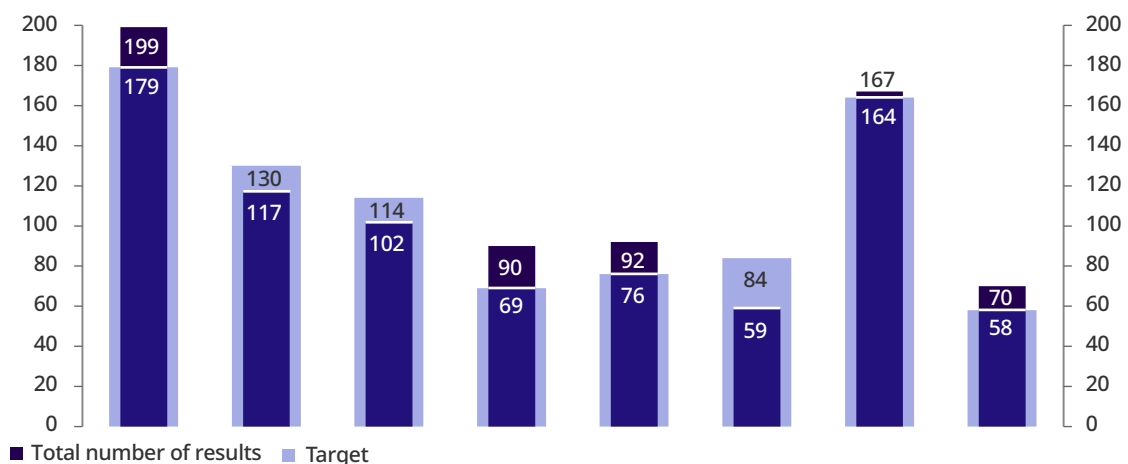
In **Phase 2**, 375 database entries were used as the basis for a 'follow the money' strategy to identify the expenditures associated with COVID-19 responsive actions. The XBDC-RBSA and RBTC databases were combined to sum the total expenditure for each reported achievement. Values tagged as COVID-19 tracking, mostly used to support the Rapid Diagnostics for Assessing the Country Level Impact of COVID-19 on the Economy and Labour Market,<sup>306</sup> were specifically identified. Financial information is available for 303 entries (81 per cent); the other 72 did not report expenditures during the period 2020–21 for the outcomes reporting responses to COVID-19.<sup>307</sup> See **ww** for the results of this analytical phase.

This database of achievements and financial information associated with responses to COVID was then used to generate analyses per policy outcome, region, country, gender responsiveness, and joint UN actions. It informed previous sections of this report in relation to the ILO's actions in each analytical pillar of this HLE. Details per region and policy outcome are in Annex X.

### Effectiveness and efficiency of the results reported

The PIR 2020–21 reports that ILO exceeded the target set for the biennium by 3 per cent, with the achievement of 896 results in 151 Member States and two territories across the eight policy outcomes. Under Outcome 1, related to increased institutional strength, resilience, service provision and capacity for advocacy of employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) and workers' organizations, results were 4 per cent over the target. Under Outcome 2, results were 10 per cent under the target for ratifications of international labour standards and progress in the establishment of tripartite mechanisms that allow constituents to effectively engage in the implementation of international labour standards. Under Outcome 1 (outputs 1.3 and 1.4), and outcomes 3–8, results were 5 per cent over the target. Figure 24 from PIR summarizes these results.

**FIGURE 24: TOTAL NUMBER OF RESULTS ACHIEVED AND TARGET BY POLICY OUTCOME, PIR 2020–21.**

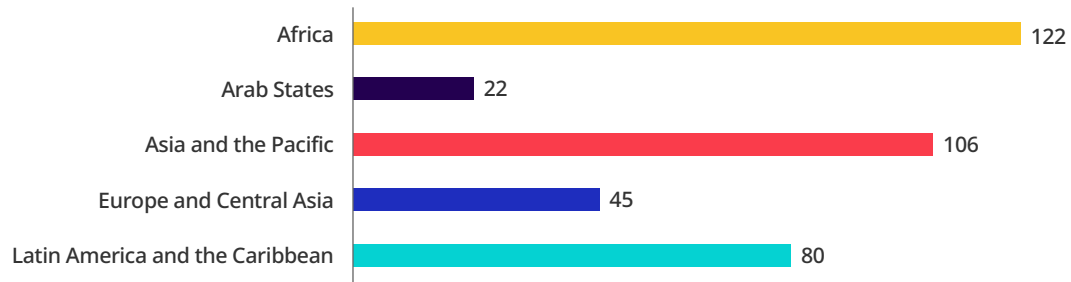


306 ILO, "Rapid Diagnostics for Assessing the Country Level Impact of COVID-19 on the Economy and Labour Market", Technical Brief, May, 2020.

307 A challenge to compile this information was the lack of a unique variable that allows the automatic merging of the financial and the reporting databases. Each data point was inserted by hand, individually, and double-checked later.

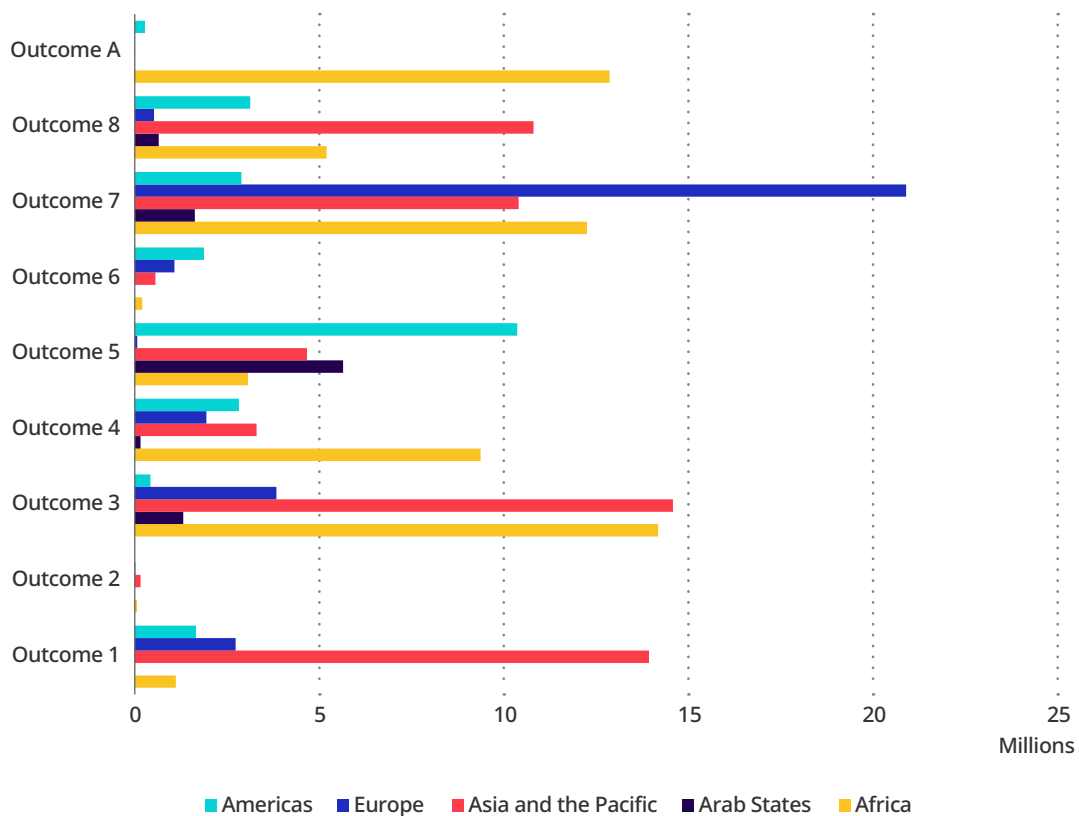
The HLE database of CPOs narrating achievements indicated that Africa and Asia and the Pacific regions were those with a highest number of CPOs responding to COVID-19, followed by the Americas, Europe and Central Asia, and the Arab States (Figure 25). It was not possible to compare these results with the targets per region.

**FIGURE 25: REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF CPOS WITH ACHIEVEMENTS IN RESPONDING TO COVID-19, 2020-21**



Results from HLE analysis depict largest expenditure figures on interventions reporting on the P&B (2020-21) Outcome 7 (Adequate and effective protection at work for all), with over US\$47 million, and Outcome 3 (Economic, social and environmental transitions for full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all), with over US\$34 million. Figure 26 shows the total expenditures associated with COVID-19 responses per outcome and region.

**FIGURE 26: TOTAL EXPENDITURES ASSOCIATED WITH COVID-19 RESPONSES PER OUTCOME, PER REGION, 2020-21 (US\$)**





Overall results on the ILO's COVID-19 response actions by region (2020–21) illustrate largest expenditures in the Asia and the Pacific and Africa regions (each over US\$58 million), followed by Europe and Central Asia (US\$31.1 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (US\$23.4 million) and the Arab States (US\$9.4 million). Turkey, Timor-Leste, Egypt, Bangladesh and Colombia stand out as the countries with the largest ILO expenditure associated with actions responding to the COVID-19 immediate effects on the world of work (over US\$12 million each).

These are also the top five countries with expenditures responding to COVID-19 per gender mainstreaming actions. Activities in Turkey, for instance, included an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on women's employment within the policy brief on the impact of the pandemic on the labour market (TUR 152), and a report on the impact of COVID-19 on working conditions of domestic workers (TUR 155). In Timor-Leste, 20 per cent of the COVID-19 cash transfer programme under MPTF were allocated to female-headed households (TLS 901). In Egypt, Better Work conducted a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on the Egyptian garment sector and provided capacity building on raising awareness and preventing infection by COVID-19 in Better Work factories (EGY 152).

The ILO COVID-19 response actions provided as a UN joint response are largely located in Nepal, Madagascar and Viet Nam. In Madagascar, for instance, the ILO supported the Ministry of National Education in project management, the implementation of the school infrastructure construction project using labour intensive methods in the construction of school buildings, classrooms with refectory, latrines, school furniture and capacity building of all partners in areas relating to works and maintenance, as part of a project with UNICEF and WFP. As part of a project with IFAD, the ILO supported the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in the implementation of a training project on labour-intensive approaches for SMEs and design offices in the rehabilitation of rural roads using the same approach. This has enabled the creation of 1,442 decent jobs and has contributed to local development through the use of local materials.

Concerning GPs, 31 out of 45 in the original database, reported achievements on COVID-19 responses (69 per cent). Most of them focused on social protection and OSH, and were linked to a flagship project, mostly on Building Social Protection Floors and Safety and Health for All. The focus of these GPs and countries involved is presented in **Table 3**. GP targeted actions in Asia and the Pacific (US\$5.0 million expenditure) and Africa regions (US\$2.5 million expenditure) linked mostly to outcomes 7 and 8 of P&B 2020–21. In **Cameroon**, for instance, ILO supported the government in drafting a national policy for health and social protection in August 2021. The final version of the document was approved by the national tripartite committee for OSH in October 2021. It includes the new challenges of the pandemic and the need to extend social protection to all institutions of the world of work. It also contains two capacity building modules on COVID-19 for the OSH committee and the labour inspectors. In **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, the GP included ILO's technical support to the government for the elaboration of the national social protection system through social dialogue with social partners and UN agencies. Activities included training and capacity building on social protection policy design and implementation, a partnership with UNICEF in a UN Joint Programme, the provision of financial and technical support for the purchase of IT equipment for the Ministry of Health and MOLSW, and the preparation of the UN Country team note "Developing a shock-responsive national social protection system to respond to the COVID-19 crisis in Lao PDR" presented to government with the Resident Coordinator's office.

**TABLE 3: FOCUS OF GLOBAL PRODUCTS THAT REPORTED RESPONSES TO COVID-19**

<b>Global product focus</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>Flagship programme</b>
Social protection	Cambodia, Cape Verde, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Indonesia, , Peru, Senegal	Building Social Protection Floors for All
OSH	Bangladesh, Cameroon, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Malawi, Zambia,	Safety and Health for All
Protection of workers – other than OSH (ex., HIV prevention)		
International Labour Standards	Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Zambia,	Better Work
Gender equality and inclusion	Viet Nam	
Employment	Cote d'Ivoire	
Knowledge production	Sri Lanka	

## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE STAFF AND CONSTITUENT SURVEYS

### Staff

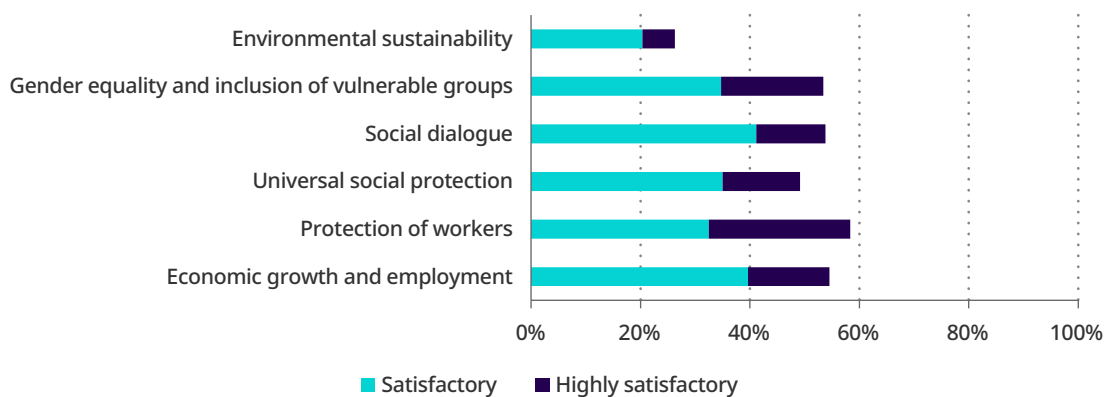
In terms of staff perceptions of the relevance, the HLE survey suggested the majority think the ILO is taking the necessary steps in designing and implementing recovery actions. Across all the main policy areas of the Call to Action (for example, Economic growth and employment, protection of all workers and universal social protection) an average of 75 per cent said that it was and just 8.2 per cent said it was not. Looking at some other dimensions, they were less sure about the ILO's work related to Just Transition (56 per cent said it was and 15 per cent said it was not) and its sectoral work (59 per cent said yes). In both these latter areas there was a high "don't know" figure suggesting that the specialist nature of these work areas means they are less well understood.

The relevance of the ILO's COVID-19 response to core standards and cross-cutting principles of the ILO's work were also rated highly by staff. Actions were judged by staff to have been framed in a way that promotes international labour standards in 85.5 per cent of cases; that includes actions that are gender responsive and support vulnerable groups in 80.5 per cent of cases; and that shape actions through social dialogue in 83.9 per cent of cases. Promoting synergies with other development partners received a somewhat lower rating of 67.4 per cent.

The internal coherence of and collaboration between different policy areas in responding to the crisis was given a fair rating by staff, with around three quarters of respondents giving a rating of 4, 5 or 6 out of 6 (for example, "somewhat coherent", "coherent" and "very coherent") but less than half giving a 5 or 6 out of 6 rating overall. Protection of all workers received the highest rating in this respect with 52.3 per cent giving the higher ratings.

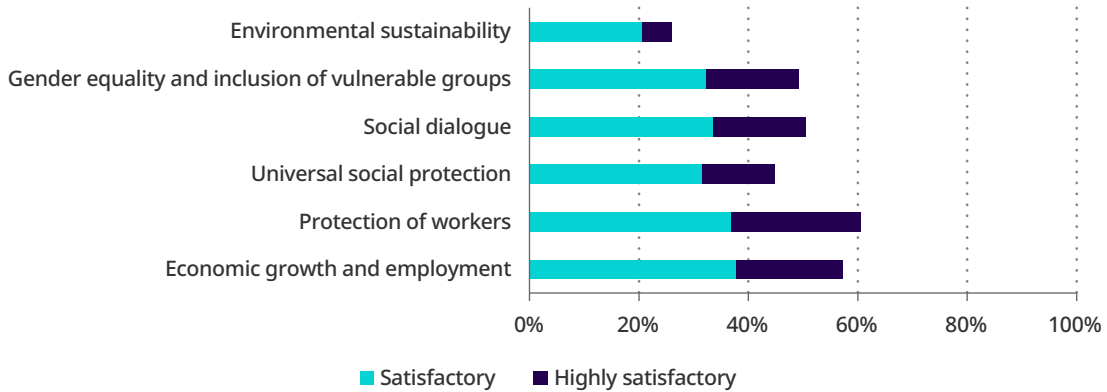
The survey asked staff to rate the effectiveness of the ILO's work in implementing projects and programmes in the context of COVID at country level. Across different policy domains, the ILO's work in the protection of workers received the highest rating (25.8 per cent "highly satisfactory") followed by gender equality and the inclusion of vulnerable groups (18.6 per cent "highly satisfactory"). Only 5.9 per cent gave this rating to the ILO's work in environmental sustainability (see **Figure 27**.)

**FIGURE 27: EFFECTIVENESS OF PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES DURING COVID-19 BY POLICY DOMAIN – STAFF SURVEY**



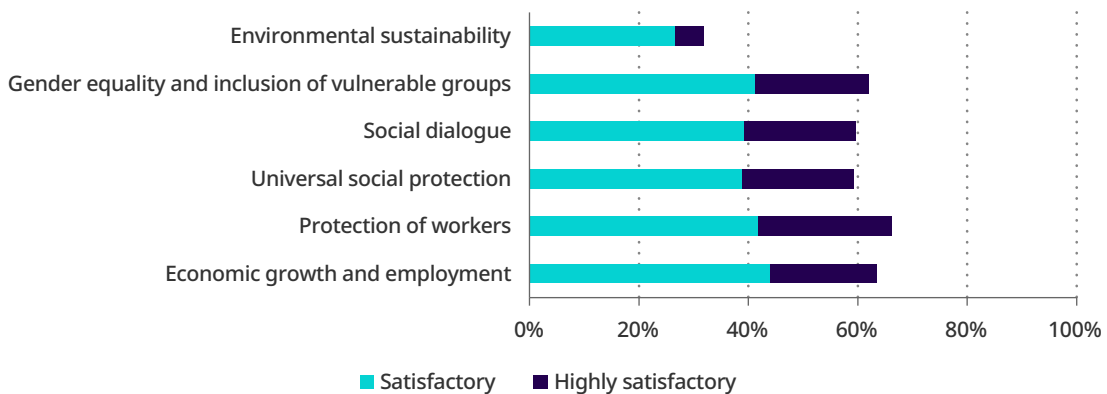
Staff were also asked to rate the ILO's work in supporting and strengthening the capacity of social partners during COVID in these policy areas with similar ratings given. See **Figure 28**.

**FIGURE 28: EFFECTIVENESS IN STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES OF SOCIAL PARTNERS DURING COVID-19 BY POLICY DOMAIN – STAFF SURVEY**



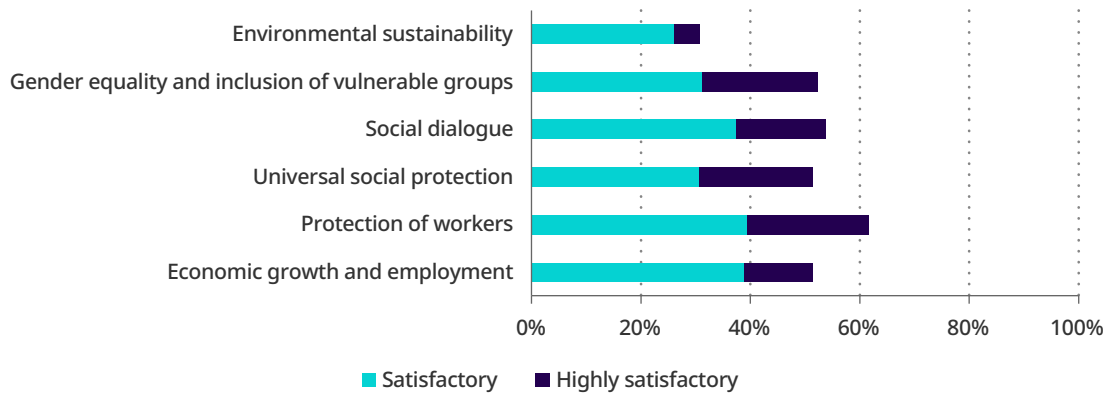
The effectiveness of the ILO's awareness raising and advocacy work across these domains was rated relatively higher compared with the above, with nearly all policy areas receiving "highly satisfactory" ratings from around a fifth of staff. Protection of workers again rated the highest and, consistent with other responses, environmental sustainability the lowest. (**Figure 29**)

**FIGURE 29: EFFECTIVENESS OF AWARENESS RAISING AND ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES DURING COVID-19 BY POLICY DOMAIN – STAFF SURVEY**



The effectiveness of the ILO's work supporting legal and policy frameworks across these domains was again rated the highest in the area of protection of workers (with 22.3 per cent giving a highly satisfactory" rating). A high "don't know" response for environmental sustainability (22.2 per cent) and universal social protection (18.0 per cent) may have affected these ratings to some extent, though only 4.63 per cent were prepared to give environmental sustainability the highest rating while 20.7 per cent did for universal social protection. See **Figure 30**.

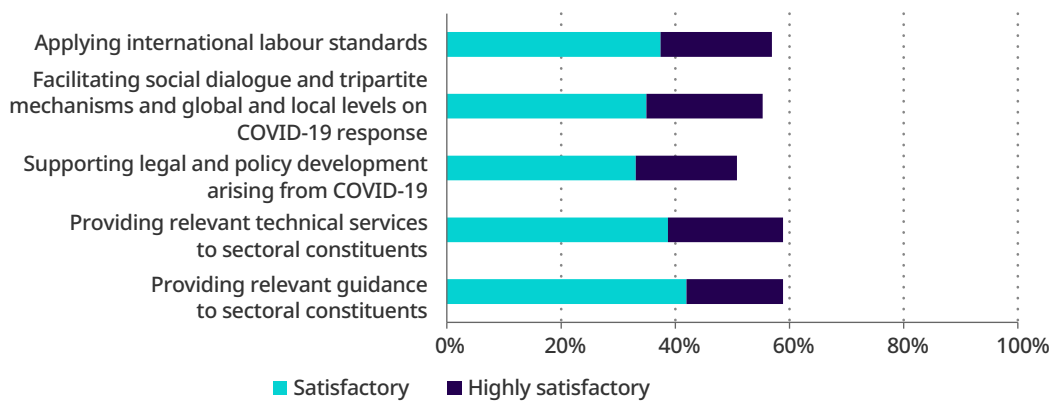
**FIGURE 30: EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORTING LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS DURING COVID-19 BY POLICY DOMAIN – STAFF SURVEY**



Across all policy domains, the effectiveness of the ILOs coordination of efforts with UN agencies and other partners was rated by staff as “satisfactory”. Only protection of workers (54.5 per cent) received high scores from more than half of respondents followed by universal social protection with 49.5 per cent. Environmental sustainability again received the lowest high scores at 38.7 per cent.

Looking at the sectoral aspects of the ILO’s COVID-19 response, staff gave the effectiveness of “providing relevant guidance to sectoral constituents” and “providing relevant technical services to sectoral constituents” the highest percentage of high scores (both 58.9 per cent for either “highly satisfactory” or “satisfactory”) followed closely by “applying international labour standards” (56.9 per cent) (see Figure 31).

**FIGURE 31: EFFECTIVENESS OF ILO’S SECTORAL WORK DURING COVID-19 – STAFF SURVEY**



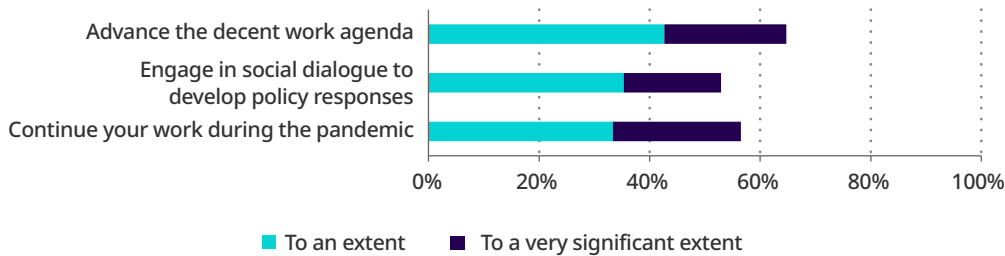
## Constituents

While the small and somewhat unbalanced sample size for the constituent survey requires caution in interpretation, the following responses were received that relate to the ILO's policy action during the pandemic:

On a 10-point scale, with zero denoting "not useful at all" and 10 denoting "extremely useful", on average, constituents rated the policy guides and tools prepared by the ILO at 7.2.

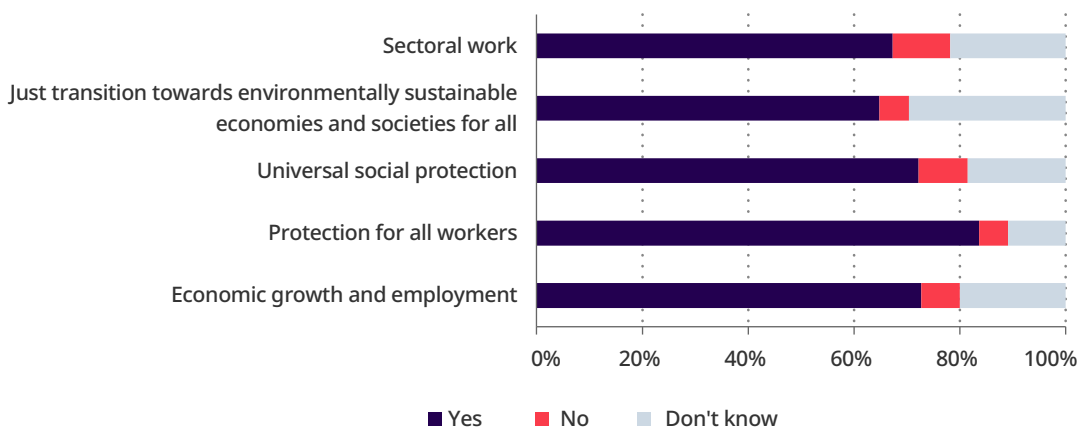
In terms of the ILO's work in strengthening their capacity, constituents gave high scores to "advancing the decent work agenda" (64.7 per cent high scores) and "engaging in social dialogue to develop policy responses" (52.9 per cent). More than 80 per cent of respondents gave a rating of 4/6 or higher (**Figure 32**).

**FIGURE 32: CONTRIBUTION TO CAPACITY STRENGTHENING – CONSTITUENT AND PARTNER SURVEY**



Excluding the high number of "don't know" responses to the question "do you think that the ILO is taking the necessary steps to design and implement recovery actions that are relevant to your needs" in key policy areas, a large majority of constituents said that it was. Results for the policy areas were: Protection of all workers (93.9 per cent), just transition (92.1 per cent), economic growth and employment (90.9 per cent), universal social protection (88.6 per cent), and sectoral work (86.0 per cent) (**Figure 33**.)

**FIGURE 33: DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RELEVANT RECOVERY ACTIONS – CONSTITUENT AND PARTNER SURVEY**



Constituents gave higher effectiveness ratings than ILO staff for COVID-related work in all policy areas – percentages of responses that were 5/6 or higher for each area were: protection of workers (constituents 67.3 per cent, staff 58.3 per cent); social dialogue (constituents 65.4 per cent, staff

53.8 per cent); universal social protection (constituents 56 per cent, staff 49.2 per cent); economic growth and employment (constituents 55.8 per cent, staff 54.5 per cent); gender equality and inclusion of vulnerable groups (constituents 54.9 per cent, staff 53.4 per cent); and environmental sustainability (constituents 44 per cent, staff 26.3 per cent).

Constituents also gave higher effectiveness ratings than ILO staff for all of the ILO's sectoral work related to COVID-19 – percentages of responses that were 5/6 or higher for each area were: “providing relevant guidance to sectoral constituents” (constituents 68.5 per cent, staff 58.9 per cent); “applying international labour standards” (constituents 68.5 per cent, staff 56.9 per cent); “providing technical services to sectoral constituents” (constituents 60.4 per cent, staff 58.9 per cent); “facilitating social dialogue and tripartite mechanisms” (constituents 60 per cent, staff 55.3 per cent); and “supporting legal and policy development arising from COVID-19” (constituents 51.9 per cent, staff 50.1 per cent).