



The 2021– 2023 ILO/Korea Partnership Programme funded projects in ASEAN, Cambodia and Lao PDR – Independent Final Cluster evaluation

QUICK FACTS

Countries: ASEAN, Cambodia and Lao PDR

Evaluation date: 15 October 2023

Evaluation type: Clustered

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: ILO ROAP

Technical Office: SKILLS, SOCIAL PROTECTION and LABADMIN/OSH

Evaluation manager: Ms. Rattanaporn Pongpattana, M&E Officer, ILO ROAP

Evaluation consultant(s): Mr. Theo van der Loop (Team Leader/International Evaluator), Mr. Chansy Samavong and Mr. Somith Sok (National Evaluators for resp. Lao PDR and Cambodia)

DC Symbol: RAS/21/50/KOR, RAS/21/51/KOR, RAS/21/52/KOR

Donor(s) & budget: The Ministry of Employment and Labor of the Republic of Korea (MOEL/ROK);
Budget: US\$ 2,153,937.

Key Words: Skills , Social Protection, Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), ASEAN, Cambodia and Lao PDR. [Use themes as provided in i-eval Discovery](#)



BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The present evaluation report is mandated by the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Final Independent Cluster Evaluation of the programme entitled “*The 2021– 2023 ILO/Korea Partnership Programme funded projects in ASEAN, Cambodia and Lao PDR*” (Annex 1). By focusing resources and expertise on those countries most in need, the ILO/Korea Partnership Programme in the Asia-Pacific region aims to maximize its contribution to the realization of the Decent Work in Asia-Pacific. Originally designed as a 3-year programme from 1 June 2021 until 31 December 2023, it was managed by the CTA, under the guidance of the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP), which works in close collaboration with ILO specialists in ILO Decent Work Team (DWT), Bangkok. It encompasses three Asia-Pacific Regional projects in the areas of Skills, Social Protection and OSH. It was financed by the Republic of Korea with a total budget for the three projects of US\$ 2,153,937, and it was implemented in Lao PDR, Cambodia, and other countries in ASEAN and in Asia and Pacific Region, including regional components.

Present situation of the project

The Programme will end on 31 December 2023, and the present evaluation has recommended to request for a no-cost extension of about four months.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The present evaluation’s purpose is for accountability and learning for programme improvement. The scope of the Evaluation covers the implementation of all three-funded Asia-Pacific Regional projects and covers all the geographic areas involved in the three projects, including Cambodia, Lao PDR and ASEAN. The evaluation also examines the Project’s performance in relation to all relevant ILO’s cross-cutting issues including gender equality and non-discrimination. The primary clients are the ILO/Korea Partnership Programme team, ROAP, DWT-Bangkok, and MoEL/ROK. Secondary clients are tripartite constituents and the project counterparts in the project countries, as well as the partner institutions in Korea.

Methodology of evaluation

The methodology includes a desk study of the relevant documents and primary data collection through 37 interviews with stakeholders conducted online and offline. In addition, the international evaluator made field visits to Lao PDR, Cambodia and Thailand. In Lao and Cambodia national consultants supported the international



evaluator. The participatory methodology further includes a critical reflection process by the key stakeholders in particular through the online stakeholders' workshop and the inputs by stakeholders to the draft report. Key deliverables are the inception report, the preliminary presentation of findings at the online stakeholders' workshop, the draft report and the final report.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The Evaluation found that the three ILO/Korea projects were highly **Relevant** and have responded to the needs and priorities of the tripartite stakeholders and beneficiaries. In terms of *Strategic Fit*, it was found that the projects were at least to a substantial degree unique. There were various other projects dealing with broadly similar technical areas but in each of those projects the focus was just a bit different. The national stakeholders interviewed all underlined that the areas selected (within the topics of OSH, social protection and SKILLS), are very crucial areas for their respective countries.

Concerning **Coherence**, the evaluation found that the ILO/Korea projects did each individually contribute in various ways to leveraging synergies and partnerships to enhance the projects' effectiveness. In addition, there was close cooperation with several Korea partner institutes. The Design of the three projects was considered appropriate as underlined by the stakeholders during the interviews undertaken for this evaluation, and also the two MTE's on Skills and Social Protection undertaken in early 2023 found that the design remained generally valid.

The investigations into the **Effectiveness** of the ILO/Korea projects shows that they have been making important progress in specific areas towards their planned results, although it should at the same time be underlined that the implementation has generally been slow with lots of activities concentrated in the present, final programme year. A review of the indicators at the Outcome level in the Logical Framework of the PRODOC of each of the three projects resulted in the assessment that the outcomes have been partially achieved. The slow progress especially in the first year of the project was due to a series of Challenges encountered such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the political situation in Myanmar, and the complex



management structure of the programme. Overall, it was found that the project staff addressed the challenges satisfactorily. Next to the challenges there were also several pertinent enabling or success factors, such as the continuity of the ILO/Korea Partnership, the strong commitment and support of the main government partners, the commitment and technical competence of ILO staff involved, and the important contributions made by the Seconded and loaned staff from Korea.

The **Management Arrangements** and the lines of accountability have been somewhat complex in this project: While the management was undertaken by the CTA, seconded from the MOEL/ROK, and the ILO Deputy Regional Director of ROAP, the technical leads were left to the lead specialists from the ILO DWT Team in Bangkok who backstop dozens or more projects in Asia and the Pacific, as well as to the in-country teams (mostly part-time) based in Vientiane for Osh and Social Protection, and in Bangkok for Skills. The driving of the implementation of the regional components of the three projects at the technical level generally seems to be the responsibility of the DWT experts. The ILO/Korea projects have collected some data that help track the relevant gender concerns, and efforts were made to have equal numbers of women and men in all activities (see further below).

In terms of the **Efficiency of Resource Use**, two Mid-Term Evaluations (MTE) found that the programme's resources have been strategically allocated to achieve expected results and were generally utilized efficiently including savings due to more online work. The actual spending of the funding being slow in the first year but picked up rapidly after that especially since mid 2022. Nevertheless, the implementation rates (expenditures plus encumbrances) are still quite modest with an overall 62.9% as of 21 July 2023. An overall balance of 37% of the total budget with over five months left in the project is not unusual though in (ILO) projects, as spending always accelerates towards the end. In this case also a series of major milestones is planned for the coming months. Expenditures differed substantially among Outcomes as is indicated in Table 4 with especially a low implementation rates for the regional components. In terms of expenditures, the largest

category in all three projects is for Project Management (36.0%) of the total budget closely followed by the Outcome 1 activities in each project (29.8%).

In terms of **Impact**, the ILO/Korea programme has made several important steps. While in the skills project there are currently no actual beneficiaries yet (i.e., migrant workers using MRS), because the MRS System should be put in place before that, but a few important inroads towards impact have been made: a positive change in the mindset of technical staff of the MoLVT in Cambodia; buy-in from Thai employers and ECOT into the MRS Roadmap; students have acquired enhanced and more up-to-date skills; and at the regional level the MRS is well-known in ASEAN SLOM, increasingly becoming a central issue in the ASEAN TVET Council. In social protection it is difficult to see a clear tangible impact (i.e., an increase in coverage of social protection), which is related to the incipient stage of Lao's development in this area, but a positive impact is that politics in Lao has become more constructive towards Social Protection and the government initiated the reform of the Social Security Law. In addition, the innovative sensitization work with Members of the National Assembly has a substantial potential impact on ongoing and future Law Revisions. In the OSH project the legal framework was enhanced in Lao PDR; the LNCCI will disseminate the acquired knowledge to their members and their workers and the LFTU is training OSH workers; and awareness has been increased among all stakeholders.

An important element of **Sustainability** is National/Local Ownership, and the ILO/Korea projects have fostered it in a number of different ways resulting in substantial ownership at selected national organizations. Despite the fact that all stakeholders indicated that continued support will be quite essential for the sustainability of the results after the projects have ended, the evaluation identified specific signs of sustainability, such as the series of capacity building activities in all three projects. In addition, MRS is part of the ASEAN-SLOM Agenda, while some countries are already using the MRS Roadmap without ILO involvement. In Cambodia, the MoLVT has developed a series of MRS indicators for the next five years plan and requested a budget allocation for that.



The connection between the RSTWG and the ATC ensures an institutionalized setting. In social protection, the establishment of a national Actuarial Working Committee linked to the NSSF is likely to be sustainable, and this applies also to the awareness raising. With respect to OSH in Lao PDR, support from the government budget has been proposed by the OSH Center, and a sustainable Reporting/Notification System on occupational diseases and accidents is in development. In addition, social and tripartite dialogue was strengthened in the area of OSH, and awareness and understanding of OSH increased.

The last evaluation criteria concern the ***ILO Cross-cutting Themes***, of which gender equality and non-discrimination have been addressed in a somewhat generic way both in the design and in the implementation of the ILO/Korea projects. There were no specific activities focussed on gender and non-discrimination and there was no dedicated budget allocated for that. While most of the previous evaluations recommended to put more emphasis on gender, neither the PRODOC's nor the implementation followed-up on that. Considerations for people with disability as well as interventions on the Environment were generally not explicitly included. Attention was paid to ILS, in particular to the relevant ILO Conventions, while Tripartism and Social Dialogue were mostly integrated.

The evaluation has conducted a ***SWOT Analysis*** of each of the three ILO/Korea projects from which it was concluded that for each of the three projects there are serious internal Weaknesses and external Threats. At the same time, the internal Strengths are also quite powerful, and the external Opportunities identified for all three projects are very substantial and realistic. This analysis was combined with a ***Comparative Analysis*** of the three projects. Albeit a word of caution was given on the subjectivity of the scoring, etc., it was found that the scoring of the three projects provides quite similar results with a marginally higher average score for the Social Protection project. This is in part also logical as the three projects are implemented under one and the same programme sharing a lot of crucial common aspects. Based on the SWOT and the Comparative analysis, it is recommended to continue both Social Protection and OSH in Lao PDR. It is further recommended to phase

out gradually the work on MRS by agreeing to fund one last phase of another 3 years, in particular to take advantage of the Opportunity (cf. SWOT) to complete the last part of the MRS Roadmap from Step 5 to Step 7 for both Corridors 1 and 2. For the Skills Outcome 2 on Digital Learning it is recommended to develop a more integrated plan for this technical area as part of a PRODOC. Lastly, the Regional Components of each of the three projects are potentially important for embedding activities and outcomes into the ASEAN Institutions and Workplans, as well as for sharing Good Practices and for enhancing cooperation among countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main findings & Conclusions

1. **Make sure to request for a no-cost extension for January-May 2024 by submitting a substantiated request with a revised M&E Framework and an updated budget** to MOEL/ROK through PARTNERSHIPS, Geneva, because the Korea budget year runs until December and a request for a no-cost extension has not yet been submitted.
2. **Continue the ILO-Korea Partnership Programme where appropriate with funding for another programme phase.** All stakeholders interviewed as well as the ILO do appreciate very much the long-term continuity of the partnership, and to continue that into the future would enhance the sustainability of the work conducted so far. It is further recommended to start consultations with the involved Tripartite Constituents in an early stage (well before the PRODOC is developed).
3. **Continue the work in Lao PDR and Cambodia** based on the SWOT analysis in Section 3.9 combined with the Comparative analysis in Section 3.10. In addition, until and including the present phase of the Partnership the priority of MOEL/ROK was with the lower-income countries, and it is more than likely that this will continue, which also supports the inclusion of in particular Lao PDR and Cambodia in a possible next phase. Monitor the situation in Myanmar and make provisions to have dedicated activities there once the UN decides to allow activities again in the country. Include other ASEAN Member States and other Asia and the Pacific countries where appropriate.

4. **With respect to the three technical topics, it is recommended to:**
- a) **Continue both OSH and Social Protection in Lao PDR** (based on the SWOT analysis in Section 3.9 and the Comparative analysis in Section 3.10). In addition, these two areas are related to two outputs of outcomes of the ILO DWCP of Lao PDR 2022-26.
 - b) **Phase-out gradually the work on MRS by agreeing to fund one last phase of 3 years**, in particular to take advantage of the Opportunity (cf. the SWOT analysis) to complete the last part of the MRS Roadmap from Step 5 to Step 7 for both Corridors 1 and 2. This will be conditional upon the inclusion in the new PRODOC of a solid and comprehensive Exit/Sustainability Plan, as well as models for replication of MRS.
 - c) **Develop for the Skills Outcome 2 on Digitalisation of skills and TEVT a more integrated plan** as part of a PRODOC and include a solid Exit Plan.
 - d) **Continue the Regional Components of each of the three projects** as they are potentially important for embedding activities and outcomes into the **ASEAN** Institutions and Workplans, as well as for sharing knowledge and Good Practices and for enhancing cooperation among countries.
 - e) **Investigate the possibility of integrated OSH/Social Protection/Skills interventions** to maximize the impact of the programme (as e.g., has been done in the current phase between the OSH and Social protection projects in Lao PDR).
5. **Make sure to install a Programme/Project Steering Committee (PSC) and to conduct a meeting every half year** in a possible next phase of the Partnership. This was found to be essential because of the specific complex structure of the programme management with different layers of management and different layers of (regional and/or in-country) technical leads who are not dedicated leads but at best part-time. Such a regular PSC would also enhance communication and can oversee and drive progress. In addition, related donors (Japan, China, EU, SDC, etc.) could be invited whenever appropriate to enhance coordination and coherence. Lastly, it is recommended to organise the first PSC meeting within three months from the start of the project.
6. **Involve the workers' and employers' organisations more systematically in the consultations for a new phase of the**



	<p>programme and provide capacity building with a dedicated budget to key staff of these organisations including a minimum number of female staff members.</p> <p>7. Develop a Gender Equality Strategy in a next phase from the design stage, and make sure to identify specific outcomes/ outputs on gender, and in particular make sure that the project design will address pertinent strategic needs of women. In addition, make sure to allocate dedicated resources to such a Strategy.</p> <p>8. Conduct a sustainability workshop (“Closing Event”) in early 2024 in order to consolidate the Outcomes and Results by discussing long-term strategies with key high-level stakeholders (including ASEC), and to investigate ways to keep the momentum going that was created by the projects.</p> <p>9. Strengthen relationship with the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) in order to enhance the linkages with regional priorities.</p>
<p>Main lessons learned and good practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LL1 – In a complicated management environment with different levels of management and different levels of technical leads coordination involves bringing all stakeholders together at regular intervals in order to drive progress and to enhance cooperation, coherence and communication. • LL2 – Inclusion from private sectors in the MRS processes is crucial in harnessing timely and relevant outcomes. • GP1 – Adding a Regional component to Outcomes/Outputs specific for one or two countries has the clear potential to enhance knowledge sharing, learning and mutual understanding between countries and to involve different ASEAN Institutions. • GP2 - Adaptability and flexibility of ILO-ROAP, the Programme Team, the DWT experts, the in-country teams, as well as of the Donor is critical for progress in project implementation especially in times of crisis.