Independent Midterm Evaluation of the second phase of the ILO Global Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All (2021 – 2025)

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Albania, Angola, Barbados, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Rep. of the Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Paraguay, Philippines, Rwanda, Samoa, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Suriname, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Uganda, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Zambia

Evaluation date: 09 October 2024

Evaluation type: Project

Evaluation timing: Mid-term

Administrative Office: Universal Social Protection Department (SOCPRO)

Technical Office: Universal Social Protection Department (SOCPRO)

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DC Symbol: GLO/21/34/MUL; GLO/20/29/BEL; GLO/22/31/IRL and various other DC projects

Donor(s) & budget: Multiple including Belgium, GIZ, IrishAid, Luxembourg. Total: USD 116,322,546

Key Words: *Project Evaluation; Independent; Interim; Global; Social protection; Social security; Informal economy; Climate change; Financing social protection; Indonesia; Viet Nam; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Malawi; Rwanda; Senegal; Zambia; Uzbekistan; Occupied Palestinian Territory*
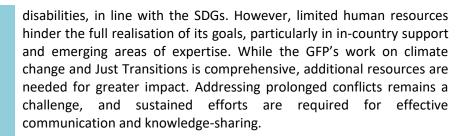
BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	
Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure	The ILO's Global Flagship Programme (GFP) on Building Social Protection Floors for All, initiated in 2016, supports the development and implementation of social protection systems guided by ILO's social security standards. The second phase (2021-2025) aims to establish social protection floors in 50 countries, advance knowledge in 16 thematic areas, and strengthen strategic partnerships both nationally and globally. Its strategy has the ambition of increasing legal coverage for an additional 20 million people; increase effective coverage for an additional 30 million people; and improve protection for an additional 10 million people. It focuses on three pillars: in-country support, thematic support, and strategic partnerships. The programme's management involves a dedicated team, led by the ILO's Universal Social Protection Department (SOCPRO), supported by a high-level advisory committee (Global Tripartite Advisory Committee, GTAC) and a Global Technical Team (GTT).
Present situation of the project	The GFP operates through multiple development cooperation projects and funding modalities, ensuring flexible and efficient administration. Regular monitoring, annual reporting, and independent evaluations maintain transparency and continuous improvement (see the dedicated Results Monitoring Tool).
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	The midterm independent evaluation of the GFP (covering the period from August 2021 to April 2024) aims to assess the implementation status of the second phase and provide feedback for programme improvement. It reviews the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of the GFP. It incorporates gender equality, human rights, and the SDGs as cross-cutting themes and evaluates the programme's flexibility and capacity to address emerging needs. The primary users of this evaluation include ILO staff, constituents, funding partners, and development partners.
Methodology of evaluation	Conducted between March and August 2024 (see Appendix 3. Timeline), the evaluation employed various methods, including desk literature reviews, semi-structured interviews with 123 stakeholders (62% male) (Appendix 4. List of Interviewees), an online survey, and a validation workshop with key stakeholders. Consultations addressed key questions related to the evaluation criteria and the achievement of the outcomes/objectives of the project (Appendix 2. Evaluation Matrix). The

evaluation was managed by Mr. Ritash Sarna, with support from an international evaluator and eight national consultants.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation findings are presented according to the evaluation questions. The evaluation has also drawn Lessons Learned and Emerging Good Practices.

Relevance and coherence

Conclusion 1. The second phase of the GFP strongly aligns with the ILO's mandate related to the Policy Outcome on Social Protection, the Decent Work Agenda, and the ILO's Development Cooperation Strategy. The GFP adheres to key ILO conventions and recommendations, contributes to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly targets 1.3 and 3.8. and synergizes with other ILO policy outcomes. However, coordination with the Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions requires further clarification on how it is processed and dissemination among staff to avoid overlaps and ensure efficient resource use.

Conclusion 2. The GFP responds effectively to the recommendations from the ILO field operations and structure and Development Cooperation review by providing a coherent structure for ILO interventions, employing a results-based management approach, enhancing capacity development, knowledge management, and results monitoring frameworks. Challenges remain in funding and complementarity with the Global Accelerator, and in visibility and communication of the GFP's strategic importance to donors, constituents, and partners. Additionally, better regional dialogue and thematic exchanges are needed to address specific regional needs. The GFP's flexible structure allows responsiveness to emerging needs, but ongoing efforts are required to avoid overlaps and ensure efficient coordination.

Conclusion 3. The GFP is well-aligned with international social protection trends and development frameworks, effectively adapting to emerging priorities like the COVID-19 crisis, climate change, and the informal economy, maintaining high alignment with the SDGs, UN initiatives, the multilateral system, and global partnerships. It supports gender equality, non-discrimination, and the inclusion of people with
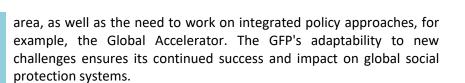
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disabilities, in line with the SDGs. However, limited human resources hinder the full realisation of its goals, particularly in in-country support and emerging areas of expertise. While the GFP's work on climate change and Just Transitions is comprehensive, additional resources are needed for greater impact. Addressing prolonged conflicts remains a challenge, and sustained efforts are required for effective communication and knowledge-sharing.

Effectiveness

Conclusion 4. The GFP has made significant progress toward its objectives between January 2021 and March 2023, achieving 105 institutional changes across 40 countries and extending social protection to 31.3 million people, surpassing initial targets, nearly doubling the initially set ambitions for Step 1, and targets for Steps 2 and 3 were successfully achieved. The second phase focused on social protection floors in 50 countries and resulted in notable achievements, including the ratification of Convention 102 by seven countries. Despite strong performance, improvements are needed in reporting clarity and coordination, as current reports lack detailed disaggregation and more easily searchable results in the RMT. Addressing these areas will further solidify the GFP's impact and ensure that it continues to meet and exceed its ambitious objectives and outputs. Midterm evaluations show satisfactory results, with high execution rates and efficient fund utilisation. Addressing reporting and coordination issues will enhance the GFP's overall impact.

Conclusion 5. The GFP has significantly contributed to and benefited from cross-country policy and technical advice, particularly through South-South collaboration, enhancing learning and best practices. Examples include Uzbekistan learning from Uruguay's monotax system and Rwanda's programme design benefiting from cross-country advice. Emerging areas like climate change, gender-responsive protection, and coverage for informal workers highlight the need for stronger ILO technical capacities in these areas. Given the large informal sector globally, more effort is required in social protection for informal workers, alongside gender-responsive systems within social protection policy, as seen in Viet Nam and Rwanda. High levels of informality are a major reason why developing countries lack adequate domestic resources, emphasising the need for increased effort and priority in this

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area, as well as the need to work on integrated policy approaches, for example, the Global Accelerator. The GFP's adaptability to new challenges ensures its continued success and impact on global social protection systems.
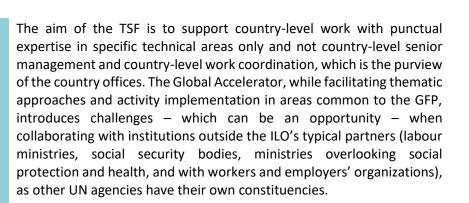
Efficiency

Conclusion 6. The GFP has shown significant cost-effectiveness through integrated resource management and strategic partnerships, achieving a 70% financial execution rate and a 61% expenditure rate by the end of 2023. In countries like Viet Nam and Zambia, the GFP combined field missions with partnerships to reduce costs while meeting objectives The use of XBTC allocations has been pivotal in building capacity for social protection financing, leading to larger projects, such as in Senegal, where the project supported stakeholders in their efforts to reallocate fuel subsidies to family allowances. However, the GFP faces bureaucratic challenges, including delays in operations and coordination issues, with staffing shortages at the country level adding complexity. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving operational efficiency.

Conclusion 7. The GFP has established strong partnerships at national, regional, and interagency levels, contributing significantly to its objectives. National collaborations with governments, trade unions, employers, and UN agencies have been crucial, while regional partnerships have enhanced social protection policies. Although bureaucratic challenges slow activity implementation, improving communication and administrative processes could enhance effectiveness. Strategic partnerships with NGOs, academia, and UN agencies have supported knowledge sharing and capacity building. Strengthening these partnerships will ensure continued progress in promoting sustainable social protection systems worldwide.

Effectiveness of management arrangements

Conclusion 8. The GFP management arrangements receive political, technical, and administrative support from ILO, its constituents, and donors, though the adequacy varies. Donor funding is crucial for both pooled and individual projects, while ILO constituents provide the institutional backing needed for implementation. However, the Technical Support Facility lacks sufficient country-level senior management and coordination, as most staff are not based in-country.
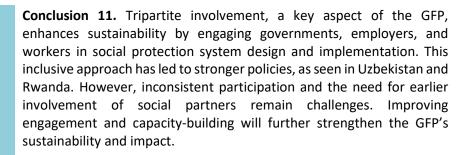
The aim of the TSF is to support country-level work with punctual expertise in specific technical areas only and not country-level senior management and country-level work coordination, which is the purview of the country offices. The Global Accelerator, while facilitating thematic approaches and activity implementation in areas common to the GFP, introduces challenges – which can be an opportunity – when collaborating with institutions outside the ILO's typical partners (labour ministries, social security bodies, ministries overlooking social protection and health, and with workers and employers' organizations), as other UN agencies have their own constituencies.

Conclusion 9. The GFP's administrative and financing arrangements show both strengths and areas for improvement. Efficient resource use is supported by multidonor setups and streamlined processes. While the GFP is vital for building national social protection systems, a potential shift in donor funding to the Global Accelerator risks financial instability. Though funding is secure until 2025, expanded partnerships with private sector entities require continuity for improved sustainability. Promising partnerships with development banks and successful collaborations, such as with the EU and Swiss cooperation to P4H, should be replicated. Continuous evaluation, sustainable funding, and improved communication with donors are key to maintaining financial stability and avoiding overlaps with the Global Accelerator.
Sustainability and impact.

Conclusion 10. The GFP has a strong focus on results and impacts by embedding social protection in national legal frameworks to ensure long-term commitments from governments. Strategic communication helps build public support for social protection. Partnerships, like the one with the IMF on social protection financing, show promise for sustainability. However, the programme must continue enhancing its focus on the long-term financial and operational sustainability of social protection systems. Developing comprehensive sustainability strategies and exit plans for time-limited projects is crucial, complementing them with other on-going and future projects. Increased visibility through public events and communication can further strengthen the programme's sustainability.

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Conclusion 11. Tripartite involvement, a key aspect of the GFP, enhances sustainability by engaging governments, employers, and workers in social protection system design and implementation. This inclusive approach has led to stronger policies, as seen in Uzbekistan and Rwanda. However, inconsistent participation and the need for earlier involvement of social partners remain challenges. Improving engagement and capacity-building will further strengthen the GFP's sustainability and impact.

Cross-cutting policy drivers on ILO project evaluation
Gender issues assessment

The GFP increasingly integrates gender approaches, activities, and gender-related result monitoring, with gender-disaggregated reporting and a dedicated budget in phase 2 for gender data visibility. The mid-term evaluation highlights significant contributions to addressing gender and inclusion issues. Despite progress in raising awareness, challenges and inequalities remain in GFP-implementing countries. Ongoing efforts are needed to ensure inclusivity stays central and that the programme benefits everyone, regardless of gender, age, or disability status.

Tripartite issues assessment

The assessment of tripartite issues shows strong ILO integration with government efforts in the GFP and engagement of social partners. Employers' and Workers' organizations are involved through focal points at ILO HQ and country levels but seek more clarity about the GFP and its connection to the Global Accelerator.

International Labour Standards assessment

The assessment of international labour standards (ILS) confirms the GFP's continued alignment with ILO's Decent Work principles, with no further issues noted. The GFP promotes and adheres to international labour standards.

Environmental sustainability

The GFP has expanded its focus to include environmental sustainability, aligning more closely with ILO's work in this area.

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	Capacity Development
	Capacity development at all levels is a core principle of ILO's GFP, and the midterm evaluation confirms that the programme has improved capabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main findings & Conclusions	**Relevance and coherence** **Recommendation 1.** Enhance coordination and clarity between the GFP and the Global Accelerator through joint planning workshops and meetings to define roles and avoid overlaps. Develop a coordination framework outlining how the two initiatives will complement each other without duplicating efforts. Regular stakeholder meetings should be held to discuss progress and collaboration. Expected outcomes include clearer roles, more efficient resource use, reduced redundancy, and stronger collaboration, leading to more effective social protection systems. **Recommendation 2**. Strengthen engagement with social partners and civil society for relevance and visibility by expanding tailored capacity-building programmes for workers' and employers' organizations, focusing on policy advocacy and participation in social protection dialogues. Increase inclusive consultations and promote national and regional social protection forums for ongoing dialogue and collaboration. Expected outcomes include greater involvement and ownership by social partners, enhanced capacity for contributing to social protection policy, and stronger, more inclusive forums for sustainable social protection systems. **Effectiveness** **Recommendation 3.** Expand the GFP to more countries while reducing and consolidating thematic areas with those of the Global Accelerator. Conduct strategic assessments to prioritise countries most in need and streamline the thematic focus on impactful areas like universal and gender-responsive social protection. Establish clear and improved collaboration between the GFP and Global Accelerator to avoid duplication and enhance resource efficiency. Expected outcomes include greater global social protection coverage, more focused and

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effective thematic areas, and improved coordination between the GFP and Global Accelerator.

Recommendation 4. Develop a contextualised mechanism for policy influence and capacity building tailored to the specific needs of participating countries. This includes tools for engaging decision-makers, building technical capacity in emerging areas like digital economy inclusion and green jobs, and offering ongoing professional development. Enhance the Results Monitoring Tool to document lessons learned and share best practices. Establish forums for experience sharing among tripartite partners and conduct regular needs assessments. Expected outcomes include stronger policy influence, increased technical capacity, better documentation of learnings, and improved collaboration among tripartite partners, leading to more sustainable social protection systems.

Recommendation 5. Strengthen technical capacities in emerging thematic areas through South-South collaboration by forming specialised working groups on topics like climate change, gender-responsive social protection, and disability inclusion. Facilitate regular South-South learning exchanges and document best practices. Develop targeted capacity-building programmes, including training and workshops tailored to countries facing challenges like high informality and gender-specific vulnerabilities. Expected outcomes include improved technical capacities, greater sharing of innovative solutions, and strengthened South-South collaboration, fostering a cohesive network of countries advancing social protection goals.

Efficiency

Recommendation 6. Enhance operational efficiency by reducing bureaucratic hurdles and streamlining administrative processes. Simplify procedures by reviewing and eliminating unnecessary steps, developing faster approval processes, and implementing digital tools for automating tasks like project tracking and reporting. Integrate the Results Monitoring Tool with other systems for better data management and ensure regular updates from country offices. Create clear communication channels for project managers to access updates and submit reports easily. Expected outcomes include reduced project

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delays, increased reporting accuracy through automation, and improved communication, resulting in higher operational efficiency.

Recommendation 7. Strengthen strategic partnerships and enhance engagement strategies by developing a partnership strategy with clear goals and roles for collaborations with key stakeholders. Establish regular forums and feedback mechanisms to improve communication and address challenges. Focus on capacity building and knowledge sharing through workshops and training for partners. Expected outcomes include stronger, more strategic partnerships, improved collaboration and communication, and increased partner capacity, leading to better advocacy, resource efficiency, and programme sustainability.

Effectiveness of management arrangements

Recommendation 8. Improve communication and coordination across all levels of the GFP by establishing a centralised digital platform for real-time updates and regular newsletters or virtual meetings. Re-launch knowledge-sharing initiatives like KISS Cafés, organize webinars on emerging issues, and schedule coordination meetings between HQ, regional, and country offices to review progress and align strategies. Engage in knowledge sharing with other flagships to foster collaboration. Expected outcomes include improved communication, enhanced collaboration, efficient coordination of activities, and better sharing of best practices.

Recommendation 9. Strengthen financial and administrative sustainability of the GFP by securing sustainable funding, particularly for phase 3, through a dedicated fundraising strategy targeting long-term funding bodies and exploring innovative mechanisms like public-private partnerships. Clarify roles and responsibilities by reviewing the GFP and Global Accelerator to avoid overlaps and capture joint funding. Optimise resource allocation by reassessing human and financial needs and exploring Junior Professional Officer (JPO) hires. Expected outcomes include greater financial stability, clearer roles for efficient program implementation, and better resource allocation to meet objectives without overburdening staff or funds.

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	Sustainability and impact
	Recommendation 10. Enhance tripartite involvement and ownership for sustainability by engaging social partners early in design and planning through workshops and regular feedback mechanisms. Improve capacity building for social partners with regular training on policy advocacy, social dialogue, and technical aspects of social protection, using tailored materials. Strengthen tripartite forums at national and regional levels for better collaboration and monitoring, providing logistical support to ensure their effectiveness. Expected outcomes include increased ownership from social partners, enhanced capacity for advocacy, and stronger tripartite forums for sustained collaboration and problem-solving.
	Recommendation 11. Strengthen financial and operational sustainability of social protection projects through the GFP by developing sustainability strategies, including risk assessments, financial planning, and robust exit strategies for time-limited projects to ensure lasting benefits. Increase GFP visibility through public events, newsletters, and social media, while sharing success stories and lessons at annual conferences. Secure long-term funding by diversifying sources, engaging development banks and private sector partners, and exploring innovative mechanisms like social impact bonds. Expected outcomes include sustainable project benefits, increased public and stakeholder support, and secured long-term funding for social protection initiatives.
Main lessons learned and good practices	**Main Lessons Learned**
	LL1. Survey insights for future phases. A 2020 survey in 56 countries informed the second phase of the GFP, and a similar approach could guide phase 3, ensuring the program evolves based on global feedback.
	LL2. Enhancing focus on knowledge goods. The ILO should enhance its focus on knowledge products by improving the integration and relevance of data portals and platforms, aligning them with thematic areas and the Decent Work focus.
	Good Practices
	GP 1. Gender and vulnerability data utilisation. Gender and vulnerability data have helped address gender and inclusion issues, but

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	continued efforts are needed to ensure all individuals benefit equally, regardless of gender, age, or disability status.

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