International Labour Organization

Evaluation Office

i-eval Discovery

Independent Final Evaluation of the Trade for Decent Work Project Phase 1: 2019-2024

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Cabo Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique; Bangladesh, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Tajikistan, Viet Nam; Moldova; Ecuador, Honduras, Guatemala, Peru; Fiji

Evaluation date: 07 July 2025

Evaluation type: Project

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: n/a

Technical Office: International Labour Standards (NORMES)

Evaluation manager: Inviolata Chinyangarara

Evaluation consultant(s): orange & teal, Switzerland

DC Symbol: GLO/18/30/EUR; RAF/21/08/FIN; GLO/23/51/FIN

Donor(s) & budget: European Union, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, USD 9.36 million

Key Words: child labour, decent work, fundamental conventions, international labour standards, responsible business conduct, trade

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	
Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure	The project aims at promoting the Decent Work Agenda in selected countries that are beneficiaries of the EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP, GSP+, or EBA) or have signed or are negotiating a trade agreement with the EU. The project operated within a framework consisting of two components: • **Country-focused Facility** supported selected of target countries, based on annual work plans submitted for financing to the donors. • **Global Facility** provided flexible support to respond to emerging needs in partner countries or to advance global initiatives, such as the promotion of the MNE Declaration. Although the project spanned six years, activities were planned and defined through annual programming cycles. The project was structured around four intermediate objectives focused on strengthening the capacity of constituents and institutions to support compliance with International Labour Standards (ILS). This included enabling participation in national ILS processes, improving reporting systems, enhancing frameworks for social dialogue and conflict resolution, and building advocacy capacity among tripartite constituents and other key stakeholders. Based on these objectives, the project involved activities such as capacity building for stakeholders, technical support for legislative gap analyses and reforms, and the development of frameworks for social dialogue.
Present situation of the project	The first phase of the project ended on 31 December 2024. The second phase of the project runs from 2024-2027.
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	**Purpose**: The objectives of the evaluation are to assess the project's performance using the OECD DAC criteria. It also identifies lessons learned and good practices and provides recommendations to enhance sustainability and guide future similar interventions. **Scope**: The evaluation covers the entire project implementation from January 2019 to December 2024 focusing on four countries: Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Viet Nam. The countries and ad hoc interventions were chosen to reflect a mix of regions, languages, themes, and donors. **Clients**: The evaluation is intended for ILO constituents, field units, headquarters, and donors, while also providing insights for a broader range

	of stakeholders.
Methodology of evaluation	A mixed methods approach was employed, including document review, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, case studies, an online survey, and a validation meeting. The evaluation team also explored how the project activities plausibly influenced the observed outcomes, using evidence collected through various methods (contribution analysis). The approach was informed by the OECD DAC Standards (including the Quality Standards for Development Evaluation, and "Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully" and "Protection of people involved in evaluation" guidelines) as well as ILO's relevant guidance notes and standards. The **document review** covered the project document and subsequent project proposals, six annual reports, and two budget sheets. The evaluation team conducted 11 online, semi-structured **individual interviews** involving 16 project stakeholders. Furthermore, the evaluation team conducted 25 **in-person, semi-structured interviews** with stakeholders in Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Viet Nam, involving 29 representatives of the ILO and its constituents. The evaluation team conducted two **online focus group** discussions, namely on the ad-hoc interventions and the cluster approach in Bangladesh. The online survey was distributed to 187 project stakeholders and resulted in a response rate of 51.9%. The evaluation integrates findings from four **case studies** where on-site fact-finding was conducted as well as from selected ad hoc interventions to examine the project's implementation across different contexts and gather information on results, challenges, and enabling factors. Each one of the case studies focuses on a specific topic, such as *Project working in a cluster set-up*, *Promotion of the MNE Declaration*, etc. Key stakeholders also participated in a **validation meeting** to provide feedback on preliminary findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Ethical guidelines and data protection were ensured, by ensuring informed consent, allowing participants to opt out of questions, de-identifying data, and committing to delete all recordings and related materials six months after the evaluation, with recordings made only upon prior consent.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS	The evaluation main findings, structured according to the OECD DAC criteria, are as follows: **Relevance**: The project aligns well with ILO priorities, such as Decent Work Country Programmes and the Programme and Budget 2022-23 and 2024-25,

and the labour provisions of EU trade agreements. It supports countries in advancing decent work while meeting requirements for preferential market access. Engagement with constituents to ensure that activities responded to national needs was strong across all countries. The project's intervention strategy was based on a one-year planning horizon, as future funding was uncertain when the project document was developed. While the project's intervention design is broadly valid and aligned with its stated objectives, a more comprehensive theory of change was not developed due to this limited timeframe. The use of annual work plans allowed for flexible, country-specific adjustments. This flexibility had advantages, but it also made long-term planning more difficult, partly because the M&E system and tools were not applied consistently across countries.

Coherence: The project demonstrated strong internal coherence. In the survey, 89% of respondents confirmed effective coordination within the ILO and with its constituents. The project was seen as well integrated into existing ILO structures and linked to other ILO-funded interventions. In contrast, external collaboration was viewed as more mixed. The Bangladesh cluster approach was highlighted as a good practice, helping to strengthen both internal and external coherence as well as collaboration.

Effectiveness: Interviewees across countries generally associated high level of result achievement, particularly in strengthening engagement with international labour standards (ILS), building institutional capacity, and supporting social dialogue. Survey data confirmed these views, with nearly 90% of respondents reporting improved ILS capacity and 78% noting better systems for reporting and conflict resolution. Some saw further potential in supporting groups like parliamentarians and civil society. A strong majority of respondents (75%) stated that the project delivered high-quality services and products, including training and technical support. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) was a limiting factor: despite detailed country reporting, the lack of a unified M&E plan and inconsistent indicators made comparison and learning difficult. Cross-cutting issues were addressed with varying depth – gender and youth received strong attention, while just transition or environment were less emphasised, as they were not central to the project's focus.

Efficiency: The project reduced overheads in several countries by using cost-sharing arrangements with other projects of related thematic focus. Although many considered staffing and funding levels to be insufficient, total project spending did not reach 100%, partly due to contextual factors that limited full resource use. Reporting demands were high, with some offices estimating that progress reports required more than 20 staff days per year. Several ILO staff noted that stronger peer-learning mechanisms could help improve both efficiency and effectiveness. Finally, in terms of value for money, the results appear positive. Over 80% of respondents stated that the time and resources invested in the project were worthwhile given the results achieved.

Impact: Stakeholder perceptions indicate that the project contributed meaningfully to progress on labour standards and social dialogue. It supported the ratification of 12 ILO conventions in six countries (Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Viet Nam), helped prepare additional ratifications, and supported alignment of domestic laws with international labour standards. The project also strengthened national systems to monitor and report on labour rights. Between 2021 and 2023, eight countries fulfilled their ILO reporting obligations. This points to improved legal alignment with international standards and stronger systems that support accountability under EU trade agreement commitments.

Sustainability: The project embedded sustainability into its overall strategy by focusing on long-term legal, institutional, and capacity-building measures. In many countries, interventions helped align national laws with international labour standards, embedded reforms within public institutions, and provided stakeholders with tools and expertise to carry the work forward. Notable examples included national reporting units, support for ratification processes, digital tools, and formal cooperation agreements, such as the ten-year MoU between Viet Nam and the ILO. The project trained a broad range of actors, such as labour inspectors, judiciary staff, parliamentarians, and tripartite constituents. That said, limited resources and staff turnover may undermine sustainability as identified in the project's risk matrix. Survey results indicated a broadly positive outlook: 68% of respondents expected the results to last, though some raised concerns about funding and political commitment. Donors showed the least confidence, while ILO staff remained the most optimistic.

Conclusions: This evaluation finds that the project was generally well aligned with ILO strategies and national priorities, and that it addressed relevant needs among constituents. Its focus on supporting legal and institutional frameworks, and linking these to trade incentives, was broadly appropriate and appreciated by many stakeholders. Nevertheless, the evaluation also identifies areas for refinement, that can be implemented in the second phase

	of the project. This includes imbalances of the project's scope and its coordination mechanism, inconsistent M&E processes and data, or concerns about the sustainability of some project results that require continued support and follow-up to take hold more firmly.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES	
Main recommendations	The report provides the following recommendations: • Align coordination capacity with project scale. • Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems for comparability and learning. • Foster more effective peer learning across countries. • Strengthen and systematise sustainability planning and follow-up.
Main lessons learned and good practices	The lessons learned and good practices that can be drawn from the project implementation: • Addressing sensitive reform issues requires a **long-term, phased approach**, even within short project cycles, focused on trust-building and technical engagement, with coordinated efforts and inclusive national capacity-building to foster ownership and sustainability. • Developing **online courses** proved to be an effective and efficient use of remaining project resources. These courses offer continued potential for future outreach, to sustain the momentum generated by the project. • As projects expand, flexible approaches need to be complemented by **clearer planning and monitoring frameworks** to support implementation. • The ILO's **cluster approach** in Bangladesh – grouping related interventions under thematic areas – proved effective in enhancing coherence, stakeholder engagement, and cost-efficiency, despite the added coordination efforts. • In the Philippines, aligning project activities with **ILO supervisory processes**, such as the 2023 High-Level Mission on Freedom of Association, strengthened national engagement and demonstrated how such alignment can enhance project relevance.