



Quick Facts

► Independent high-level evaluation of ILO's Decent Work Country Programme strategies and activities in ILO-subregion of Central America with emphasis on Costa Rica, Honduras and Mexico (2020-24)

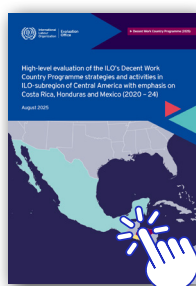


► October 2025

► Description and purpose of the evaluation

The goal of the independent high-level evaluation (HLE) is to determine the extent to which ILO interventions from 2020-24 have supported national constituents in advancing Decent Work priorities and addressed related gaps in the absence of Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) in the ILO-subregion of Central America with emphasis on Costa Rica, Honduras and Mexico.

The HLE has two complementary purposes: ensuring accountability and fostering organizational learning. The evaluation identifies key findings, lessons learned, emerging good practices and recommendations that will help shape future ILO strategies, with a particular focus on the Latin America and Caribbean region.



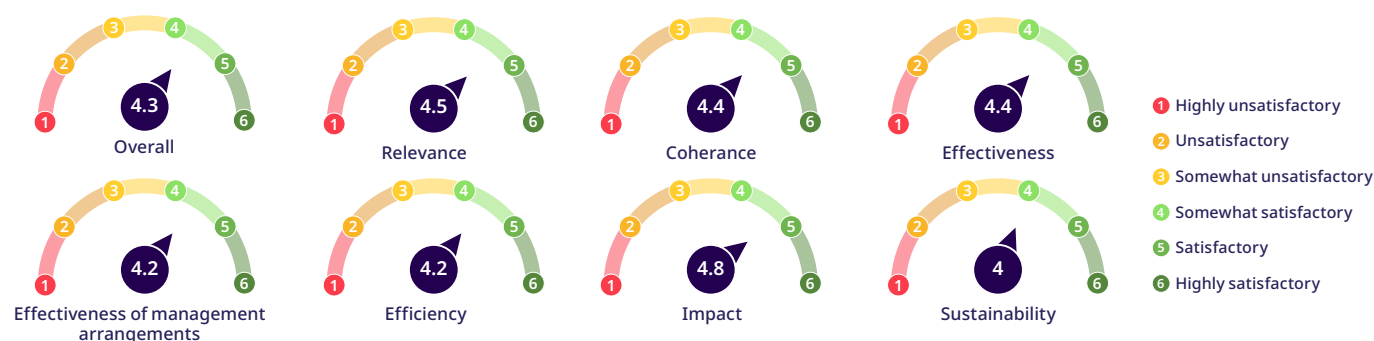
► Methodology

The evaluation followed [EVAL's high-level evaluation protocol for DWCP evaluations](#). It combined a criteria-based approach with a theory-driven, complexity-aware, and improvement-oriented model, and drew upon mixed methods from various sources:

-  Comprehensive document review of both ILO and external documentation
-  Synthesis review of 22 project evaluations in the Central American subregion
-  Interviews and focus group discussions with ILO staff, Constituents, beneficiaries, UN partners and donors (92 women and 54 men)
-  Survey with ILO constituents (25% response rate) and staff (26% response rate)
-  Three country case studies of Costa Rica, Honduras and Mexico

► Overall assessment

How did the ILO's work on advancing the Decent Work Agenda in the Central America subregion perform in terms of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability?



KEY FINDINGS

- 1** The ILO's **Country Programme Outcomes (CPOs) and projects are largely aligned with national priorities and global frameworks**, showing strategic focus on areas like formalization, labour inspection, skills, and OSH. However, perceptions of addressing vulnerable groups' needs varied, due to structural challenges, weak institutions, and limited cross-cutting focus.
- 2** Adaptation in **fragile contexts** has been reactive and short-term, lacking systemic impact. Political caution, high staff turnover, and limited presence in sensitive areas reduce effectiveness and credibility in high-risk settings.
- 3** **Constituents' participation is uneven**, mostly consultative, and less inclusive at the subnational level. Donor influence,

political factors, and varied capacities weaken participation, making it procedural rather than transformative. More consistent and inclusive engagement is needed.

- 4** The ILO's most advanced results are in **Protection at Work and Social Dialogue P&B Outcomes**. Results are stronger in stable contexts; fragile settings reveal a need for better risk management.

- 5** While **ILO coordination supported thematic alignment, complexity and fragmentation hindered coherence**. Tools for tracking and monitoring interventions exist but are inconsistently used, and follow-up was often limited to reporting, reducing decision-making impact and overall effectiveness.

KEY FINDINGS

- 6** The **ILO subregion delivery rate was 76%**, with uneven performance across P&B outcomes. Employment promotion and gender equality were efficient (14% of CPO results achieved with 7% of spending; 12% with 2%, respectively), while normative actions had low efficiency (12% of CPO results achieved with 23% of spending). Country-level efficiency varied. Improved planning and strategic budgeting are needed to boost impact.
- 7 Partnerships** improved short-term efficiency but were mostly non-institutionalized. Often project-specific, they lacked integration into long-term strategies. The absence of coordination platforms and learning mechanisms limited sustainability and replication of good practices.
- 8** In terms of impact, the ILO made **notable progress in the care sector, gender equality, and labour migration**, though the results are not fully institutionalized. These efforts reflect normative commitments but need stronger national ownership for lasting sustainability.
- 9 Sustainability** depends on institutional ownership and political will. Despite some reforms, inconsistent leadership, lack of exit strategies, and short project cycles hinder progress. Without clear institutionalization and capacity-building plans, gains risk reversal.

► Lessons learned

- 1. Flexibility and contextual adaptation drive relevance and results:** Countries such as Cuba, El Salvador, and Haiti, shows the capacity of the ILO to adapt program strategies to institutional challenged environments and high staff turnover.
- 2. Cross-cutting issues require political sensitivity and technical depth:** Resistance to ideas like gender equality required a clever political approach: use of appropriate terminology and champions have been key, still ILO staff often lacked enough training in intersectionality and political skills, which limited the depth and consistency of these efforts.
- 3. Internal coordination, staff availability and communication are critical:** Regular coordination meetings and shared planning tools, along with mentoring systems that promoted coherence were introduced in the subregion offices, the organization's institutional framework is fragile due to technical gaps and staff turnover. The lack of specialists disrupts key processes and hinders sustained progress.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen strategic alignment, coordination, communication, and learning across the ILO countries offices and the DWT in Central America:** develop and implement a DWT action plan, establish thematic subregional coordination mechanisms, support regional strategies, and align with DW national priorities.
- Reinforce the ILO's work in thematic areas with limited progress:** Sustainable Enterprises (i.e., consider replicable models), Social Protection (i.e., lead a regional diagnostic), Integrated Policy for Social Justice (i.e., consider successful initiatives for replication and co-developing diagnostics on institutional gaps, regulatory reviews, and national policy roadmaps), Evidence for Advocacy (i.e., strengthen evidence-based research and country-based political intelligence and integrate advocacy in persuasive narratives), and overall prioritize disability, Indigenous Peoples, just transition, and non-discrimination, while continue work on other crosscutting themes. Advocate for systemic and integrated approaches in its resource mobilization efforts, focusing on underfunded areas like gender equality, skills development, and informality. Communication products should highlight DWCP priorities to attract broader funding.
- Foster an adaptive approach** that responds to evolving contextual challenges, while **strengthening national ownership**. This approach should be anchored in long-term sustainability and explicitly address the needs and priorities of vulnerable groups. Strengthen capacity-building for under-resourced institutions, improve knowledge sharing, and ensure staff are trained in procurement and financial management.
- Revise financial management, human resources, and strategic partnership frameworks** to ensure more flexible, results-oriented, and tactical resource allocation (i.e., prioritizing multi-year strategic partnerships with donors and private sector) and map the ILO human resource capacities in Central America by P&B Outcomes. Explore innovative models for increasing its representation in non-resident countries, such as out posting specialists, and ensure sufficient capacity in resident offices, particularly regarding collaboration with ECOWAS.
- Strengthen the systematic monitoring tools, streamlined decision-making processes, and continuous learning mechanisms** to reinforce operational aspects (i.e., develop a regional/subregional knowledge management strategy, consistent use of design, monitoring, and review tools across offices, ensure monitoring and reporting reflect the ILO cross-cutting priorities and create institutional mechanisms to identify, document, and scale successful initiatives.
- Establish a capacity-building action plan** for ILO staff to ensure shared standards in the design, M&E, and reporting of project results and technical assistance, while allowing for adaptation to contextual challenges.

QUOTES

► Voices from constituents

"We need the support of the ILO because it is an entity that opens the way for us, they do not make decisions, but they do support us. In the meetings of the roundtable, in one of the axes, which is auditing, they were concerned that the ILO should stand up for us."

"The ILO has a very strong convening capacity, the organization has credibility, and the reputation it has built globally has been invaluable."

► Voices from ILO staff

"The ILO aligns its actions with the priorities of the government, adapting its cooperation agenda to political, economic, and institutional circumstances. This process involves formal validation and ratification by national authorities, which brings not only institutional legitimacy but also constant operational flexibility in the face of changes in government or reprioritization."