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Labour
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i-eval Discovery



ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality (2022–25) – Final Evaluation

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Global

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Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: Gender Equality Team within the Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Branch (GEDI)

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Key Words: [Gender Equality](#), [Organisational learning](#)

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The ILO Action Plan is of the main tool to support the goals mentioned in the Strategic Plan and the P&B outcomes. The ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022–25 is linked to the SDGs to support a fair, inclusive and secure world of work. It also largely aligns with the UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), which aims to support implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The Action Plan stipulated that its implementation be independently evaluated at the end of 2025. This evaluation took place from mid-May to early-October 2025. The timing of the evaluation is intended to support the development of the next multi-annual action plan, and inform strategic decision making in the development of the proposed ILO Strategic Plan 2026-2029. The evaluation aims to independently assess progress towards the goals of the 2022-2025 ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality, including performance based on established indicators and the mainstreaming of policy outcomes. It also seeks to provide strategic recommendations, highlight best practices, and foster dialogue among key stakeholders to support ongoing commitment and innovation for gender equality in the next multiannual plan.

Keeping in line with the OECD/DAC Principles and the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, the evaluation was based on the six evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability) as defined in the ILO Policy Guidelines for Results-based Evaluation. The questions sought to address priority issues and concerns that will help to confirm and validate the objectives of the ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022- 2025, its strategy and achievements, being instrumental in developing and implementing the next multiannual action plan.

The evaluation was managed by the ILO Evaluation Office (EVAL). An Evaluation Manager, with no prior involvement in the Action Plan, oversaw the process, including preparing terms of reference, contracting and briefing evaluators, monitoring methodology, and

	reviewing deliverables in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The evaluation was conducted by two independent evaluators, responsible for designing and implementing the evaluation, delivering reports, and ensuring stakeholder engagement. The Gender, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (GEDI) Team handled administrative, logistical, and procedural support throughout the process.
Present situation of the project	In 2021, a high-level independent evaluation of the ILO's gender equality and mainstreaming efforts during 2016–21 was conducted including the ILO action plans for gender equality for the period 2016–2021. The findings of the high-level evaluation, along with the Office's response were presented to the Governing Body in 2021. In its March 2022 discussion, the Governing Body requested the Director-General to: (a) finalize and implement the ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022–25, taking into account the guidance provided during the consideration of document GB.344/INS/10; and (b) integrate its guidance in pursuing the ILO's mandate to achieve gender equality at work through a transformative agenda, taking into account the resolution and conclusions of the General Discussion Working Party on inequalities and the world of work, especially in implementing the ILO's Strategic Plan for 2022–25 and its two corresponding programmes and budgets. The ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022–2025 operationalises the ILO gender equality policy. It identifies internal mainstreaming strategies for which progress is measured on staffing, substance and structure.

	In March 2024, the Governing Body reviewed the implementation of the ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022–25 noting the areas where the Office was exceeding or meeting targets as well as the areas where improvements were required (GB.350/INS/4). The timing of the evaluation is intended to support the development of the next multiannual action plan.
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	The independent evaluation of the ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022-2025 was conducted from May to October 2025 to support strategic decision-making and inform the development of the next multi-annual plan. It assessed progress toward gender mainstreaming, policy outcomes, and performance against established indicators, while also providing strategic recommendations and highlighting best practices. This evaluation fulfils UN-SWAP requirements and aims to foster reflection and dialogue among key stakeholders to promote continued support for gender equality. The evaluation covers the duration of the Action Plan (2022-2025) and looks at the institutional and operational dimensions of the Action Plan, and the dimension of programmatic and policy outcomes at global, regional and national levels. The main clients for the evaluation are: • The ILO and its staff, responsible for implementing the Action Plan. • ILO staff from the Gender Equality Team GEDI. • ILO senior management, including the Director-General and members of the Senior Management Team at Headquarters and in the field (Regional Directors).
Methodology of evaluation	The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques in line with established international evaluation standards, including a thorough document review and key informant interviews. The document review covered strategic plans, reports, evaluations, and

frameworks related to gender mainstreaming, while the stakeholder consultations involved 33 interviews with ILO staff, partners, and representatives from workers' and employers' organizations, aiming to understand their capabilities, perceptions, challenges, and lessons learned.

The evaluation was participatory, with a theoretical approach based on a utilization-focus to engage stakeholders throughout. This evaluation approach was particularly appropriate as one purpose of the evaluation was to support the development of the next Action Plan, which will require ongoing interaction with users.

The evaluation was undertaken during a time when a number of staff and constituents were not available for interviews due to the International Labour Conference which ran from June 2nd to June 13th, 2025. Participation and scheduling of key informant interviews was also affected by summer holidays in the months of July and August. Despite lack of availability and delays for interviews, the evaluators were still able to interview their target number of key informants (a minimum of 30 individuals) and engagement levels and the quality of their inputs were still very high.

Participation of constituents in the evaluation was limited to interviews with representatives of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and International Organisation of Employers (IOE), identified by the Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Branch of ILO (GEDI). Representatives from government constituents of the ILO were not identified for interviews.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Key informants acknowledged the heightened challenges of promoting gender equality in the current climate, especially regarding LGBTIQ+ rights, emphasizing the importance of the ILO's continued advocacy as a core element of its mandate. While the Action Plan functions as a practical tool for implementing the ILO Policy on Gender Mainstreaming and Equality, its limited visibility has restricted its overall impact, despite constituents viewing its strategies as relevant and helpful in aligning with international labour standards. Understanding of the ILO's "transformative"

gender agenda remains uneven across staff, with communication challenges and contextual differences impeding consistent interpretation and engagement, which reflects a broader trend within the UN system.

The ILO's gender architecture has seen improvements with strengthened coordination and clearer roles, yet remains somewhat fragmented, lacking formal recognition of responsibilities and consistent expertise, which hampers effectiveness. The implementation of the Action Plan was also hindered by a dormant Gender Network for over a year, though recent revitalization efforts have increased focus on gender mainstreaming. Custodians of gender indicators participate in reporting but often lack advocacy roles, and while the organization is progressing toward a more intersectional approach, gaps in regional and national focus on intersectionality persist. Between 2022 and 2024, the ILO has made gradual progress in meeting UN-SWAP indicators, but uneven reporting quality and lagging performance against similar agencies suggest room for improvement. Institutional capacity-building has improved staff knowledge, predominantly among specialists, with notable gender parity advances at senior levels; however, regional and departmental disparities remain. Although underperforming on some mainstreaming indicators, the ILO achieves reasonable results on gender equality overall, with a need to enhance mainstreaming efforts. Challenges include uneven leadership engagement, over-reliance on the GEDI team, underutilized resource-tracking systems, staffing shortfalls, limited budgets (about 6.4% versus a 15% target), and inadequate incentives, all constraining full Action Plan implementation. Strategic partnerships and the normative, tripartite structure of the ILO offer unique advantages, but these are not fully utilized or communicated externally. While recent progress has established institutional foundations for sustainability, especially through increased staffing and visibility of the Gender Network, ongoing UN reforms threaten these gains. Overall, the ILO has achieved results on par with or better than other thematic areas within the UN, demonstrating notable gains in advancing gender equality during the period under review.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Main findings & Conclusions

Recommendations

1. Values Proposition on gender equality and mainstreaming:

Develop and disseminate internally and externally a clearer values proposition, to facilitate the ILO's strategic positioning and enhance and promote the visibility and impact of its programmatic outcomes.

2. Review the status and relevance of the ILO Policy on Gender Equality and Mainstreaming:

ILO should consider the advantages and disadvantages of updating its Policy on Gender Equality and Mainstreaming as well as its Action Plan following the outcomes of the 114th Session (2026) of the Conference's general discussion on advancing the transformative agenda for gender equality at work.

3. Develop and implement a renewed ILO gender equality and mainstreaming accountability framework:

Develop and implement a robust accountability framework for gender equality and mainstreaming that includes clear roles, regular reporting mechanisms, and a whole-of-organization approach. Leadership at all levels, including Country and Regional Directors, should be held accountable for results, and gender equality should be integrated into the core business of the organization. Strengthening leadership buy-in, avoiding excessive bureaucratic layering, and ensuring field-level ownership are critical to achieving transformative and sustainable change.

4. Strengthen ILO's Gender Architecture:

Establish clearer mandates and coordination mechanisms between GEDI, focal points, gender specialists, and custodians to improve coherence, reduce duplication, and enable a more strategic approach to gender mainstreaming.

5. Enhance institutional capacity for gender equality and mainstreaming:

Develop and implement an organization-wide, costed capacity development framework, utilizing results of recent gender equality and gender mainstreaming assessments, to guide learning and link competencies to performance expectations.

6. Accelerate efforts to attain the equal representation of women and develop a more enabling work environment:

Develop tailored interventions, enhance monitoring of promotion and recruitment, leverage manager dashboards to assess gender parity, prioritize

	protection against exploitation and harassment, and strengthen male allyship through inclusive initiatives 7. Ensure coherence, oversight and comprehensiveness in relation to planning and reporting: Align Action Plan performance indicators with UN-SWAP 3.0 more fully than in the past, integrate evaluation findings into Programme Budget reporting, and implement a quality assurance system with peer reviews and audit oversight. 8. Align with UN-SWAP 3.0 Performance Indicators on resource allocation and tracking: Strengthen the Gender Equality Marker (GEM) in line with the UN Data Standards for United Nations system-wide reporting of financial data. An indicative target of 15 percent for GEM 3, and 100 percent for GEM 2 (i.e. all funds other than GEM 3) should be set for extra-budgetary resources, with incremental progress to be established in the next Action Plan; and similar targets should be set for core budgetary resources going forward.
Main lessons learned and good practices	Lessons Learned: • Shared ownership is essential; gender equality efforts must be integrated into core strategies, budgets, and performance metrics for lasting impact. • Moving toward shared accountability, engaging senior management and creating internal champions, can foster broader leadership engagement and sustainable change. • The effective use of gender data, including disaggregated and intersectional metrics, is vital for targeted interventions but remains underutilized; enhancing data systems and linking funding to gender results can improve effectiveness. • Partnerships with UN agencies, governments, social partners, and the private sector amplify impact and resources; collaboration in training and showcasing success stories increases ownership and sustainability. • To ensure sustainability, gender must be embedded from the start of projects with clear frameworks, capacity building, and mandatory analysis at all stages, rather than treated as an afterthought. • Promoting transparent career progression, for example through clarifying merit-based criteria and procedures,

helps prevent backlash while supporting gender parity in leadership roles.

Emerging Good Practices:

- Embedding gender considerations from project inception ensures projects address women's specific challenges and reduce inequality.
- The GFP (*i-eval Discovery*), 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 and help in the decision-making process for better targeted actions and strategies.
- Global partnerships like the Global Alliance for Care and EPIC have successfully advanced gender equality, especially in pay and care work.
- The second phase of the Building Social Protection Floors project integrated gender approaches, activities, and results, making meaningful progress on gender and inclusion.
- EU-funded programmes effectively mainstreamed gender and non-discrimination, with targeted activities like GEAR and support for women in the garment sector demonstrating tangible impact.
- The ILO has increasingly emphasized women's empowerment in policy frameworks, leading to improved statistical measures on gender equality issues such as pay, harassment, and care economy.