



International
Labour
Organization

► Evaluation Office

► Social protection (social security) interventions: What works and why?

Lessons learned from a synthesis review, 2012–2018



SUMMARY

► Preface

Since 2012, the International Labour Organization Evaluation Office (ILO-EVAL) has regularly contributed to the ILO's recurrent discussions on selected issues by preparing companion pieces to recurrent reports. The aim is to enhance organizational learning by systematically synthesizing information on results, lessons learned and good practices. So far, EVAL has produced synthesis reviews for recurrent discussions on Social Dialogue (2013),¹ Employment (2014),² Social Protection (Labour Protection) (2015),³ and Social Dialogue (2017).⁴

This is a summary of the synthesis review report prepared in advance of the Recurrent Discussion on Social Protection (Social Security), which is scheduled for discussion at the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference.

The study was carried out by Magali Bonne-Moreau, an independent consultant, under EVAL's supervision. It presents results and lessons learned from selected evaluations and relevant ILO publications in the social protection (social security) domain.

We acknowledge with thanks our colleagues from the Social Protection (SOCPRO) Department for their inputs to the scope and preparation of this report. Special thanks are also due to Mini Thakur, Senior Evaluation Officer, for her continuous support and inputs throughout the study, and to Maria Audera Bustamante for her assistance.

We hope that the findings from this evaluative study will serve to guide our constituents, colleagues and others who work on the issue of social protection.

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¹ www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS_212381/lang--en/index.htm

² www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS_243429/lang--en/index.htm

³ www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/previous-sessions/104/committees/social-protection/lang--ja/index.htm

⁴ www.ilo.org/eval/synthesis-and-meta/WCMS_584293/lang--en/index.htm

▶ Executive summary⁵

This report presents the findings of a review of evaluation reports related to ILO interventions in the domain of social protection (social security) in the period 2012–2018. It aims to contribute to organizational learning, to provide guidance to ILO constituents on future work related to social protection (social security), and to strengthen the capacity of the Office to make evidence-based decisions from the findings generated during the analysis of the evaluation reports. Through the systematic analysis of results, lessons learned and good practices of selected evaluation reports, this synthesis review identifies what works, for whom, and why, in the context of ILO's work on social protection (social security).

This report, commissioned by the ILO Evaluation Office (EVAL), has been prepared in advance of the of the International Labour Conference (ILC) Recurrent Discussion on Social Protection (Social Security) in 2020. It is meant to contribute to and complement the Recurrent Report on Social Protection (Social Security) submitted for discussion to the 109th Session of the International Labour Conference.

Social protection, or social security, is defined as “the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability across the life cycle. Social protection includes nine main areas: child and family benefits, maternity protection, unemployment support, employment injury benefits, sickness benefits, health protection, old-age benefits, disability benefits and survivors’ benefits. Social protection systems address all these policy areas by a mix of contributory schemes (social insurance) and non-contributory tax-financed social assistance.”⁶

While this synthesis review covers mostly projects and interventions specifically focusing on promoting and extending social protection and social security, it also includes ILO interventions that had a strong social protection (social security) component.

▶ Methodology

This synthesis review aims to answer the following questions: *Based on evaluations of the ILO's efforts to support social protection (social security) between 2012 and 2018: What is being done? What works? For whom? And why?*⁷

It was conducted using the methodology included in the terms of reference (TOR), which ensured a rigorous and systematic analysis and appraisal of the existing evaluation reports on the subject, with transparency regarding inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as review processes and decisions.

⁵ Executive summaries are also available in French and Spanish on ILO EVAL's website at: <http://www.ilo.ch/eval/synthesis-and-meta/lang--en/index.htm>

⁶ *World Social Protection Report 2017–19*, ILO, 2017, p. 2, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_604882.pdf [accessed 24 Jan. 2020].

⁷ A set of key sub-questions that aimed to be addressed, granted that sufficient evidence was available, guided the review and are available in Annex 2. These were developed based on the TOR as well as areas of inquiry addressed in previous systematic reviews.

As far as possible, the final selection of reports was purposive to include projects from all regions, as well as global/interregional projects, and covered different areas of focus and thematic scope irrespective of the language in which they were written. Reports not providing relevant/sufficient information on work carried out to support social protection (social security) were excluded, as were reports without recommendations, lessons learned and emerging good practices (when applicable).

The evaluation reports included in the review were interim and final independent project evaluations as well as one high-level strategy evaluation. The final number of documents included in this review was 24 out of 40 documents initially considered and screened.

The reports in the final list were systematically appraised. Information on their key findings, recommendations, lessons learned and emerging good practices related to work on social protection (social security) were extracted and used to conduct a qualitative thematic synthesis.

The main limitations of this review related to the availability of relevant and good quality evaluative evidence to address the initial research questions and, in particular, the lack of lessons learned and good practices. This also limited the possibility to identify the ILO's main challenges in supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on social protection (e.g. UN reform, new forms of employment).

► Findings

The initiatives evaluated by the reports considered for this synthesis review covered a range of areas related to social protection, and the establishment and extension of social security schemes, including, inter alia: unemployment protection; social protection for migrant workers and their families; the extension of social protection coverage to those in the informal economy; the establishment of pension systems; and maternity protection.

► What works?

The review of ILO projects revealed various conditions that promoted progress towards the development and/or extension of social protection in the project countries. These conditions are summarized below:

- Projects that were strategically relevant and responded to stakeholder needs were often more successful than those where there was limited constituent interest in social protection issues.
- The ILO has a broad toolbox of capacity-building activities related to social protection and social security, and provided effective platforms for sharing experiences and good practices in this context. Impact was greatest when interventions took into account local needs, capacities and context, and results were anchored in national institutions.
- An inclusive approach to capacity building was highlighted as a strength, as was the strategy of peer-to-peer learning and fostering international exchanges of experiences, practices and realities. Capacity building was sometimes used as an entry-point and strategy for

maintaining relationships with countries where conditions for the implementation of projects were unfavourable.

- ▶ Dissemination of good practices on topics related to social security and social protection, including through web-based platforms, regional knowledge-sharing tools, or publications led to positive outcomes.
- ▶ The use of social dialogue was noted as an essential element for the development of effective social protection policies and programmes in many of the evaluation reports reviewed. Platforms for national and regional dialogue were highlighted as a good practice, as they allowed members to build consensus and combine their efforts and resources to achieve improved social security coverage.
- ▶ The ILO Assessment-based National Dialogue (ABND) process, which involves a participatory approach, assesses national gaps in coverage, needs and priorities, and whether the social protection floor (SPF) is a reality for the whole population of a country and how it can be extended to all members of society, was a positive component of different projects, and was found to be a useful tool in promoting tripartism.
- ▶ ILO products provided useful insights into various instruments, practices, norms and laws with the potential to contribute to the extension of social protection, including floors in project countries as well as beyond. This knowledge, along with technical assistance, led to a range of policy developments and implementation measures, as well as the promotion and application of international labour standards.
- ▶ Projects aiming to build/extend social protection, including floors, and to promote decent work and the formalization of the informal economy, had an inherent focus on the promotion of equal opportunities, and addressed men and women equally by advocating universal and rights-based systems of social protection. However, there were only a few projects that specifically incorporated gender issues and gender-mainstreaming components in their design and implementation.
- ▶ The ILO effectively collaborated with a range of institutional partners to implement its projects on social protection. In some instances, ILO was able to establish its sphere of influence by creating strong collaborative relationships for change in tripartite partners' policy and practice in target countries, and strategically targeted its partnership arrangements. The focus upon existing partnerships enabled projects to have maximum influence in a short period of time through focused technical assistance and support for pilot activities implemented by these partners.

▶ For whom?

Most evaluation reports made a distinction between the target groups and the expected final beneficiaries of social protection-related interventions. In the majority of cases, target groups were policy-makers responsible for the preparation and implementation of strategies to extend social security coverage. They also included administrators and technical staff responsible for the preparation, application, and monitoring of social security and social protection schemes, and social partners involved in social security issues, trade unions, in particular, as well as relevant civil society organizations. In a number of projects, specific groups were targeted as final beneficiaries including migrant workers and their families, garment workers, lower income households, unemployed and vulnerable groups, including the working poor, women, and people living in rural areas.

▶ Why?

Evaluation reports identified a number of internal and external factors leading to positive outcomes in terms of establishing and extending social protection.

Success factors included:

- ▶ **Adaptability to the local context**, so that interventions took into account national realities and specificities, and responded to the specific needs of beneficiaries, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.
- ▶ **Realistic planning** regarding the time and pace of implementation of interventions on the ground, and a **flexible approach** to the design and execution of project activities and strategies.
- ▶ Adopting a **participatory approach** by involving local actors, governments, institutions, workers' and employers' organizations, as well as beneficiaries, at all stages of design and implementation. This enabled the identification of the most relevant actions and strategies in response to emerging problems or changes, created a sense of ownership, held actors accountable, and promoted a favourable environment to ensure the sustainability of projects' results.
- ▶ **ILO's tripartite approach added value to the process and improved ownership** when planning and implementing interventions related to social protection.
- ▶ The effective use of **project management tools** was highlighted as an important good practice, as was the use of monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Having an experienced coordination team that was able to adapt to local circumstances and create meaningful relationships with different actors was also a success factor.
- ▶ **A local ILO presence was found to be a significant positive factor** for the development of alliances, nationally and internationally. Regular contact with partners and local authorities, fostered trust, and participation in relevant discussions helped to develop collaborative networks and consolidated project results.
- ▶ **Synergy and cooperation between the projects under review and other projects** contributed to effectiveness, efficiency, and to the sustainability of outcomes.
- ▶ **ILO's relationships with partners on the ground and its specialized technical knowledge and expertise were important elements** that led to its strategic advantage when promoting the extension of social protection, and policy development in particular.
- ▶ **ILO's positive reputation in the field of social protection and labour issues helped projects gather support for their implementation.**
- ▶ **Political will and stakeholder ownership are key** to lasting results.

A number of challenges to the successful promotion and extension of social protection were identified in the evaluation reports. In many cases, obstacles faced during the implementation of a project came from various sources, both internal and external; the main ones are presented below:

- ▶ The **political context** had a direct impact on the possibility of progressing towards expected outputs and outcomes. There were many instances where planned activities were suspended temporarily or indefinitely due to **political instability** and **changing governance and management frameworks**.
- ▶ **The deteriorating economic situation** in certain countries.
- ▶ **Low commitment and capacities** of countries and actors' limited ownership of the projects' results and sustainability prospects.
- ▶ **Policy differences between countries and institutional challenges** were obstacles to the implementation and management of social protection initiatives
- ▶ **Inadequate project design, with overambitious objectives in terms of duration and scope, limited or no risk assessment, weak links between outputs and outcomes, and limited contextual analysis** were major weaknesses leading to failure of certain project components.
- ▶ **Insufficient attention was paid to gender equality**.
- ▶ **Lack of synergies and complementarities** within and between relevant projects led to missed opportunities for resource optimization and improved results.
- ▶ Obstacles also stemmed from **inadequate management processes, staffing and funding issues, leading to resource inefficiencies**.

► Annex 1. Detailed Methodology

This synthesis review consists of a desk-based review of ILO evaluations and studies (both published and unpublished) related to social protection. It covers ILO projects and interventions focusing on social protection (social security), as well as those that have a significant component related to the area under review. To address the risk of bias and ensure quality control, the methods used in this review are presented in an explicit, transparent and reproducible manner.⁸

► Key questions to be addressed

This synthesis review aims to answer the following questions:⁹

Based on evaluations of the ILO's efforts to support social protection (social security) between 2012 and 2018:

- 1) What is being done? (What interventions do we observe?)
- 2) What works? Or what doesn't work? (What aspects of interventions are particularly effective?)
- 3) For whom? (Who are the beneficiaries of these interventions?)
- 4) Why? (What are identified success factors and challenges?)

► Selection of reports

As part of the *Independent high-level evaluation (HLE) of the ILO's strategy and actions for creating and extending social protection floors (2012–2017)*, a synthesis review of 24 evaluation reports¹⁰ for the period 2012–2016 was undertaken by EVAL in 2017. The findings from the synthesis review were used as input to the HLE, and the reports identified for the 2017 synthesis review were used as inputs for the current synthesis review.

In addition, 16 reports¹¹ covering the period 2017–18 were identified by EVAL using a keyword¹² search in i-Eval Discovery, and were included in the short-list, as EVAL considered they were relevant for the synthesis review. This resulted in 40 independent, internal, final and mid-term evaluation reports.

⁸ This follows the recommendation from the *Campbell systematic reviews: Policies and guidelines, version 1.4*. (Oslo, Campbell Collaboration, Campbell Policies and Guidelines Series No. 1, 2019).

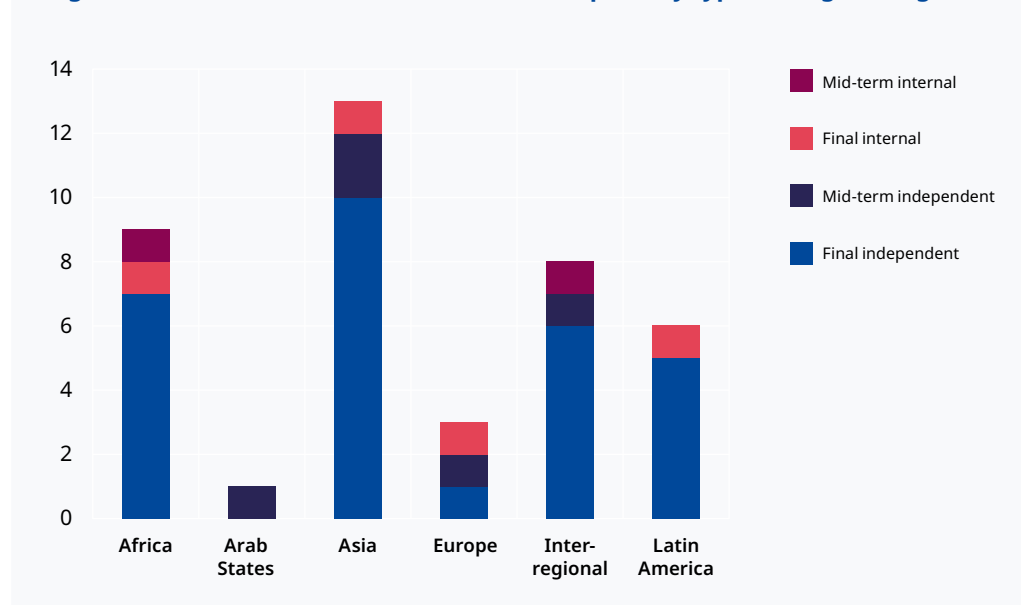
⁹ When sufficient evidence was available, a set of key sub-questions also guided the review and is available in Annex 2. The sub-questions were developed based on the TOR as well as areas of inquiry addressed in previous systematic reviews.

¹⁰ Twenty-two Independent evaluation reports, including seven joint programme evaluations, and two out of 10 potential internal evaluations identified by EVAL were used in the 2017 synthesis review. The two internal evaluation reports were included because they were found to be comprehensive, and had been conducted by external consultants.

¹¹ These comprised 12 Independent evaluation reports, including one joint programme evaluation and four internal evaluation reports.

¹² The key words used were: social protection, social security and social exclusion.

► **Figure 1. Number of short-listed evaluation reports by type, timing and region**



A matrix was then prepared for this review, covering these reports, and providing information on: type, timing and nature of the evaluation; regional coverage; countries covered; thematic coverage; funding source; and year of evaluation completion. A summary of the type, timing and regional coverage of the reports is provided in figure 1.

► Search strategy and protocol for the review – final selection of reports

Criteria related to content for the inclusion/exclusion of reports to be considered for review are based on the questions specified above, as well as guidance provided by EVAL, and are summarized in figure 2.

Different elements were taken into account in the selection of reports, in line with the TOR specifications:

Type of document: Both mid-term and final internal and independent evaluation reports of ILO interventions were considered. When both mid-term and final evaluation reports existed for the same project, only the latter were included in the final list as they are more likely to have lessons that could be useful for the purpose of this review, and the former were sometimes used to complement the information in the final evaluation reports. High-level evaluations were used to supplement findings from the project-level evaluations.

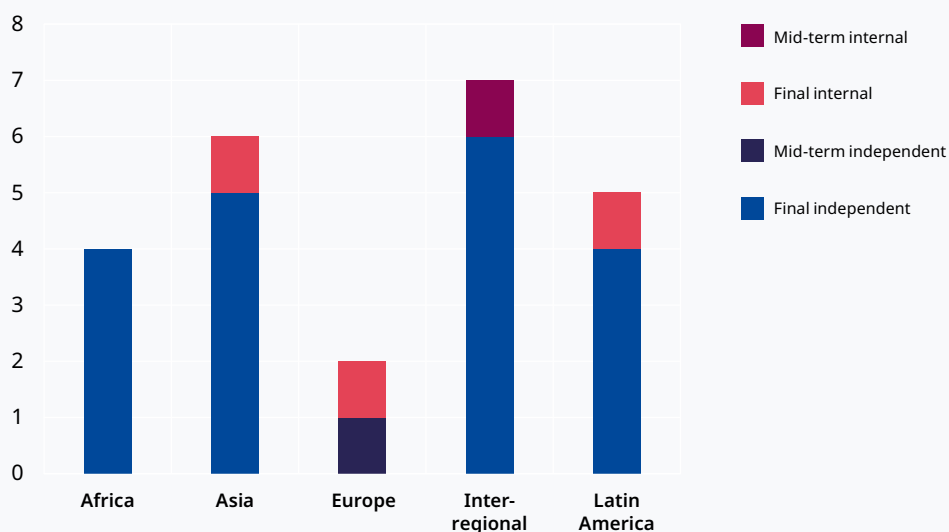
Time-period: Evaluation reports of interventions that took place between 2012 and 2018.

Area of focus/thematic scope: Reports related to interventions associated with the establishment, development and maintenance of social protection systems (social security), either directly or as significant components of other key thematic areas, as defined by EVAL and the ILO.

► **Figure 2. Final inclusion and exclusion criteria – content**

Inclusion	Possible inclusion or exclusion	Exclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The establishment, development and maintenance of social protection systems is a stated objective. ▶ Measures towards the establishment, development and maintenance of social protection systems are not stated objectives but are explicitly described in the project strategy. ▶ The establishment or extension of social protection systems is mentioned as one of the direct or indirect achievements. ▶ The report provides relevant and adequate information on aspects related to the establishment, development, maintenance or extension of social protection systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The introduction of social protection/extension of social security is a stated objective. ▶ The report provides some relevant information on aspects related to the introduction of social protection systems/ extension of social security. ▶ The report is based on a joint evaluation and there is some attribution to the ILO's work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The establishment, development and maintenance of social protection systems was not addressed in the project. ▶ The report does not provide relevant/sufficient information on aspects related to social, protection/ social security systems. ▶ The report does not cover the relevant time-period.

► **Figure 3. Number of evaluation reports in the final selection by type, timing and region**



Quality of the evaluation reports: In order to achieve robust and reliable results, the quality of the evaluation reports was assessed on the basis of their being comprehensive, complete, evidence-based and providing information relevant to the questions addressed in this synthesis review. Reports not providing relevant/sufficient information regarding work done to support social protection (social security) were excluded, as were reports without recommendations, lessons learned or emerging good practices (as applicable).

Language: Reports in the ILO's three official languages of English, French and Spanish, as well as reports in Portuguese were considered for review.

The final selection of reports was purposive, to include as far as possible projects from all regions, as well as global/interregional projects, irrespective of the language of the report. Projects representing different areas of focus/thematic scope were also included.

The final selection included 24 reports including a HLE and two mid-term evaluations of projects that also had final evaluation reports in the final selection. These three reports were used to complement the information provided in the final evaluation reports, presented in figure 3.

► Collation of findings

The appraisal of the reports in the final list was carried out systematically. Information covering the key findings of the evaluation reports, recommendations, lessons learned and emerging good practices related to work on social protection (social security) were extracted from the reports and presented in a matrix. A qualitative thematic synthesis was conducted and, as far as possible, based on the questions described in the previous section, the topic areas covered, the type of interventions, and geographical area.

► Limitations

The main constraint during this synthesis review related to the availability of sufficient, good quality evidence in the reports, especially lessons learned and good practices, which limited the depth at which the questions and sub-questions could be addressed. When lessons learned and good practices were present, they often addressed programmatic and management issues that were not specific to projects related to social protection (social security), rather than substantive content. As such, this review does not examine every aspect of the questions in the TOR, but rather highlights a number of recurrent or key issues that emerged from the evaluative evidence, and that can contribute to the Recurrent Discussion on Social Protection (Social Security) 2020.

It was particularly difficult to obtain specific evaluative evidence regarding the contribution of social protection/social security to relevant priorities of the 2030 Agenda (People, Peace, Prosperity, Planet, Partnerships), SDG goals, SDG targets and indicators, as well as to the SDG call of "leaving no one behind". This could be attributed to limitations in the monitoring and reporting systems. As such, these topics have very limited to no coverage in this synthesis review.

Other limitations were the under-representation of Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS) in the initial database, and non-representation in the final database. There were also challenges in attribution in joint programmes.

► Annex II. Final list of reports reviewed

S.n.	Report No.	Title (TC Symbol)		Evaluation type and timing
1.	E2	Proyecto de seguridad social para organizaciones sindicales SSOS - Fase II (INT/00/000/AAA)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#aglma04	Final Independent
2.	E3	Social protection and gender in Cambodia - Final Evaluation (CMB/09/04/SPA)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#bq218xi	Final Independent
3.	E9	Extension of social protection - STEP/Portugal project, Phase II (GLO/08/60/POR)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#azb79f1	Final Independent
4.	E10	Evaluation of MIGSEC: Extending social security to African migrant workers and their families (RBSA) (RAF/08/02/RBS)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#a8yz8ns	Final Independent
5.	E12	Improving social protection and promoting employment (INT/09/06/EEC)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#beq0175	Final Independent
6.	E13	Making Decent Work a Reality for Domestic Workers (GLO/11/54/SID)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#b718zk8	Final Independent
7.	E14	Responding effectively to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world of work: Country programmes (GLO/12/63/NOR)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#bv8lc4w	Final Independent
8.	E19	Promotion and building unemployment insurance and employment services in ASEAN countries (RAS/13/53/JPN)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#afi3ifc	Final Independent
9.	E20	Programa para la promoción de un Piso de Protección social en la región andina (RLA/14/03/SPA)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#aafvp1q	Final independent
10.	E21	Report of the Independent Evaluation of African Country Programme Outcomes funded from 2012-2013 RBSA in the Thematic Area of Social Protection (INT/00/000/AAA)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#alxmhdn	Final independent
11.	E23	Supporting the establishment of the National Health Insurance Scheme in Lao PDR and the extension of coverage - Final Evaluation (LAO/11/01/LUX)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#a1qpu32	Final independent
12.	E24	Building national floors of social protection in Southern Africa (RAF/13/04/IRL)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#bkwpovi	Final independent
13.	E25	From the crisis towards decent and safe jobs in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Phase II (RER/13/01/FIN)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#ai7lxd9	Interim independent
14.	E26	Promoting and building income security and employment services in Asia, Phase II (RAS/13/08/JPN)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#bry8ie0	Final independent

S.n.	Report No.	Title (TC Symbol)		Evaluation type and timing
15.	E27	ILO's strategies and activities for creating and extending social protection floors for all 2012–2017 (N/A)	https://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationreports/Strategyandpolicyevaluations/WCMS_584279/lang--en/index.htm	High level evaluation
16.	E28	Evaluación cluster sobre iniciativas OIT en favor de la transición hacia la formalidad (RBSA) (N/A)	Regional thematic evaluation	Final independent
17.	E29	Evaluación Temática Regional sobre Pisos de Protección Social (N/A)	Regional thematic evaluation	Final independent
18.	E32	Programme de Coopération Sud-Sud pour les Pays d'Afrique dans le domaine du Dialogue Social et de la Protection Sociale (RAF/15/15/DZA)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#auduvbr	Final independent
19.	E33	ILO/Korea Partnership Programme Towards the Realization of the Asian Decent Work Decade (2015-2017) (GLO/15/50/ROK)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#bfdv07	Final independent
20.	E34	Strengthening of Social Protection Systems in the PALOP and Timor-Leste (GLO/15/12/PRT)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#bxhwpv1	Final independent
21.	I2	Proyecto para la extensión de la protección social en los países de la subregión andina; Bolivia, Ecuador y Perú (RLA/08/02/SPA)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#beb56	Final internal
22.	I-1	Social protection in Mozambique (MOZ/12/50/OUF)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#bo9ngux	Final internal
23.	I-3	Asia Region Thematic Evaluation on Social Protection 2012-2017 (Phase II)	https://www.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#a67rau0	Final internal
24.	I-4	RBSA-Funded project on social security in Tajikistan 2016-2018 (N/A)	N/A	Final internal

