Note for consultations, September 2026

1. This note summarizes the paper to be discussed at the 358th Session of the Governing Body in November 2026 regarding the Independent High-Level Evaluation (HLE) of the Better Work Programme. The paper follows the Governing Body's March 2024 update on Better Work and its November 2025 consideration of the HLE of Better Work for the period 2014–25 and the mid-term evaluation of the Phase V Strategy (2022–27).
2. The paper provides an overview of developments since 2024; reports on implementation of the HLE recommendations; identifies lessons learned; and sets out considerations for Better Work's Phase VI (mid-2027–2032). It also considers Better Work's alignment with and contribution to wider ILO priorities and strategies.

Section 1: Introduction and programme overview

3. The first section recalls previous Governing Body discussions and situates Better Work within a changing operating environment characterized by shifts in trade and global supply chains, geopolitical tensions, and pressure on official development assistance. It also places Better Work in the context of relevant ILO priorities, including the ILO Strategy on Decent Work in Supply Chains, the March 2026 Governing Body discussion on possible initiatives complementing the existing body of international labour standards in supply chains, and the Office's reform and reprioritization process.
4. Better Work is an ILO flagship programme and partnership with the International Finance Corporation (IFC). It currently operates in 11 countries, reaching approximately 2,250 participating factories and 3.7 million workers, and works in partnership with 50 global brands and retailers. Using the garment sector as an entry point, Better Work seeks to improve working conditions and support inclusive economic growth.
5. The programme combines enterprise-level assessments of compliance with national labour laws and principles of international labour standards and subsequent advice and training to support improvements. Better Work shares its factory approaches and evidence with constituents and industry stakeholders to identify and address decent work deficits, promote fundamental principles and rights at work and scale up good practices beyond its direct footprint.

Section 2: Programme developments since 2024

6. The second section describes significant developments since the Governing Body's 2024 discussion. These include changes in the country portfolio following the closure of the Nicaragua programme after Nicaragua's withdrawal from the ILO and funding cuts in 2025 affecting the programme, particularly Jordan and

Haiti. Other developments include the planned resumption of the programme in Jordan within a One-ILO approach and a request from Benin concerning the potential establishment of a Better Work programme.

7. The section also describes changes to the programme's global governance following restructuring within the IFC/World Bank Group, as well as changes within the Office following the ILO reform and reprioritization process. Better Work is now a departmental programme within the Labour Governance and Sectoral Policies Department, facilitating greater integration within the department - promoting FPRW and stronger labour governance - as well as across the Office, particularly connecting enterprise-level experience with wider ILO technical and policy work.

8. An updated breakdown of programme financing is provided. The programme's mixed funding model - combining, amongst other sources, development partner, private-sector, and national government contributions - has helped mitigate the effects of the 2025 funding reductions, particularly given the ability to shift unearmarked private sector funding. The programme has had an increase in both private sector and national government contributions since 2024.

9. This section also highlights recent independent research, programme evidence and indicators on the drivers of and barriers to compliance and decent work, including in relation to freedom of association and collective bargaining, gender equality and productivity.

Section 3: High-Level Evaluation and implementation of recommendations

10. This section recalls guidance provided by Governing Body members during the March 2024 and November 2025 discussions and reports on implementation of the HLE recommendations in line with the Office response.

11. The HLE found Better Work to be highly relevant and effective, with measurable contributions to social dialogue, working conditions, gender equality and productivity. It identified the ILO-IFC partnership, research and evidence base, use of supply chain and trade as an entry point for decent work, and the combination of enterprise-level interventions with wider ILO policy engagement as important strengths.

12. The HLE identified sustainability as the programme's weakest dimension, highlighting the resource-intensive nature of enterprise engagement, dependence on development cooperation financing, slow progress towards time-bound country transitions, and uneven capacity of national institutions and constituents to assume programme functions.

13. The paper reports progress against the HLE's five recommendations.

14. First, transition planning is being advanced in long-standing programmes. Time-bound transition plans are in place in Indonesia and Viet Nam, while discussions on sustainability and transition are under way in Bangladesh, Cambodia and other country-based programmes.

15. **Second,** the enterprise engagement model is being adapted to improve flexibility, scalability, efficiency and cost recovery, including through differentiated approaches based on enterprise circumstances and capacity, use of more agile tools and approaches, that also enable their use by constituents and other actors, as appropriate, including adaptations in other sectors. This section also notes work under way to strengthen cost recovery and diversify financing.
16. **Third,** One-ILO delivery is being strengthened through even greater collaboration with different ILO technical units and decent work country teams, including joint interventions and programming linking workplace-level issues with sectoral and national interventions in areas such as labour governance, wages, social protection, gender equality and fundamental principles and rights at work.
17. **Fourth,** measures are being strengthened to build the capacity of national constituents and provide access to relevant tools, methodologies and data, including through more effective cooperation with labour administrations and inspectorates, employers' and workers' organizations.
18. **Fifth,** Better Work continues to engage with buyers to support enterprise participation, reduce duplication, strengthen alignment of buyer and industry compliance and due diligence approaches with national labour laws and principles of ILS, and promote responsible business practices.

Section 4: Key lessons learned

19. This section identifies lessons from the HLE, programme experience in implementing the HLE recommendations, and consultations that can inform the direction of Better Work's next strategic phase.
20. A central lesson is that enterprise-level engagement has contributed to improvements in compliance and working conditions, but sustained workplace outcomes also depend on the enabling environment, including strong government institutions and social partners, effective labour administration and inspection, social dialogue and collective bargaining, labour justice mechanisms, and wage policies and wage-setting mechanisms and social protection systems.
21. At the same time, institutional strengthening is a long-term process, while enterprises continue to require practical support to implement labour laws and improve working conditions. Sustainable transitions therefore require sufficient enterprise-level support alongside policy and institutional strengthening at sectoral and national levels.
22. Country-level transitions of the programme should be guided by common principles while allowing for country-specific, time-bound pathways developed with tripartite constituents, taking account of national circumstances, sectoral characteristics, institutional capacity and sustainable financing arrangements. Changes in supply chains, trade and investment patterns, as well as transitions such as graduation from least developed country status, can also shape how the programme evolves and contributes to improved workplace outcomes and compliance, particularly where enterprise-level interventions are reinforced by

stronger labour governance and respect for fundamental principles and rights at work.

23. The section also considers constituent requests for support beyond Better Work's traditional focus on first tier exporting garment factories. Programme experience indicates that tools, approaches and experience can be more agile and adapted to lower supply-chain tiers and other sectors through constituent-led, integrated One-ILO approaches, working with Decent Work Country Teams and other projects and partners.

Section 5: Considerations for Better Work Phase VI

24. Drawing on the HLE, programme evidence and consultations, the section proposes four broad considerations for Phase VI (mid-2027–2032).

25. First, the future role and form of enterprise-level engagement. Enterprise-level engagement remains an important foundation. Phase VI could consider a focus on: (i) time-bound interventions that strengthen enterprise ownership and capacity to sustain improvements, including during programme transition or exit; and (ii) more agile tools and methods that enable greater scale, efficiency and adaptation, including through use by constituents and other actors, as appropriate; (iii) strengthening the generation of data, knowledge and evidence from enterprise-level engagement on the drivers of and barriers to compliance and decent work. These approaches would continue to provide a practical entry point for engagement with buyers and other actors in support of improved compliance and decent work.

26. Second, approaches to institutional sustainability and country transition. Building on lessons from existing programmes, Phase VI can more systematically consider how sustainability and transitions are incorporated from programme design onwards, including through country-specific and time-bound pathways developed with tripartite constituents and one-ILO approaches. Relevant considerations include constituent and institutional capacity, knowledge transfer, appropriate handover and oversight arrangements, continued access to enterprise-level support and expertise, and sustainable financing arrangements.

27. Third, Better Work's contribution to integrated ILO delivery. Consideration could be given to how Better Work's enterprise-level experience, data, evidence, tools and partnerships can contribute even more effectively to Decent Work Country Programmes and wider ILO policy, institutional and technical interventions, including by informing responses to underlying drivers of decent work deficits and reinforcing compliance and workplace outcomes.

28. Fourth, a more diversified and sustainable financing model. A further consideration for Phase VI is the development of a more diversified and sustainable financing arrangement in a context of constrained funding and resources. Options include increasing efficiencies, cost-recovery, and collaborative approaches, alongside greater diversification of funding in line with the ILO Development Cooperation Strategy. The scope and ambition of the strategy will need to take account of the resources available.

29. Taken together, these possible directions could enable Better Work to make a more effective and practical contribution to wider Office efforts including to strengthen working conditions and the enabling environment for decent work and sustainable enterprises and to advance decent work in supply chains.

Section 6: Alignment with ILO priorities and strategies

30. The final section explains how the proposed Phase VI directions align with the Programme and Budget, the Strategic Plan for 2026–29 and the Office’s reform and reprioritization process. Looking ahead, Better Work could contribute to areas of the Programme and Budget for 2028–29, currently under development, including related to international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work; social dialogue and labour governance; sustainable enterprises and responsible business conduct, responsible investment in supply chains; and social protection amongst others.

31. The section also identifies alignment with relevant ILO strategies, frameworks and action plans and the potential contribution of Better Work, including the ILO Strategy on Decent Work in Supply Chains (2023–27) and), the 2026 Governing Body discussion on possible complementary initiatives and the development of its successor strategy; the ILO strategy for achieving universal social protection (2021–30); the MNE Declaration; the ILO Integrated Strategy for the Promotion and Implementation of the Right to Collective Bargaining; recent tripartite conclusions on access to labour justice and wage policies, including living wages; and ILO strategies and action plans on occupational safety and health and gender equality.