

Grand Bargain Annual Meeting 2020

ILO Statement

The Annual Meeting of the Grand Bargain is taking place in unprecedented circumstances. This calls for a reflection both on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the commitments, as well as on the how the response to the pandemic can be capitalized to accelerate progress on some work streams, adapt them and ensure the long-term relevance of the Grand Bargain during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The consequences of the pandemic are expected to be long-lasting, further blurring the distinction between the humanitarian response and the socioeconomic recovery when it comes to ‘Building Back Better’. More than ever before actors need to really make sure interventions are seamless across the nexus. This calls for a stronger emphasis on the importance of better operationalizing the nexus, especially to offer long-term and durable solutions to certain groups (notably migrants, refugees, and other displaced persons) for which the crisis has increased pre-existing vulnerabilities.

The operationalization of the nexus cannot disregard a discussion on more and better quality funding: strategic funding decisions by donors can encourage better collaboration and complementarities between humanitarian and development actors, leveraging on respective comparative advantages. At the same time, mainstreaming the former work stream 10 in the quality funding work stream also means ensuring a sustainable balance between financing frameworks, avoiding excessive unbalances between the pillars of the response.

Beyond quality funding, a discussion should be held on how selected Grand Bargain work streams (needs assessments, participation, localization, linking cash with social protection mechanisms, etc.) could be made even more relevant for both humanitarian and socioeconomic response frameworks.

COVID-19 has forced aid providers to significantly alter their way of working. This has prompted a reflection not only on how to build on the localization agenda (increasing reliance on local responders), but also on management costs (reducing travels, increasing the use of digital solutions,...) and cash (increasing the urgency for humanitarian cash assistance and social protection benefits to be better linked for more sustainable outcomes).

The political, financial and institutional investments made thus far should be capitalized on and lessons should be learned for a “post-2021 Grand Bargain”. In the context of the response to COVID-19, its initial aims have become even more relevant than before. At the same time, the fulfilment of its commitments still require work by all sides, and improved synergies across aid organizations (both humanitarian and development) and donors will make the difference.

As the lessons learned of the COVID-19 response become gradually clearer, as of 2021 the Grand Bargain should take a closer look at what worked, what did not, and what areas of improvement can be identified, in order to better tailor future initiatives to a context that will likely be significantly and permanently changed.

The focus should remain on the *quid pro quo* element, foreseeing a fair balance between “better funding” and “better spending”, as positive incentive structures can catalyse change.

Participation, in terms of effective community and stakeholder participation should remain at the core of the post-2021 Grand Bargain, including from the point of view of mainstreaming the nexus, as this contributes to the development of more inclusive interventions with a greater impact on resilience.

The importance of harmonizing information collection, dissemination and performing joint needs analysis should go beyond humanitarian needs assessments and better link, at the appropriate time and in the appropriate cases, with longer-term development and post-disaster assessments.

Localization also remains crucial both in the short-term and in the long-term response. Building coalitions on crisis response with local civil society organizations, local, national government and donors should be the “normality”.

The promotion of the use of cash in a way that reinforces social protection systems (including through public works) is a promising area of collaboration between humanitarian and development actors, and it has been made all the more relevant in the context of COVID-19 (and it will likely remain in its aftermath). Harmonizing planning frames between humanitarian and development operations, including through multi-year planning in fragile settings, still requires further efforts and the ILO would welcome commitments in this regard.

The post-2021 Grand Bargain should be more agile, more participative and leaner. Reducing the reporting burden and the number of parallel initiatives to be followed would allow for better focus and reduce the “implementation fatigue” that many are starting to feel. In order to avoid widening the gap between large frontrunners and smaller players – stronger inclusiveness should be ensured for signatories without co-convenors’ role or with limited capacity to permanently engage in multiple initiatives running in parallel.

Investing in advocacy, communication, and reducing the fragmentation of the initiatives and working groups would allow for better focus. While complementarities should be sought (for instance with the IASC RG4), the Grand Bargain should remain a unique and diverse platform, where humanitarian and development actors, as well as donors, can engage in a semi-structured way.

We see the need for a better cascading Grand Bargain principles at country-level, with the need to target RCs/HCs as a precondition to embed, whenever possible, the Grand Bargain principles in their coordinating, facilitating and arbitrating roles, including across the nexus.

Increasing the involvement of local governments and non-OECD/DAC donors would also reinforce the political buy-in and re-balance an otherwise top-down approach. For the ILO this also means strengthening the dialogue with the main institutional actors of the world of work as part of the stakeholders involved in national responses.

The ILO sees the added value of the Grand Bargain in its unique nature, as an open, inclusive and diverse platform, where humanitarian actors can engage with donors and development actors in an action-oriented way. This delicate balance should be always ensured, in order to create the necessary ownership by each actor, thus contributing to the success of the initiative.