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Sub-regional occupational safety and health (OSH) strategy – SRO ILO Moscow

Scope of the problem

ILO estimates are that over 2 million workers die each year from work-related accidents and diseases, and that globally this figure is on the increase. Extrapolated for the CIS countries, the ILO estimates that over 5 *million* workers suffer from work-related (not only registered occupational) diseases.

These estimates are supported by the national information. The Ministry of Health has announced that more than 2 million people die in Russia every year, about 600,000 of them are of working age and 480,000 are men. In recent years, every fifth person suffering from a work related disease has stopped working before reaching the age of 45. The premature deaths and diseases are seriously diminishing Russian working population and adding to the imbalance of the demographic structure.

The official statistic in Russia is reporting about 6000 fatal occupational accidents annually. The reporting system does not cover small and medium size enterprise.

The CIS republics are transforming or re-building their national OSH systems from the old Soviet system. The transition state of their economies is decreasing the resources available for OSH, while the demands on society for improved working conditions and accident compensation is increasing.

Safe Work

The strategic objective of the ILO In Focus Programme SafeWork is to enhance the coverage and effectiveness of labour protection, aiming at safe and decent working conditions for all.

The targets of SafeWork are to assist the constituents

- to strengthen their occupational safety and health capacity through the application of ILO standards, codes and guides, as well as through improved information, statistical tools and methods on safety and health;
- to enhance national OSH systems (annex) by developing national OSH programmes and plans of action to implement safe working conditions.

Occupational accidents and diseases and poor working conditions cause economic havoc for whole families and is a major cost for the society. ILO estimates that 4 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is lost due to accidents and work-related diseases. In the transition economies, the system of

compensating workers for working in sub-standard working conditions (hazard pays) is further adding to the waste of resources and adding to the burden of disease.

Safe working conditions is good business and a part of normal quality and production management. Providing adequate work is an investment in the human resources and skills of the work force at the enterprise, in quality and productivity. Sustainable and cost-effective improvement of working conditions has to be based on cooperation between employers and workers at the enterprise – social partnership in OSH, a crucial part of a coherent OSH management system.

ILO Moscow is implementing these policies jointly with ILO/SafeWork and the tri-partite constituents in ten countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The fundamental components

The fundamental pillars of occupational safety and health – awareness and commitment, information and knowledge, training and capacity building - are necessary to develop a national OSH strategy including a systematic approach to OSH management, in the end aiming at the creation of a national safety and health culture.

Awareness and commitment

The ILO SafeWork long-term translation programme has overcome the language barrier and created an awareness and interest for cooperation among the OSH specialists and organisations across the language borders. The creation of general public awareness as well as high level political commitment for effective implementation of national OSH systems is moving into a new phase with the new ILO mechanisms. Government organisations, the academic world and the social partners are engaged in the work.

The realisation that occupational accidents and diseases cost the society, the enterprise and the victims enormous amounts is the first step to eliminate the waste of national resources and commit business leaders to improved working conditions. General awareness raising is a crucial component in the long term work for a safety culture.

The ILO Moscow is effectively using various means to increase the general awareness and visibility of OSH, such as:

- the DG was promoted to Honorary Doctor in OSH during his visit to Moscow in 2002
- the world safety day on 28 April 2003 was endorsed and promoted by the Deputy Premier in all regions of Russia; the response from Russia and the neighbouring states was overwhelming and encourages to do an even bigger effort in the following years
- public events, exhibitions, articles in newspapers and magazines

Information and knowledge

The strategy of ILO/SafeWork in the Russia Federation has, for the last decade, been to assist in translating and publishing up-to-date OSH information in Russian. Over 20 000 pages of material are available in Russian, including the Encyclopaedia, IPCS chemical safety cards, ILO guidelines, manuals and code of practice. The Virtual Academy of Safework (www.safework.ru), the portal for ILO and international information, Russian federal and regional information and the official Russian OSH information system RISOT, is an interactive, comprehensive and much used resource. The continuous publication of international material is supplemented with the development and dissemination of local OSH material.

ILO Mow takes a high-tech approach utilising the rapidly expanding electronic dissemination inside the Russian Federation, to the neighbouring countries and to Russian speaking OSH specialist around the world. In addition to Internet, CD-ROMs, printed publications and the media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television) is effectively utilised to spread information. The policy is to provide free access to ILO OSH information to all who need it in the electronic media.

ILO Moscow is, in particular, promoting the establishment and strengthening of physical network of national OSH information and training centres. Several centres have been established in the Russian Federation. Azerbaijan, Belorussia, Georgia and Uzbekistan have their own national centres; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are in the process of establishing theirs. The upgrading of the established centres will require more emphasis.

ILO SafeWork is working towards harmonized methods for the collection and analysis of data on occupational accidents and diseases. Present underreporting and lack of data makes analysis erroneous and targeting of OSH resources inaccurate. Improved collection of statistics is linked with improved coverage of compensation. The work in ILO Moscow is in the beginning stage.

The information and knowledge component is an integral and continuous part of the strategy.

Training and capacity building

The government, employers and workers need adequate capacity to develop, process and disseminate knowledge – concerning international standards, national legislation, technical guidance, methodologies, accident and disease statistics, best practice, educational and training tools, research or hazard and risk assessment data, everything in an understandable language.

The OSH specialists in the region have high education and long experience. The ILO's input is to provide information and experience and initiate discussions on OSH policies, methods and practical work in a market economy environment to overcome the transition period.

The ILO Mow is supporting local experts and organisations to produce pilot and modular training courses and packages utilising the training-of-trainers-approach. The present topics are social dialogue at the work places in OSH, economic costs of poor working conditions, monitoring of OSH at work places, etc. Future topics will be selected in cooperation with the constituents.

The national constituents are independently working on the adaptation and implementation of ILO standards, codes of practice and guidelines (such as OSH management systems, etc) with ILO support and advice, where necessary. The ultimate goals are the ratification of ILO OSH conventions.

Several of the newly independent countries are in the process of building up their own national OSH system. ILO is actively supporting the preparation of national OSH profiles and encouraging the launching of national OSH programmes by the highest government authorities.

The balanced implementation of the fundamental components requires a systematic approach – an OSH management system identifying the baseline - weaknesses and strengths – and allocating national and external resources in the most cost-effective way.

OSH management system

The ILO Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems (ILO-OSH 2001) has been recently developed. The concept of OSH management system is well known from the former OSH management system used in the Soviet Union. The ILO OSH 2001 has been translated and promoted in numerous conferences in the ILO Mow countries during 2002-03. It links closely to social dialogue and a preventive approach in the application of a systems approach to the management of national OSH systems.

The adaptation and integration of ILO OSH-MS into the former Soviet OSH system and new management systems from other areas is a priority for the systematic improvement of working conditions.

Safety culture

A national preventative safety and health culture is one in which the right to a safe and healthy working environment is respected at all levels, where governments, employers and workers actively participate in securing a safe and healthy working environment through a system of defined rights, responsibilities and duties, and where the principle of prevention is accorded the highest priority.

The long term objective is to create a culture of prevention to replace an outdated culture of strict detailed control, apportion of blame and sanctions, supplemented with a system of hazard pay. Funds wasted for “compensation” for work in substandard working (hazard pay) should be used for investing in safety, productivity and quality.

Implementation mechanisms

National OSH profiles and programmes

ILO Moscow started in 2002 to use the new ILO instrument, the preparation of OSH profiles aiming at national OSH programmes and plans of actions, based on a preventative safety and health culture and the management systems approach.

The OSH profile looks at, inter alia,

- the right of workers to a safe and healthy working environment;
- the respective responsibilities of governments, employers and workers;
- the establishment of tripartite consultation mechanisms on OSH;
- the principles of assessment and management of hazards and risks at the workplace level;
- initiatives fostering a preventative safety and health culture; and
- worker participation and representation at all relevant levels.

The formulation of national OSH programmes is an effective way to consolidate national tripartite efforts in improving national OSH systems. The endorsement and launching of a national OSH programme by the highest government authority, for example by the Head of State, government or parliament, has a significant impact on strengthening national OSH capacities and mobilization of national and international resources. It is essential to ensure the active participation of employers, workers and all relevant government institutions in the formulation and implementation of the

programme. The programme should be developed on the basis of the achievements and needs of each country aiming at the improvement of national OSH systems and their capacity and OSH performance.

National OSH programmes cover key aspects such as national policy, high-level commitment and vision that are publicly expressed and documented, national strategy that would include the development of a national OSH profile, targets, indicators, responsibilities, resources, and government leadership.

Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan have prepared national OSH profiles, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have started the process. Azerbaijan is working on its national OSH concept aiming at a national OS strategy. In Russia the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Health have their own programmes. A new initiative has been made to develop a State programme for “Health for the working population of Russia 2003-2015”.

An integrated approach to safe and decent work

The right to maintain one’s life and health is a basic human right – this applies in particular to working life, where a tremendous annual loss of lives and health goes largely unnoticed.

The sustainable improvement of working conditions is not possible without social dialogue – workers and employer cooperation at enterprises, locally and nationally. The development of structures for social dialogue (safety committees, workers safety representatives, etc.) at enterprises is especially important.

Safe work cannot exist without employment and a living wage. On the other hand, safe and well managed working conditions are necessary for productivity and quality – without which an enterprise cannot survive in the global market. Employment strategies and the creation of jobs need to be focusing on, not only the increase of people employed, but on the creation of safe and decent work, including job security, payment of salaries on time, maternity protection, etc.

Working conditions and conditions of employment are both essential parts of safe and decent work. The overall strategy of SRO ILO Moscow is to link various fields of activities (including child labour, forced labour, HIV/AIDS, gender characteristics, migrant workers, small businesses the informal sector, etc) to improve the working conditions for the work force in general and, specifically, for vulnerable groups.

The ILO Mow OSH strategy is developed for a 5 year perspective with regular updates to react to the rapidly changing situation in the transition economies. The cooperation with each country is based on its level of development and commitment, allowing for direct cooperation between consenting countries and for transfer of experiences between countries in and outside the region.

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National occupational safety and health (OSH) system

