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Policy Development Section

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Employment and Social Protection Segment

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Update on ILO occupational safety and health programmes, activities and resources

Purpose of the document

This document provides an update on the ILO programmes, activities and resources relating to occupational safety and health, with a particular focus on the 2018–19 and 2020–21 biennia (see the draft decision in paragraph 24).

Relevant strategic objective: Social protection.

Main relevant outcome: Outcome 7: Adequate and effective protection at work for all.

Policy implications: Implementation of the ILO Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health, adopted by the 91st Session of the International Labour Conference.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None.

Follow-up action required: See draft decision.

Author unit: Governance and Tripartism Department (GOVERNANCE).

Related documents: None.

► I. Introduction

1. This document provides an update on programmes, activities and resources allocated to the work of the Office on occupational safety and health (OSH), with a particular emphasis on the 2018–19 and 2020–21 biennia.
2. The protection of workers against sickness, disease and accidents at work has been an objective of the International Labour Organization (ILO) since its inception in 1919. The Preamble to the ILO Constitution refers to “the protection of the worker against sickness, disease and injury arising out of his employment”. The 1944 ILO Declaration of Philadelphia recognizes “the solemn obligation of the International Labour Organization to further among the nations of the world programmes which will achieve ... adequate protection for the life and health of workers in all occupations”. More recently, the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, 2019, recognized the fundamental importance of OSH for decent work.¹ In 2021, the ILO resolution concerning a global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient underscored the importance of working toward the protection of all workers through “strengthen[ing] occupational safety and health measures by cooperating with public institutions, private enterprises, employers, workers and their representatives”. Within the broader framework of the United Nations (UN), the Sustainable Development Goals include Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth, which contains an indicator (8.8.1) on incidence rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries by sex and migrant status.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined as never before the need for OSH, and the importance of effective prevention strategies. Businesses and workers everywhere have been impacted by the threat of contracting the virus at work and by the many measures put in place to reduce the risk of transmitting it. Recent industrial accidents provide further proof that a lack of safety and health at work can have catastrophic consequences.² Estimates before the pandemic had already signalled the urgency of the problem. Recent estimates on the work-related burden of disease and injury, concerning 41 pairs of occupational risk exposure/health outcomes, show that at least 1.9 million deaths and a loss of 90 million healthy life years (disability-adjusted life years) are attributable to occupational exposure to 19 occupational risk factors.³
4. At its 91st Session (2003), the International Labour Conference adopted a Global Strategy on Occupational Safety And Health, which reaffirmed the role of the ILO in fostering a preventive approach to reducing work-related accidents and diseases through the wider promotion of a preventive safety and health culture, and better management of OSH at

¹ The 108th Session of the International Labour Conference (2019) also adopted a resolution requesting the Governing Body “to consider, as soon as possible, proposals for including safe and healthy working conditions in the ILO’s framework of fundamental principles and rights at work”. At its 341st Session (March 2021), the ILO Governing Body discussed substantive questions concerning the follow-up to the resolution and approved a revised procedural road map, including the possible placement of a technical item on the agenda of the 110th Session of the Conference.

² Recent examples include the 2020 explosion in the port of Beirut that caused 218 deaths and 7,000 injuries and left an estimated 300,000 people homeless; the 2021 fire at a food processing plant in Rupganj, Bangladesh, that resulted in 52 deaths; and the 2021 chemical fire and explosion at a plastics processing plant in Bangkok that injured dozens of workers.

³ ILO and WHO, *WHO/ILO Joint Estimates of the Work-related Burden of Disease and Injury, 2000–2016: Global Monitoring Report* (September 2021).

the national and enterprise levels. It called for action in the areas of promotion, awareness-raising and advocacy; ratification and implementation of ILO OSH instruments; technical assistance and cooperation; knowledge development, management and dissemination; and international collaboration. Building on the 2003 global strategy and the 2009 General Survey on Occupational Safety and Health, the Governing Body approved at its 307th Session (March 2010) a plan of action covering the period from 2010 to 2016 with a view to achieving widespread ratification and effective implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), the Protocol of 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981, and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187).

► II. ILO action on OSH

5. A significant body of international labour standards, codes of practice, guidelines, and policy and technical tools has been developed to assist Member States in reducing the persisting high rates of work-related fatalities and illness and strengthening the capacities of ILO constituents to prevent and manage workplace hazards and risks. The work of the Office on OSH covers all the elements of national OSH systems as defined by Article 4 of Convention No. 187, and addresses a wide spectrum of traditional and emerging risks, including physical, biological, chemical, ergonomic and psychosocial risks, as well as health promotion and well-being. Particular attention is paid to OSH deficits specific to micro and small businesses and the informal economy, and OSH improvements in global supply chains.
6. In recent years, a specific part of the ILO programme and budget has been dedicated to OSH. In 2018–19, the Office assisted 33 Member States in reinforcing their national OSH systems in line with Convention No. 187, including developing or updating national OSH profiles, policies, programmes, legislation, institutional set-ups, social dialogue mechanisms, and recording and notification systems. The results achieved exceeded the targets set for the biennium.⁴
7. Work on OSH is being delivered under output 7.2 of the Programme and Budget 2020–21, (Increased capacity of Member States to ensure safe and healthy working conditions). Results are measured by two indicators focused on the strengthening of national OSH infrastructures through the development of policies and programmes and capacity-building (7.2.1), and OSH recording and notification systems (7.2.2). Increasing demands from Member States for ILO technical assistance on OSH resulted in 43 target countries under indicator 7.2.1 in the current biennium. In addition, 47 countries were identified under the same indicator for continued assistance with a view to achieving future results, making indicator 7.2.1 the largest in the ILO Programme and Budget for the biennium 2020–21. It is expected that at the end of 2021, results with an OSH dimension will also be able to be reported under other outcomes, including outcome 1.⁵

⁴ See ILO, *Decent Work Results: ILO Programme Implementation 2018–19*, ILC.109/I(A).

⁵ Strong tripartite constituents and influential and inclusive social dialogue. Results relating to OSH inspections, for example, are reported under output 1.3.

Promotion, awareness-raising and advocacy

8. The ILO has continuously raised awareness of and conducted advocacy on OSH, in particular through the World Day for Safety and Health at Work, which has taken place annually on 28 April since 2003 ⁶ and has received global press and social media coverage. Each year, this awareness-raising campaign highlights a topic of emerging or renewed importance. ⁷ In addition, the Office participates in international meetings to promote a preventive safety and health culture, including through the triennial World Congress on Safety and Health at Work and a multitude of other global and regional events and training sessions.

OSH instruments

9. The ILO promotes the ratification and supports the implementation of over 40 international labour standards on OSH, ⁸ primarily providing assistance in the development of policies and programmes and strengthening of OSH infrastructures through the use of regular and extrabudgetary resources.
10. The Office is implementing the recommendations of the Standards Review Mechanism Tripartite Working Group (SRM TWG). As decided by the Governing Body, the SRM TWG reviewed at its third meeting (September 2017) 19 instruments concerning OSH. It made recommendations on classifying the instruments according to how up-to-date they are and identified those with gaps in coverage and those requiring practical and time-bound follow-up action. The SRM TWG subsequently reviewed nine sectoral OSH instruments, made recommendations to the Governing Body, and requested the Office to prepare proposals for the possible inclusion of standard-setting items on biological hazards and ergonomics in future agendas of the International Labour Conference, to consolidate the instruments on chemical hazards, and to review the instruments concerning guarding of machinery. It also requested the Office to commence work on technical guidelines on biological hazards and chemical hazards, and to consider the regular review of the 2011 code of practice on safety and health in the use of machinery at a later date. A meeting of experts for the tripartite validation of technical guidelines on biological hazards is now proposed for 2022, and a standard-setting item related to protection against biological hazards has been included in the agenda of the 112th and 113th Sessions of the Conference (2024 and 2025). In accordance with a decision of the Governing Body at its 335th Session (March 2019), the Office has prepared a draft code of practice on safety and health in textiles, clothing, leather and footwear, to be discussed and adopted by a meeting of experts in October 2021, and it is reviewing the ILO code of practice on safety and health in construction.

Technical assistance and cooperation

11. The Office develops and applies methodologies to promote the formulation of national OSH policies, profiles and programmes and assist in their implementation. In addition, it provides policy and technical assistance to constituents through the development and

⁶ For the 2021 event, ILO offices and constituents around the world organized over 40 regional and national social media campaigns, lectures, webinars, virtual dialogues and other themed events. In 2020, 34 global, regional and national events were organized.

⁷ In recent years, this has included highlighting OSH risks connected with the future of work and, in 2020 and 2021, prevention and awareness of the risks of COVID-19 and other pandemics for the world of work.

⁸ For more information, see "[International Labour Standards on Occupational Safety and Health](#)".

publication of reports, briefs, technical tools,⁹ training materials, capacity-building (including through the International Training Centre of the ILO),¹⁰ research reviews on OSH, development cooperation projects and partnerships with local experts and practitioners in the field covering all categories of hazards.

12. At its 325th Session (October–November 2015), the Governing Body took note of the Safety + Health for All flagship programme, which aims to improve the safety and health of all workers worldwide by building knowledge, capacities and conducive national frameworks, and spurring demand for safety and health at work.¹¹ It supports and builds on the ILO's ongoing work to promote ratification and implementation of OSH standards by drawing on the ILO's multidisciplinary expertise and joining forces with other flagship programmes. An integral part of the Safety + Health for All flagship programme is the Vision Zero Fund, a G7 initiative that was endorsed by the G20 in 2017. Working with global supply chains in the agriculture, garment and construction sectors, the Fund strives to reach zero work-related fatalities and severe injuries and diseases through fostering public and private action in selected businesses operating in low- and middle-income countries, and introducing prevention activities to improve OSH, including on risk management in line with ILO guidelines.¹²

Knowledge development, management and dissemination

13. To provide wide access to information, the ILO has developed and manages a number of OSH databases, information resources and networks.¹³
14. The Office continues to support and engage in research on OSH risks, including on biological risks, chemical hazards and major industrial accidents, and emerging risks linked to climate change, technology, demographics, new forms of work, and supply chains. Physical and ergonomic risks are another key area, especially new work processes, such as large increases in teleworking. Psychosocial risks and workplace health promotion, including the prevention of violence and harassment and of substance abuse, are also areas of continued significance.
15. Improving the collection and quality of occupational accident and disease statistics is a recognized need. In 2019, the ILO signed a memorandum of understanding with the WHO to develop a new methodology and regularly update joint estimates of the work-related burden of disease and injury. The estimates will enable policymakers to better track exposure to occupational risk factors and health loss at the country, regional and global levels.

⁹ In 2020 and 2021, a large proportion of resources was dedicated to developing [guidance and technical materials on COVID-19](#) (in particular on safe work practices and return-to-work policies), and providing direct assistance to countries, with both regular budget and development cooperation resources.

¹⁰ In 2021, the International Training Centre, with support from the Office, organized 21 courses, including a Master's degree in OSH.

¹¹ Safety + Health for All is active in 19 countries and has managed 28 development cooperation projects to date, 22 of which are currently active.

¹² The Vision Zero Fund is currently active in Colombia, Ethiopia, Honduras, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Mexico, Myanmar and Viet Nam, and is providing COVID-19 OSH assistance in collaboration with Better Work to Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Viet Nam.

¹³ These include the ILO Global Database on Occupational Safety and Health Legislation (LEGOSH), the ILO Global Database on Occupational Safety and Health Agencies, Institutions and Organizations (INTEROSH), the International Chemical Safety Cards database, the ILO electronic library on labour administration and inspection and occupational safety and health, the ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety, the ILO Occupational Safety and Health Thesaurus, the ILO Occupational Safety and Health Glossary and the International Hazard Datasheets on Occupations.

International collaboration

- 16.** The ILO's international collaboration in the area of OSH includes all activities undertaken jointly or in cooperation with other intergovernmental organizations. These include developing policies and programmes, participating in technical committees, preparing technical standards, developing databases and information materials, and organizing conferences and workshops. Within the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, the ILO coordinates policies and global activities with eight other UN agencies on the sound management of chemicals and waste, sustainability and the environment. The ILO's participation in the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management involves stakeholders from the world of work in the global discussion on the safe management of chemicals. The ILO also has multilateral commitments related to the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata Conventions. Collaboration with the WHO includes work on major industrial accidents, chemicals, biological hazards and communicable and non-communicable diseases, including as part of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases. The ILO is also working with the WHO by providing technical guidance on the development of WHO guidelines for mental health in the workplace and guidance on COVID-19 and teleworking.¹⁴
- 17.** Other forms of multilateral collaboration include work with the International Atomic Energy Agency and other international organizations to promote the application of the Radiation Protection Convention, 1960 (No. 115), including by promoting the active involvement of employers' and workers' organizations in the development of international standards on radiation safety and protection, participating in the work of the Radiation Safety Standards Committee and the Emergency Preparedness and Response Standards Committee, and membership of the Inter-Agency Committee on Radiation Safety.¹⁵ The ILO works in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to promote OSH in rural areas, and has a long-standing tradition of collaborating on OSH with financial institutions such as the World Bank (including on the Environmental and Social Framework), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the African Development Bank.
- 18.** Furthermore, the ILO collaborates regularly with non-governmental organizations such as the International Ergonomics Association,¹⁶ the International Commission on

¹⁴ The 1948 agreement between the ILO and the WHO, which was approved by the Governing Body of the ILO and the World Health Assembly, provides for the establishment of a joint committee on occupational health to identify priority areas for action, and joint or coordinated activities at the international, national and regional levels. Since its establishment in 1950, the Committee has held 13 sessions, convened alternately by the two organizations usually every five years. The last session was convened by the ILO in 2003.

¹⁵ The IACRS promotes consistency and coordination of policies on radiation protection and safety. It comprises eight intergovernmental organizations (the European Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Labour Organization, the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Pan American Health Organization, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, and the World Health Organization) and five non-governmental bodies.

¹⁶ The ILO and IEA prepared the Principles and Guidelines for Human Factors/Ergonomics (HF/E) Design and Management of Work Systems, which describe ways to integrate physical, cognitive and organizational human factors and ergonomics into the design and management of work systems to ensure the safety, health and well-being of workers and to enhance worker and organizational performance, effectiveness and sustainability. The completed document will be published by the ILO and will serve as a technical basis for the development of an international labour standard on workplace human factors/ergonomics. Currently, the ILO and IEA are collaborating on a report on national law and practices concerning workplace human factors/ergonomics and manual handling of weights.

Occupational Health,¹⁷ the International Social Security Association, the International Occupational Hygiene Association,¹⁸ the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health and the International Association of Labour Inspection. The ILO collaborates with regional bodies such as the European Commission,¹⁹ the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Pan American Health Organization and the Southern African Development Community.

19. Since 2019, the Office has chaired the Steering Committee of the Global Coalition for Safety and Health at Work and has acted as the secretariat to the Steering Committee and task groups. The Global Coalition is a multi-stakeholder initiative with representatives from governments, employers and workers, and global and regional organizations with the aim of contributing to the international debate and knowledge dissemination on major topics influencing the present and future of OSH.
20. Following a four-year pilot of an agreement of 6 August 2013 with the International Organization for Standardization, including in relation to OSH management systems, the ILO Governing Body reviewed the implementation in March 2018 and decided to formally terminate the agreement.²⁰

► III. ILO resources dedicated to OSH

21. The Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health Branch (LABADMIN/OSH) of the Governance and Tripartism Department is the service responsible for managing the programmes and activities of the ILO on OSH, in collaboration with other units at headquarters and field offices. Its work includes coordinating policy and technical advice, awareness-raising, knowledge development and dissemination, capacity-building, liaising with multilateral actors and promoting cross-regional collaboration through a Global Technical Team.²¹ The Branch provides follow-up to Governing Body decisions on OSH. This includes work in relation to the Standards Review Mechanism (development of technical guidelines and technical support for standard-setting) and the current discussion on OSH as part of the fundamental principles and rights at work. Given the limited resources available in the field, the Branch directly assists field offices and constituents in implementing or preparing to ratify the more than 40 international labour standards, and generally delivers activities under output 7.2. The Branch manages the Safety + Health for All

¹⁷ The ICOH is a professional society founded in 1906 with the aim of fostering scientific progress, knowledge and the development of occupational health and safety in all its aspects. It has a membership of 2,000 professionals from 105 countries. It is on the steering committee of the Global Coalition for Safety and Health at Work, chaired by the ILO.

¹⁸ Currently the ICOH and IOHA are providing inputs for the draft technical guidelines on biological hazards and supporting ILO specialized training activities.

¹⁹ ILO activities on OSH are undertaken in conjunction with various bureaux of the European Commission, including the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs and Inclusion, the Directorate-General for International Partnerships, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. Ongoing partnerships on OSH activities include conferences, seminars, recommendations relating to both EU and ILO principles on OSH, and support to multi-agency programmes such as the provision of regular funding for the International Chemical Safety Cards. The European Commission is a donor to the Vision Zero Fund and is a member of the steering committee of the Global Coalition for Safety and Health at Work.

²⁰ GB.331/PV, para. 320. See also the [ILO statement on the termination of the agreement](#).

²¹ In addition to OSH, the LABADMIN/OSH Branch is responsible for labour administration and labour inspection, currently covered under output 1.3 of the Programme and Budget 2020–21.

flagship programme (including the Vision Zero Fund) and chairs the Global Coalition for Safety and Health at Work.

22. Initial regular budget allocations to the Branch (excluding regular budget development cooperation and staff development funds) have mostly remained constant since 2016 (see Appendix I). They represent an average of US\$11.8 million per biennium, with a low of US\$11.1 million in 2020–21 and a high of US\$12.6 million for 2022–23 for staff and non-staff costs. Once staff costs (for regular budget positions) have been deducted, the percentage of resources available for activities, including those related to OSH, has steadily decreased, representing 18 per cent of the budget in 2016–17, 13.8 per cent in 2018–19, 12.3 per cent in 2020–21 and 12 per cent in 2022–23. As of July 2021, over US\$61 million had been allocated to development cooperation projects through the Safety + Health for All flagship programme (see Appendix II). Contributions have been received from 13 different development partners. The flagship programme has been implemented in 19 countries, covering an overall target population of 138 million workers benefiting directly or indirectly from its interventions.²² The budget allocation under indicator 7.2 of the Programme and Budget for 2020–21 is US\$26.27 million, 90 per cent of which from extrabudgetary resources.
23. Positions for technical specialists on OSH that are funded by the ILO regular budget have remained stable over recent biennia. In the 2016–17 biennium, nine regular positions were formally referred to as OSH specialist positions, increasing progressively to 11 regular positions in 2020–21. However, some specialists also cover the areas of labour administration and labour inspection. For the 2022–23 biennium, a new technical position on OSH has been formally created for the Branch, making a total of 12 positions. In the field, regular budget OSH specialist positions have increased slightly overall, from eight in the 2016–17 biennium to ten in the 2022–23 biennium. As of the 2020–21 biennium, the Arab States and Europe and Central Asia regions each have one OSH specialist, Asia and the Pacific has two OSH specialists, and Africa has three OSH specialists. A new technical position on OSH has formally been created for the Americas region starting in the 2022–23 biennium, which will increase the number of specialists in the region from two to three.

► Draft decision

24. **The Governing Body noted the report provided by the Office and requested the Director-General to take its guidance into account in the implementation of the Programme and Budget for 2022–23 and when preparing future programme and budget proposals.**

²² The creation of a flagship programme on OSH increased the funding available for work at the global and country levels, but there have been no additional resources or positions to manage the programme or provide technical support to project development and implementation.

▶ **Appendix I****ILO regular budget resources allocated to LABADMIN/OSH, * 2016–23**
(in US dollars)

Biennium	Staff costs	Non-staff costs	Total resources	Percentage of non-staff costs
2016–17	10 058 640	2 202 884	12 261 524	18.0
2018–19	9 613 680	1 537 430	11 151 110	13.8
2020–21	9 740 400	1 363 547	11 103 947	12.3
2022–23	11 080 800	1 513 196	12 593 996	12.0
Average			11 777 644	

* Covering the technical areas of labour administration, labour inspection and occupational safety and health

► Appendix II

Funding of the Safety + Health for All flagship programme, 2015-21

