

NINTH MEETING OF THE SRM TWG

(16-20 SEPTEMBER 2024)

Overview document: Background information applicable to the examination of instruments concerning dock work

- This overview document provides background information applicable to the review by the SRM TWG of the instruments concerning dock work and dockworkers that it will review at its ninth meeting in September 2024.

9 August 2024

1. The regulatory approach concerning dock work

International labour standards¹

Throughout its history, the ILO has regularly considered the special situation of dockworkers and dock work and adopted various Conventions and Recommendations in this regard. In addition, many other ILO instruments, especially those concerning work in industrial enterprises (including ports) apply to dockworkers similarly as to other workers.

The ILC examined matters relating to dockworkers in 1929 and again in 1932, when instruments on the prevention of accidents to workers engaged in loading and unloading ships were adopted: the Marking of Weight (Packages Transported by Vessels) Convention, 1929 (No. 27), the Protection against Accidents (Dockers) Convention, 1929 (No. 28),² the Protection against Accidents (Dockers) Convention (Revised), 1932 (No. 32), and the Protection against Accidents (Dockers) Reciprocity Recommendation, 1932 (No. 40).

By the 1970s, there was tripartite agreement that the social repercussions of changes in cargo-handling methods in ports, the regularization of employment and incomes, industrial relations, improvements in work efficiency and dockworkers' conditions of work and living standards should be addressed through standard-setting. As a result, the Dock Work Convention, 1973 (No. 137) and the Dock Work Recommendation, 1973 (No. 145) were adopted.

In 1979, Convention No. 32 and Recommendation No. 40 were revised by the adoption of the Occupational Safety and Health (Dock Work) Convention, 1979 (No. 152) and Occupational Safety and Health (Dock Work) Recommendation, 1979 (No. 160), which remain the most up-to-date instruments on this subject.

Ratification of international labour standards on dock work

The following table illustrates the ratification rates of the relevant instruments concerning dock work.

RATIFICATION: OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (DOCK WORK)		
Convention	Effective ratifications:	Further information
Convention No. 27	65 effective ratifications³ (0 denunciations)	• Marking of weight (packages transported by vessels) • To be revised

¹ ILO: [General Survey on Dock Work](#), 2002, Report III (Part 1B), para 2-8.

² Convention No. 28 was withdrawn by decision of the International Labour Conference at its 106th Session (2017).

³ South Africa is not included in the list of Member States with effective ratifications because despite ratifying Convention No. 27 in February 1933, the Convention is not in force in the country. The Certified Statement relative to the registration of Convention No. 27, submitted to the United Nations in 1949, states that "Ratification is not to be effective for the Union of South Africa until the unconditional ratifications of Great Britain, Germany, France and Italy have been registered." The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has not ratified the Convention.

		• Included in SRM TWG 2024 review
Convention No. 32	32 effective ratifications (14 denunciations)	• Protection against accidents (dockers) • Outdated • Included in SRM TWG 2024 review
Convention No. 152	27 effective ratifications (0 denunciations)	• Occupational safety and health (dock work) • Up-to-date • Not included in SRM TWG's initial programme of work
RATIFICATION: DOCK WORK		
Convention	Effective ratifications:	Further information
Convention No. 137	24 effective ratifications (1 denunciation)	• Dock work • Interim status • Included in SRM TWG 2024 review

2. Wider context

Ports are essential facilitators of world trade, handling 80% of the global trade volume.⁴ They are global strategic assets, linking global value chains and underpinning the global economic interconnectedness.⁵ According to estimates by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in container shipping alone, over 900 ports across the world were servicing global liner shipping networks in 2022.⁶

Over the years, ports have become more than cargo handling centres and emerged as complex, multifunctional centres offering a wide range of services for cargo and users.⁷ Ports and their management can have implications on economic growth, crisis response efforts, environmental protection and gender equality; hence, demonstrating their integral role in sustainable development.⁸ The pandemic and subsequent socio-political upheavals led to logistics disruptions, delays and port congestion, which impacted the economies of countries served by the ports, particularly in least developed countries and small island developing states.⁹

Ports are an important source of local employment, however the participation of women in the port industry remains low with minimal changes from year to year.¹⁰ Data from UNCTAD

⁴ UNCTAD: Policy Brief, [Emerging strategies for ports during the pandemic](#), February 2022, p.3.

⁵ UNCTAD: [Global Port Infrastructure Sufficiency Index: Results of the pilot phase](#), 2023, p. 7.

⁶ UNCTAD: [Global Port Infrastructure Sufficiency Index: Results of the pilot phase](#), 2023, p. 7.

⁷ UNCTAD: [Global Port Infrastructure Sufficiency Index: Results of the pilot phase](#), 2023, p. 7.

⁸ UNCTAD: [Why ports are at the heart of sustainable development](#), 2022.

⁹ UNCTAD: [Why ports are at the heart of sustainable development](#), 2022.

¹⁰ UNCTAD: [Why ports are at the heart of sustainable development](#), 2022; and UNCTAD, [Review of Maritime Transport](#), 2023, page 106.

from over 50 ports in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America showed that women only held 18% of official port jobs in 2021.¹¹ Across the industry, participation rates have at best increased by small single percentage points between 2017 and 2022.¹² The global average for women involved in cargo handling and operations in ports was just 6%, compared with 42% for management and administrative roles.¹³ However, there are cases of individual ports where participation rates are considerably higher; in European ports the highest regional average was 26%.¹⁴

3. Review by the SRM TWG

At its ninth meeting, the SRM TWG will conduct its substantive review of instruments pertaining to dockworkers and dock work.

Consideration by previous meetings

At its second meeting in October 2016, the SRM TWG discussed the follow-up to be taken in relation to 63 instruments previously identified as outdated by the Cartier Working Party, including those pertaining to dockworkers. During this meeting, the SRM TWG discussed follow-up to be taken in relation to two outdated instruments concerning dockworkers, specifically on occupational safety and health (dock work): Convention No. 32 and Recommendation No. 40.

In approving the recommendations of the SRM TWG at its second meeting, the Governing Body decided that the SRM TWG would follow up on these instruments at later meetings.¹⁵ The Governing Body also invited the Office to follow-up with the governments and the social partners of the Member States bound by Convention No. 32, encouraging them to ratify the related up-to-date instrument, Convention No. 152.

Questions to consider

At its ninth meeting, the SRM TWG will review two Conventions and one Recommendation concerning dock work. It will also examine the follow-up to be taken to a further two outdated instruments falling within this subject area that had been examined for the first time by the SRM TWG at its October 2016 meeting. This will involve considering: the classification of Conventions Nos 27 and 137 and Recommendation No. 145; the follow-up to be taken to outdated Convention No. 32 and Recommendation No. 40; and the appropriate follow-up action to be taken.

Within its mandate as set out in paragraph 9(b) of its terms of reference, the SRM TWG may wish to consider whether any gaps in coverage exist in relation to instruments concerning

¹¹ UNCTAD: [Why ports are at the heart of sustainable development](#), 2022.

¹² UNCTAD: [Review of Maritime Transport](#), 2023, page 106.

¹³ UNCTAD: [Why ports are at the heart of sustainable development](#), 2022.

¹⁴ UNCTAD: [Why ports are at the heart of sustainable development](#), 2022.

¹⁵ Governing Body, [Decision on the second item on the agenda: The Standards Initiative](#), November 2016.

dockworkers and dock work as a whole and make corresponding recommendations to the Governing Body.