

ILO OSH Policies and Actions

Extended Abstract

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The Preamble to the ILO Constitution refers to “the protection of the worker against sickness, disease and injury arising out of his employment”. The Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health adopted at the International Labour Conference in 2003 reaffirmed the role of ILO instruments as a central pillar for the promotion of occupational safety and health. At the same time, the strategy also calls for integrated 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. The Strategy pinpoints the need for tripartite national commitment and national action in fostering a preventive approach and a safety culture which are key to achieving lasting improvements in safety and health at work.

The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, 2019, recognized the fundamental importance of OSH for decent work. The 2021 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”.

In line with the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”, the ILO’s OSH actions aim at the promotion of safe and secure working environments for all workers (indicator 8.8 of SDG 8).

The ILO carries out OSH activities to strengthen national OSH infrastructures through the development of policies and programmes and capacity-building. A large body of International labour standards, codes of practice, guidelines, and policy and technical tools on OSH have been produced to assist Member States in reducing workplace accidents and diseases caused by work and strengthening the capacities of ILO constituents to control workplace hazards and risks and to protect workers’ safety and health.

For example, the ILO has produced more than 40 international labour standards on OSH, two most recently adopted standards relevant to OSH are Convention No. 189 on domestic workers and its accompanying Recommendation No 201 in 2011 and Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment and its accompanying Recommendation No. 206 in 2019. More than 50 codes of practice and guidelines have been adopted through the tripartite mechanism of the ILO targeting workplace hazardous agents, dangerous machinery, industrial accidents, high risk sectors and industries, protection of workers, workers’ health surveillance, etc. The most recently adopted ILO code of practice is on safety and health in textiles, clothing, leather and footwear industries which was approved on 8 Oct 2022 by an ILO tripartite meeting of experts.

The ILO provides policy and technical assistance to Member States to support the efforts of its constituents in improving safety and health through the development of practical OSH

guides, tools, training manuals and policy brief, and information notes. In this regard, the manuscript entitled “Diagnostic and exposure criteria for occupational diseases – Guidance notes for diagnosis and prevention of the diseases in the ILO List of Occupational Diseases (revised 2010)” will be published before the end of 2021 by the ILO. More than 40 experts have worked throughout a timespan of ten years on this publication. Most of the experts contributed their expertise and knowledge on a voluntary basis. This publication provides information and criteria to be considered in the diagnosis and prevention of the diseases specified in the 2010 ILO list of occupational diseases. It is intended for the use of competent authorities, social security institutions, workers’ compensation funds, occupational safety and health professionals, physicians, employers and workers, and persons in charge of recording, notification, prevention, and compensation programmes for occupational diseases.

Based on the review and analysis of the OSH instruments, the ILO Governing Body has decided to include a standard-setting item on biological hazards on the agenda of the 2024 and 2025 sessions of the International Labour Conference. In addition, the ILO Governing Body will consider to include standard-setting discussions in the future International Labour Conferences on:

- the consolidation of instruments concerning chemical hazards;
- ergonomics and manual handling;
- machine safety.

As a follow-up to the adoption of the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work in which it solemnly declared among other things that “safe and healthy working conditions are fundamental to decent work” at the 108th Session (2019) of the International Labour Conference, the Conference adopted also a resolution requesting the ILO 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”.

The ILO Governing Body will make a decision at its meeting in November 2021 as to the placement on the agenda of the 110th Session (2022) of the International Labour Conference the following item: “Inclusion of safe and healthy working conditions in the ILO’s framework of fundamental principles and rights at work” and the possible forms of the Conference decision (amending the 1998 Declaration or adopting a self-standing declaration), consequential amendments to the 2008 ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (Social Justice Declaration) and the 2009 Global Jobs Pact, revision of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 which have references to the four categories of fundamental principles and rights, and legal effect on free trade agreements.