



27 May 2022

ICOH Statement at ILC 2022: Safety and Health is a Fundamental Right at Work.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) have estimated that 2.8 million people died in 2017 from work-related illness and injury. The most recent data and estimates presented at the ICOH Congress in February 2022 indicate that the toll caused by work-related diseases has increased from 2.3 million fatal cases to close to 2.6 million and the total loss to 2.9 million annually¹.

In addition, the annual estimate was that some 60,000 COVID-19 *work-related deaths* occurred in 2020, and the numbers were expected to be three times greater in 2021. The share of infections acquired at workplaces is close to 20% of all reported infections, based on the Italian compensation data². These COVID-19 infections did not occur only in highly exposed health workers; the numbers cover many jobs and occupations that have a significantly elevated risk of exposure to COVID-19 infection, such as painters and cleaners at construction sites, drivers, several industry sector workers in mining, manufacturing, and food industries, teachers, and day care workers, and service sector workers.

The injury toll is also not decreasing and, in particular, the global permanent and temporary disability numbers caused by accidents are expected to be much higher than estimated so far, as has been clearly shown for Europe³.

These negative outcomes create a massive social and economic burden. The ICOH has calculated that the economic burden of poor occupational safety and health (OSH) practices has risen to 5.4 % of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), equating to close to four thousand billion USD each year. This preventable production loss - or lost GDP - could cover the *total* combined GDP of some 130 of the poorest countries in the world.

The social value and impact are immeasurable.

¹ ILO 2022, *World Day Report*, ILO Geneva 2022, 62 pages, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/--protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_842505.pdf

² *International Journal of Labour Research*, ILO, 2021 / Vol. 10 / Issue 1–2, pp. 27-47.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms_806895.pdf

³ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342128040_Methodological_study_on_under-reporting_of_occupational_accidents_in_European_Union



From the ethical and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) point of view, we need to keep in mind that practically everything we have at our disposal, such as food, housing and infrastructure, schools, health providers, and social security, is produced by the workforce. The total global GDP is produced by work. The need to promote social justice and decent and safe work is also reflected in the United Nations (UN) SDGs, and not only limited to SDGs 3 (Good health and wellbeing) and 8 (Decent work and economic growth). The workforce is involved in practically all of the UN's SDGs.

“Safety and health at work is not only sound economic policy, it is a basic human right...”. (Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the UN).

Main comments on the Draft Resolution in the ILC 2020 Report VII on the inclusion of safety and health at work in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work:

1. ICOH is very pleased to refer to ILO Convention C155 and ILO Convention C187 as fundamental,
2. ICOH would strongly advise to also list ILO Convention C161 on Occupational Health Services as fundamental. In addition, all of the 30 ILO Conventions and related instruments referring to occupational safety and health should be considered as a whole for strong promotion.

Justification:

- Health risks form a major and increasing component of threats to workers' lives and wellbeing: death, disease and disability.
- Safety and health requirements and recommendations without corresponding services and follow up actions often remain a 'dead letter' when no mechanisms exist to support both workers and employers on the implementation of related measures.
- Occupational Health Services described in ILO Convention C161 could be gradually established by starting with modest and basic occupational health services initially, followed by step-wise improvements. Universal Occupational Health Coverage is an urgent requirement for the global workforce.
- The wording of the Resolution should cover all key components of safety and health at work: *protection* of those at risk, *prevention of and preparedness* for hazards and risks, and *promotion* of health and safety, and workability at all levels.

Thank you!