

Regional technical note
April 28th 2021



► **World Day for Safety
and Health at Work:
INVESTING IS PREVENTING**

Occupational safety and health is at the heart
of post-COVID-19 productive recovery and economic
reactivation

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► PREFACE

Since its establishment in 1919, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has promoted occupational safety and health (OSH) as a vital component of decent work. Nearly half of ILO Conventions and Recommendations are either wholly or partially concerned with issues related to OSH.

This priority was reaffirmed by introducing target 8.8 into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which reiterates the need to protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers. Similarly, the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, adopted in June 2019, states that "safe and healthy working conditions are fundamental to decent work". This statement is especially important now, insofar as OSH is vital in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and is a core element of the international Decent Work Agenda; therefore, OSH should be an essential component of production, reactivation, and economic recovery policies. Similarly, at the Regional Event of the Americas held on 2 July 2020, ahead of the ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work "Building a Better Future of Work", the tripartite constituents of the region reaffirmed that occupational safety and health is a priority objective and constitutes a specific task to offset the challenges of reducing the spread of the virus, preventing occupational hazards in the workplace while enabling productivity and economic activities.

Since turning into a global crisis in early 2020, the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus has had deep impacts everywhere. Equally, the pandemic has affected nearly every aspect of the world of work, from the risk of virus transmission in the workplace to the OSH risks that have emerged as a result of the measures taken to reduce the spread of the virus.

Latin America and the Caribbean are among the regions of the world most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This virus has had a direct impact on many families. As of March 2021, almost 900,000 people have died of COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean. More than 26 million workers have lost their jobs and many more are suffering in complex and unprecedented times, in which governments, businesses and workers face immeasurable challenges.

The COVID-19 health crisis has highlighted the need for tripartite constituents to reflect together to review, update and/or upgrade national standards on biological hazards in the workplace, as well as other risks associated with the pandemic, such as ergonomics and psychosocial risks including violence and workplace harassment, whose effects on people's health may continue beyond the pandemic.

On the other hand, OSH institutions do not always have the resources, methodologies, training and information necessary to perform their OSH role efficiently; national labour inspection systems also face these limitations in performing their duty of ensuring compliance with OSH standards in the workplace.

Only a few countries in the region have ratified the ILO Promotional Framework for OSH Conventions, such as Convention No. 155 concerning Occupational Safety and Health and its Protocol, Convention No. 161 concerning Occupational Health Services and Convention No. 187 concerning the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health. Moreover, their effective implementation in the countries that have ratified them is still limited.

These conventions set out the ILO's strategic approach to OSH and establish a number of obligations, among which are the need for a tripartite agreement on national policies and programmes promoting effective preventive actions in view of improving safety and health conditions and preventing occupational accidents and diseases.

The renewed role of OSH as the backbone of productivity reactivation may require the formulation, revision, and/or updating of national OSH standards in the light of technical progress and advances in scientific knowledge as well as national needs and international labour standards.

All of these actions will require social dialogue among employers' and workers' organizations and their respective governments. Hence, it will require consolidating the duties and scope of the tripartite OSH social dialogue bodies (national OSH councils or the like). Strengthening these tripartite bodies and the capacities of the respective employers' and workers' organizations will be fundamental to achieving more consistent agreements in this area.

Promoting safe and healthy conditions in the workplace is a core element of decent work and is also one of the four pillars established by the ILO since the outbreak of the pandemic to address the impact of COVID-19 in the world of work, especially among the most vulnerable sectors exposed to the disease, as are those in the informal economy, paid domestic work, and activities carried out by migrant workers, etc.

The ILO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean has adopted the promotion of OSH as a core pillar of the set of responses it is supporting to address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis.

In December 2020, the ILO Regional Office launched the Regional Initiative on Occupational Safety and Health. It aims to position OSH as the axis of the policies directed to productive reactivation and economic recovery post-COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean, providing timely and quality response to the demands of the tripartite constituents in this area.

Therefore, the ILO, through its Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, presents this paper with the aim of both contributing to the prevention and mitigation of the risk of COVID-19 contagion and strengthening national occupational safety and health systems.

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►► The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of social dialogue, not only in responding to crises, but also in preventing and promoting good occupational safety and health (OSH) conditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of social dialogue, not only in responding to crises, but also in preventing and promoting good occupational safety and health (OSH) conditions. Effective social dialogue between governments, employers' and workers' organizations is in fact essential to promote social justice, inclusive economic growth, improved working conditions and sustainable enterprises.

Having a sound and resilient OSH system in place is crucial for countries to build their capacity to face future emergencies and the challenges they bring. Protecting workers' safety and health, while supporting the survival and business continuity of enterprises, is key to the productive revival and economic recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.

► Context/Situation

The COVID-19 pandemic poses huge OSH challenges to the ILO tripartite constituents in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), particularly to the most effective measures for protecting workers in the workplace, especially those performing essential work during the health restrictions.

In this regard, health workers and workers in certain supply chains linked to essential goods and services have continued to work in their workplaces, further exposing themselves and facing higher demands.

On the other hand, as restrictions have been lifted in some countries, governments, employers, and workers have understood that the reactivation of production and economic recovery will depend greatly on fully complying with prevention and protection measures against this biological hazard in order to avoid new infections and outbreaks that could jeopardize recovery strategies. Cooperation between employers and workers in risk management, particularly through bipartite social dialogue in enterprises or collective bargaining, and the building of strengthened and resilient national OSH systems to meet the new and growing challenges of occupational risk prevention, will be crucial to achieve sustainable results.

In addition to the COVID-19 virus (SARS-CoV-2), this health crisis is causing serious mental health problems in the world of work. Depression due to social isolation, stress due to work overload, fear of job loss, fear of contagion, work-life balance challenges and emotional exhaustion, among other factors, may cause mental health repercussions that could last well beyond the pandemic. This is why preventive measures undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic should consider psychosocial risks, including violence and harassment.

Although some countries have recognized the occupational nature of COVID-19 for health workers, occupational contingency insurance systems do not always guarantee health and economic benefits, particularly in cases where the worker is unable to prove the infection is linked to occupational causes. In this context, national epidemiological surveillance surveys and national occupational diseases reporting systems are particularly relevant.

The situation is particularly worrying for informal workers, such as delivery workers and domestic workers whose informal status deprives them from having access to preventive measures against



Facts about OSH

- The odds of COVID-19 transmission in enclosed working environments are **18.7-fold higher** than in outdoor working environments (Nishiura et al., 2020).
- In a survey on teleworking, **65 per cent of enterprises** reported that worker morale has been difficult to sustain while teleworking (ILO, 2020a).
- Currently, nearly **136 million health workers** could be at high risk of being infected with COVID-19 at the workplace (ILO, 2020b).
- **14 per cent of the COVID-19 cases reported globally** are health workers (WHO, 2020).
- Globally, **1 in 5 health workers** reported experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety during the pandemic (Pappa, S., et al., 2020).

Moreover



- Until April 13, 2021, 136,115,434 confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported globally, including 2,936,916 deaths. 43% of cases and 48% of deaths were reported in the Americas region.
- In the first quarter of 2021, the North and South American subregions contributed the highest proportion of cases and deaths, contributing 59% and 60% and 39% and 38%, respectively.

- As of April 13, 2021, Aruba, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, the United States of America, French Guyana, Panama, Saint Martin and Suriname have detected the three variants of concern.
- With regard to health workers, in the Americas region 20 countries reported 1,773,169 cases, including 8,655 deaths.
- It is important to consider that vaccination against COVID-19 is part of the measures to contain the pandemic, but that without public health and social distancing measures, it does not by itself reduce the transmission of SARS-CoV-2.

Source: Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization. Epidemiological update: Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). April 14, 2021, Washington, D.C. : PAHO / WHO; 2021 Pan American Health Organization • www.paho.org • © PAHO / WHO, 2021, Available at: <https://www.paho.org/es/documentos/actualizacion-epidemiologica-enfermedad-por-coronavirus-covid-19-14-Abril-2021>

►► In addition to their already precarious working and living conditions, many migrant workers have limited access to health care and sanitation services, and hence are more vulnerable to job and income losses.



the virus and health and economic benefits in the event of infection. It is also important to note that the economic and labour crisis experienced by Latin America and the Caribbean in the context of COVID-19 has affected all workers in the region. It is also important to consider that migrants and their families, especially those with irregular immigration status and/or engaged in informal work, face additional challenges.

In addition to their already precarious working and living conditions, many migrant workers have limited access to health care and sanitation services, and hence are more vulnerable to job and income losses. This vulnerability, coupled with lack of adequate information about their rights and prevention measures, creates "greater risks of abuse and exploitation", notes the technical note "**The Impact of COVID-19 on Labour Migration and Mobility in the World of Work in Latin America and the Caribbean**", published as part of the ILO Regional Office's Labour Overview series.

The working conditions of domestic workers are also of concern. Domestic work is usually part of the informal economy, in which employment or social security data are not recorded. As a result, occupational risks are often underestimated, and under-reporting of occupational accidents and diseases is endemic in the region.

Paid domestic work takes place in private spaces that are difficult to monitor and to which the OSH administration - even in countries that have made progress in formalizing paid domestic work - have limited access. In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about additional and often paradoxical challenges. Living in the confined domestic environment may pose an additional risk of contagion. For the same reason, cases of involuntary unemployment in this sector were not uncommon, adding to the difficulties that domestic workers often experience.

Agricultural workers face similar circumstances because they are engaged in essential activities and, in most cases, continue to work without adequate working conditions. Many of these workers are also in the informal economy and lack a social protection floor to cope with the crisis brought on by the pandemic.

On the other hand, the expansion of teleworking as an alternative to the physical presence of workers in the workplace poses additional challenges to the prevention of occupational risks, even though this activity is related to higher skilled activities. The potentially unsuitable ergonomic conditions in which telework is performed at home are usually associated with increased musculoskeletal disorders. The lack of control over the length of the working day and the worker's state of constant alertness to computer notifications can also cause work-related stress and other psychological disorders. Balancing work and family life with teleworking, especially for women, is another major challenge, which has increased significantly in times of COVID-19.

The ILO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, together with other specialized international agencies, is supporting the development and application of vaccines to prevent and immunize all people against COVID-19. Large-scale and progressive immunization of people can enable productive reactivation and economic recovery ensuring health and safety at the workplace. OSH should be prioritized as a preventive measure. However, many low- and middle-income developing countries cannot afford to buy enough vaccines and so will need financial support to implement vaccination and other policy measures. In this context, new guidelines will have to be drafted in order to prioritize priority groups that may return to work in person to the workplace.

► For more information
visit the links



All these challenges place OSH again as the key component in preventing occupational diseases. The renewed interest in OSH by tripartite constituents was expressly stated at the Regional Event of the Americas on 2 July 2020, ahead of the **ILO Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work - Building a better future of work.**

The enormous challenges facing OSH in the context of the pandemic are, in turn, an opportunity to uphold this renewed interest in OSH as a priority on labour agendas beyond the pandemic. This is why the ILO Global Strategy on OSH should be considered among the working priorities of tripartite actors to formulate, approve, implement, and review national OSH policies and programmes so that their contents may well extend beyond the effects of the pandemic.

► ILO Ongoing Actions

Regional Actions

The ILO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean has adopted the promotion of OSH as a core pillar of the set of responses it is supporting to address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis.

In December 2020, the Office launched the Regional Initiative on Occupational Safety and Health that aims to position OSH as the axis of the policies directed to productive reactivation and economic recovery post-COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean, providing timely and quality response to the demands of the tripartite constituents in this area. The Initiative has three components which encompass a number of activities that will be promoted throughout 2021:

1. Promoting social dialogue on the ILO normative framework, as well as improving and updating national legislation, and strengthening institutional capacity and social dialogue on OSH;
2. Developing, disseminating, and providing constituents with workplace preventive management tools;
3. Stimulating communication, research and partnerships aimed at strengthening OSH at the regional level.

The reactivation of the Latin American and Caribbean Occupational Health and Safety Network is one of the main objectives of the Initiative. By structuring this community of practice, the region's constituents will be able to exchange national occupational risk prevention practices and support the strengthening of their national occupational safety and health systems more easily and quickly.

At the regional level, on 28 April 2020, on the occasion of World Day for Safety and Health at Work, several tripartite events were organized both nationally and virtually for Latin America and the Caribbean, respectively, with the participation of government and employers' and workers' organizations representatives. The report "**In the face of a pandemic: Ensuring Safety and Health at Work**" was disseminated at such time. In turn, the "**Virtual Dialogue Roundtable: Occupational safety and health**

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in the face of the pandemic in Latin America" prompted reflections at regional level on the key role of occupational safety and health in addressing the health, social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. The dialogue also sought to discuss solutions for the reactivation of production and economic recovery, with the participation of various experts on the subject, as well as some of the ILO's constituents in the region.

In May 2020, the ILO made available "**A 10-step tool for a safe and healthy return to work in times of COVID-19**" to LAC which provides general guidelines on formulating safety and health protocols to address COVID-19, at national, sectoral or company levels. The tool is based on social dialogue and preventive risk management principles, and has been disseminated at various regional and national events attended by tripartite representatives. It has been adapted by the ILO headquarters to prepare the global product "**Safe Return to Work: Ten Action Points**".

The joint ECLAC-ILO Report No. 22 (May 2020) "**Employment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Employment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Work in times of pandemic: the challenges of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)**" included OSH content, placing this issue at the centre of productive reactivation policies. Similarly, the ILO Regional Outlook "**Impact of Teleworking during the Pandemic**" highlighted the consequences of teleworking for workers' health.

Finally, in the context of the Regional Initiative and the World Day for Safety and Health at Work - Safe Day 2021, efforts will be placed on the growing awareness-raising and sensitization processes among government authorities, employers' organizations and workers' organizations on the importance of occupational risks prevention and control measures. Particular attention will be placed on those measures associated with the pandemic, and the strategies for productive reactivation and economic recovery.

National Level

In **Costa Rica**, the tripartite Occupational Health Council approved the "**Practical Guidance on Occupational Health and Safety for the Prevention and Mitigation of COVID-19 in the Workplace**", developed by the ILO. The Guidance has been disseminated throughout the country through a campaign launched by the Council in 2020.



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Based on the Guidance, the Office prepared **Guidance for Migrants and Refugees in Costa Rica**, as well as a sectoral **Guidance for Fisherwomen in the Caribbean areas of the country**.

The Office also supported the development of institutional protocols in the **Joint Institute for Social Assistance** (*Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social, IMAS*) and the **Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock**. **These two protocols allow direct assistance to small and medium producers in remote and vulnerable rural areas.**

In addition, with the Occupational Health Council, the ILO is implementing the "Project to promote safe and healthy workplaces to protect workers' health in times of pandemic". This project supports the creation of an information, training and advisory services platform on COVID-19 protocols; the implementation of the "Safe and Healthy Companies" seal; the establishment of a programme to develop the capacity of companies and workers to comply with protocols; and the creation of a training programme for trainers.

In **Paraguay**, the ILO prepared a proposal with seven "**Sectoral Framework Protocols on Safety and Health at Work in the face of COVID-19 pandemic**". This proposal was validated by the Tripartite Labour Council and disseminated by the authorities.

In **Chile**, the government approved a "**Step by Step Labour Plan**", following **ILO's 10-step tool as a benchmark**.

In **Honduras**, two COVID-19 guidance were developed in collaboration with the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise (COHEP). The first, "**Practical Guide to COVID-19 Prevention and Mitigation in Agriculture in Honduras**" (*Guía práctica de prevención y mitigación de la COVID-19 en la agricultura en Honduras*) and the second "**Practical Guide to COVID-19 Prevention and Mitigation in the Coffee Value Chain in Honduras**" (*Guía práctica de prevención y mitigación de la COVID-19 en la cadena de valor del café en Honduras*). The ILO also developed two OSH policy manuals for the agricultural sector: one for **trainers** and another one for **producers**.

In **Mexico**, the "Practical Guide for the Prevention and Mitigation of COVID-19 in Agriculture" and the "**COVID-19: Guidance for Occupational Health and Safety for Employers and Domestic Workers**" were developed. The ILO is adapting these tools to turn them into a global product.

In addition, five "**Protocols on Occupational Health and Safety in the coffee value chain, emphasising on COVID-19 prevention and mitigation**" were developed with the National OSH Consultative Commission. These protocols encompass all of the links in the coffee chain, from primary production to sale in coffee shops. The ILO "**Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development**" (WIND) methodology was also adapted and updated, including a section on biohazards due to the effects of the

pandemic and a new **WIND trainer's manual**. This methodology is applied as a public policy training in the agricultural sector in Mexico (it has also been transferred to Honduras). In addition, in coordination with the Mexican Social Security Institute, two OSH policy manuals were developed for the agricultural sector, one for **trainers** and one for **producers**.

In **Brazil**, the ILO supported the development of an online occupational health and safety self-assessment tool for the construction and meat packaging sectors.

In **Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru**, materials for COVID-19 awareness campaigns were developed, including a radio soap opera in Colombia¹, and a campaign placing special emphasis on health workers in Brazil.

In **Chile**, manuals were published, and train-the-trainer courses were organized to strengthen the role of joint safety and health committees in ports and the public sector, including content on COVID-19. **Brazil** also organized training workshops for these committees.

In **Colombia**, Guidelines for COVID-19 Prevention in the oil palm, sugar cane, banana and flower sectors were developed, as well as a Methodology to identify hazards, evaluate and assess occupational health and safety risks in the coffee sector.

Regional virtual OSH training activities with tripartite representatives were held in **Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru**.

Training of trainers on health and safety has been organized with employers' organizations in **Brazil** and in the **Caribbean** countries. In **Uruguay** and **Paraguay**, labour inspectors received training courses on workplace biological hazards, including COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2); and in **Paraguay** the training included other hazards associated with the pandemic (ergonomic and psychosocial).

In **Argentina** and **Chile**, the ILO promoted the recognition of teleworkers' 'right to disconnect' in new legislation on teleworking in order to safeguard teleworkers' mental health. The **Dominican Republic's** law also recognizes labour rights related to health and safety.

In **Uruguay**, support is provided to the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health in the tripartite formulation of the first National OSH Policy. In **Paraguay**, support is provided to establish a new National Council for the Prevention of Occupational Hazards. In **Honduras**, support is being provided for the reactivation of the National Commission for Workers' Health of Honduras (CONASATH).

In **Barbados**, support is provided to the Ministry of Labour and Social Partnership Relations (MLSP) and the National Training Institute (NTI) to implement a **pilot project to increase employability** of people who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

Ongoing support is provided to **Dominica** to develop OSH emergency preparedness and response plans.

With employers' organizations, the ILO through the Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) has been carrying out a number of activities at the national level.

The ACT/EMP Employers' Guides on managing your workplace, working from home, and safe return to work were adapted to national legislation in the **Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, Panama, and Guatemala**. In **Mexico** and **Guatemala**, summaries of these guides were included as a "COVID-19" module in the Guides for Enterprise Diagnostics of both **Guatemala** and **Mexico**.

In **Guatemala**, the ACT/EMP employers' guides served as the basis to draft the official regulations of the agricultural sector. In addition, support was provided to draft a guide on COVID-19 management for the **Chamber of Industries of Guatemala (CIG)**, and a **resource portal** that includes an online self-diagnosis

¹ All chapters of the radio soap opera are available at: https://www.ilo.org/lima/sala-de-prensa/WCMS_758458/lang--es/index.htm



Regional virtual OSH training activities with tripartite representatives were held in **Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru.**

for companies to assess their compliance with official protocols. Support was also given to the Chamber of Commerce of Guatemala to develop tools to be published online.

A **virtual portal** with similar resources was developed in **Panama** for the National Council of Private Enterprise CONEP, which also includes an online self-assessment on COVID-19 measures and a series of **Advisory Services on Occupational Safety and Health.**

In **Honduras**, a general COVID-19 Guidance for employers was adapted with the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise (COHEP), which in turn was adapted for the maquila sector with the Honduran Maquila Association (AHM) and the commerce sector with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tegucigalpa (CCIT). In the case of the maquila sector, the AuditGestorSSO programme was designed. This programme allows companies to run an online self-assessment and subsequently receive advice on how to comply with biosafety protocols. A communication campaign will be launched in April to ensure that the four markets in the capital comply with the official biosafety protocol.

In **Nicaragua**, the **Practical guide for the prevention and mitigation of COVID 19 in agriculture** was adapted to national regulations. In **El Salvador**, a virtual resource centre on COVID-19 was developed for the National Association of Private Enterprise (ANEP), and a self-guided course for the Chamber of Commerce of El Salvador.

In **Mexico**, together with the Jalisco Labour Department and the Jalisco Council of Industrial Chambers (CCIJ), the Good Business Practices Seal (*Distintivo de Buenas Prácticas Empresariales*) programme is underway. As part of this programme, enterprises voluntarily agree to run the OSH and COVID-19 self-assessment prepared by ILO ACT/EMP. Then they receive advice from the Department's Inspection Office and are awarded the Seal.

In the **Dominican Republic**, the ACT/EMP Employers' Guides were adapted into a single Guide on Safe Return to Work in accordance with national legislation.

Similarly, the ILO, through the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), has been carrying out a number of activities at the national level with workers' organizations.

In **Honduras** and **El Salvador**, a comprehensive guidance on occupational health is being drawn up for trade union delegates; it includes a comprehensive chapter on prevention and mitigation of COVID-19.

In **Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica**, and the **Dominican Republic**, a sub-regional programme was carried out jointly with the Unitary Union Council of Central America and the Caribbean (CSU) between July and September 2020 for the national trade union centres. The programme aimed to improve the defence strategy of migrant workers' fundamental rights and occupational health and related trade union services, as well as to improve trade union action on the transition to formality with a view to a safe return to work.

► CORE STANDARDS ON OSH

- The Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 164), call for the adoption of a coherent national OSH policy, as well as action to be taken by governments and within enterprises to promote OSH and to improve working conditions. The Protocol of 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 supplements the Convention, incorporating further requirements for the recording and notification of occupational accidents and diseases, as well as for the publication of OSH-related annual statistics.
- The Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161), provides for the establishment of occupational health services, which are entrusted with essentially preventive functions and are responsible for advising the employer, the workers, and their representatives in the enterprise on ways to maintain a safe and healthy working environment.
- The Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 197) provide for the coherent and systematic treatment of OSH issues and the recognition of existing OSH Conventions. The Convention is aimed at establishing and implementing coherent national OSH policies and promoting a national preventive safety and health culture through the establishment of a national OSH system.

► The key role of International Labour Standards relevant to the COVID-19 crisis

International Labour Standards contain specific guidance for safeguarding decent work in the context of crisis response, including guidance that can be of direct relevance to the evolving COVID-19 outbreak or other public health emergencies.

Currently, there are more than 40 normative instruments specifically dealing with OSH, providing for minimum standards aimed at the control and management of work-related risks and the protection of workers across a wide range of occupations and work situations in which work takes place. In addition, nearly half of the ILO instruments deal directly or indirectly with OSH issues, and their guidance extends to the specific situation of certain categories of workers, such as nurses, domestic workers, migrant workers, and seafarers, who are particularly vulnerable in the current context.

In addition, the current crisis has highlighted the need for discussion on future instruments to address biological hazards.

► Investment in OSH, both programmatically and financially, contributes to a strong OSH system at the national level - a system that is prepared to respond to similar crises that may arise in the future, as well as to situations caused by major industrial accidents, natural disasters, and other unforeseen challenges.

► Strengthening National OSH Systems

Crises such as COVID-19, which occur without warning, test the capability and resilience of public health and OSH systems.

Investment in OSH, both programmatically and financially, contributes to a strong OSH system at the national level - a system that is prepared to respond to similar crises that may arise in the future, as well as to situations caused by major industrial accidents, natural disasters, and other unforeseen challenges.

The key elements of a national OSH system can be grouped into six main areas (for the purpose of this report):

1. **National OSH policy and regulatory frameworks;**
2. **National OSH institutional frameworks;**
3. **Occupational health services;**
4. **Information, advisory services, and training on OSH;**
5. **Data collection and research on OSH;**
6. **Mechanisms for strengthening OSH management systems at the enterprise level to prevent and respond to OSH risks.**

►► Acknowledging that robust national OSH systems are key to safeguarding lives and livelihoods, it is vital to ensure that they are well-resourced to better absorb the impacts of any challenges head on, and to bolster public and private institutions.

In addition to these components, it is of the utmost importance to promote cooperation between company management, workers, and their representatives as an essential element of workplace-related prevention measures. Collaboration should address various aspects and include, where appropriate, the structuring of a joint committee composed of company and workers' representatives.

Acknowledging that robust national OSH systems are key to safeguarding lives and livelihoods, it is vital to ensure that they are well-resourced to better absorb the impacts of any challenges head on, and to bolster public and private institutions. Investing in these systems is therefore not only necessary to guarantee that they can respond appropriately to crises, but more importantly, that they can prepare for and mitigate such crises.

► **Box 1.** Main documents developed by the ILO to address OSH challenges in the context of the COVID-19 crisis

- The “**Guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems ILO-OSH 2001**” provides a list of a several guidelines developed by ILO tripartite constituents to manage properly occupational safety and health risks in the workplace.
- The guidance note “**Safe Return to Work: Ten Action Points**”, provides guidance to employers, workers, and their representatives on preventive measures for a safe return to work in the context of COVID-19, conforming to well established ILO principles and methods on occupational safety and health risk management.
- The guidance note “**A safe and healthy return to work during the COVID-19 pandemic**” aims at supporting constituents in drafting national policy guidelines for a gradual and safe return to work It also provides guidelines for workplace hazard assessment and the implementation of recognised hierarchy of prevention and protection control measures.

- The guidance note “**Safe Return to Work: Safe return to work: Guide for employers on COVID-19 prevention**” provides general guidance and information to employers on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.
- The “**COVID-19 Prevention and Mitigation at Work**” checklist offers a simple and collaborative approach to assess COVID-19 risks as a step to take measures to protect the safety and health of workers.
- The **FAQ - Key provisions of international labour standards relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic contains a compilation of answers to most frequently asked questions related to international labour standards and COVID-19.**
- ILO report “**In the face of a pandemic: Ensuring Safety and Health at Work**” highlights the OSH risks arising from the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace and suggests measures to prevent and control the risk of contagion, psychosocial risks, ergonomic and other OSH risks associated with the pandemic.
- The ILO guide “**Managing work-related psychosocial risks during the COVID-19 pandemic**” provides employers and managers, in consultation with workers and their representatives, with key elements to consider when assessing psychosocial risks and implementing preventive measures to protect the health and well-being of workers in the context of the pandemic.
- ILO **Technical and Ethical Guidelines for Workers' Health Surveillance** (1998) serve as a support tool to assist all those who have responsibilities to design, implement, operation, and manage workers' health surveillance schemes.

► **Box 2.** Key documents developed by the ILO to address OSH challenges in the context of the COVID-19 crisis

- **A 10 step tool for a safe and healthy return to work in times of COVID-19** provides a course of action to formulate and apply safety and health protocols, at sectoral and/or company level. It considers bipartite social dialogue between employers and workers as the basis for a safe and healthy return to work.
- The **Practical guide for the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 in agriculture** aims to provide practical guidance for the prevention and mitigation of coronavirus transmission (COVID-19) in agricultural activities. These recommendations should be considered as a complement to any rules, regulations or directives issued by each country, bearing in mind their occupational safety and health social protection coverage.
- The document **Safe and Healthy Working Environments: A guide for Employers and Business Membership Organizations on OSH advocacy and services** is , managing health and safety at work is however not only a question of legal compliance or avoiding losses linked to accidents at work. Good OSH performance can improve workers motivation and productivity, reduce absenteeism, help businesses attract talent, and secure public and private sectors contracts.
- The document **Improving OSH in the coffee supply chain. Emphases on COVID-19 prevention and mitigation in Mexico** is set out in five protocols related to occupational safety and health and prevention and mitigation measures to address COVID-19, in five different links of the coffee value chain.
- The **Practical guide for preventing and mitigating COVID-19 in the coffee value chain in Honduras** provides recommendations for coffee farms, roasters, cooperatives, marketing and exporting companies to provide practical guidance for the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) transmission in the different activities and tasks of coffee farms, roasters and cooperatives, marketing and exporting companies in Honduras.
- The **Practical Guide for the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 in agriculture in Honduras** contains targeted recommendations for medium and large agricultural enterprises to provide practical guidance for the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) transmission in the different agricultural activities and tasks in Honduras.



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