



## **The ILO Knowledge for Prevention Initiative: A Proposal for Discussion**

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### **Introduction**

1. This document introduces a new ILO proposal for promoting and supporting international networking in occupational safety and health. It builds on the past experience and traditions of CIS as well as on the outcomes of strategic discussions on possible future orientations, products and services, notably since discussions held in Orlando (2005), London (2008 & 2010), and Geneva (2011 & 2012) during which numerous institutions discussed the role of the ILO in global knowledge management in OSH. The main ideas in the current proposal were introduced during the 50<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CIS network.
2. The proposal highlights some of the challenges in relation to OSH knowledge and information around the world, and brings attention on the role the network of CIS Centres is called to play in enhancing access to quality knowledge and information for the purpose of prevention. It points to the necessity for the network to reassert its true purpose by defining its work programme, and adopting a new structure and governance modalities for its effective implementation. Strategic objectives are proposed and indications of possible outputs to serve the purpose of the network are provided. The document concludes by suggesting a possible way forward in terms of practical steps for making the CIS network a collective undertaking for prevention worldwide.

### **Key challenges**

3. This section outlines the main challenges for developing the CIS network of OSH agencies, institutions and organisations into a collective undertaking capable of mobilizing knowledge capacities to protect life at work globally, and become the key partner of the ILO in improving safety and health at work. In view of the recent policy portfolio reform at the ILO and its direct impact on the CIS, time has come to revisit the functioning of the network by taking due account of the past achievements and traditions, and taking into proper consideration the current and foreseen needs of the ILO constituents in the context of scientific development worldwide, rapid progress in information and communication technology (ICT), and changing institutional relations in the multi-faceted world of safety and health at work. The key challenges are presented in details in the following paragraphs.

#### *Adopting a need-based programme of activities*

4. The profound on-going changes happening across the world are altogether impacting on the way people access and use information, learn and communicate. Attention should be given to the network members' needs in defining a joint work programme. Adopting a need-based approach requires understanding who the end beneficiaries are, what are their needs for OSH knowledge and information, and how they can effectively mobilize and make use of available knowledge in taking due account of their context. It is useful to remind that the type and perception of risks differ from a context to another, and thus the needs vary between contexts and countries. Thus, while risks associated to nanotechnology are considered new and emerging in Europe and North America, they are absent or unapparent in low and middle income countries (LMI) where working at height in construction actually brings new and emerging risks needing their priority attention, for example.

5. A significant aspect of networking OSH knowledge and information is about technological support systems and the professional capacity to manage it. These aspects have to be fully incorporated in the work programme and functioning modalities of the network as they define the scope of possibilities for innovative development. Managing technology strategically will become critical in view of the increasingly fast evolution in ICT and the rapid expansion of mobile technology, the penetration of smart phones in the worldwide market, and the increased production of applications for content development and distribution. This challenge is underlined with the belief that technology should be based upon and serve OSH knowledge-sharing, rather than the other way around. Technology should be affordable, easy to use and maintain, and allow access to information to the largest number of potential users.

#### *Identifying and mobilizing expertise*

6. Policy makers and institutions largely depend on experts for achieving their mandate. Action needs to be taken towards identifying, locating, documenting and mobilizing this expertise to engage in the finest level of analytical, publishing and advisory work to achieve worldwide improvement in safety and health at work. Contributions are sought from experts of various disciplines, directly and through intermediaries' knowledge related institutions such as institutes, research centres, universities, NGOs and others from all type of countries on all continents, languages and cultures. A key challenge around the world consists of identifying and mobilizing this expertise as there exist no comprehensive international roster of expertise (academics, researchers, qualified professionals, government officials, others) in the field of safety and health.
7. The network could facilitate the identification and mobilization of experts as part of a future work programme. Easy and practical steps could be taken to develop and feed such a roster. Partnership with existing social media and network platform (e.g. ResearchGate, LinkedIn, others) could be explored.

#### *Preparing a generation of OSH practitioners and specialists in LMI countries*

8. The world needs a critical mass of OSH practitioners and specialists. While investing in developing national OSH systems and programmes, it is paramount to also invest in people making the OSH systems work through supporting knowledge development at country level as a priority area of action. This is particularly true for LMI countries that are facing tremendous challenges in establishing basic institutional capacity to prevent work-related injuries and diseases. Their regulatory framework is often incomplete and enforcement means are often missing. Development in OSH knowledge is generally relegated to lower ranking priorities, if a priority at all, as competing urgencies call for the bulk of the resources. Thus, looking at OSH knowledge and information beyond the establishment of documentation centres could become a priority focus for the network.
9. Quite a number of LMI countries urgently need an influx of OSH knowledge and better access to information through the mobilization of research capacities and the establishment of education and training programs. This appears as a clear condition for the emergence of a critical mass of qualified individuals to work as OSH practitioners in a vast diversity of capacities, sectors and contexts. LMI countries count an insufficient number of qualified individuals in safety and health at work, and this is related to the fact that most universities, technical colleges and training institutes in those countries usually lack a dedicated programme to provide the right set of skills and knowledge to tackle risks where it is most needed, in particular in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME), and in the informal economy, in addition to preparing OSH practitioners for the structured labour market. The support the ILO and the international OSH community can bring in OSH research, education and training is critical to them.

### *Foster collaboration in OSH knowledge at country level*

10. It is internationally well-understood that OSH knowledge and information are among the key pillars for developing and supporting prevention. A key role for the ILO in OSH consists of promoting and supporting the establishment of sustainable capacities at country level to acquire, develop and make use of OSH knowledge and information for successful preventive action in workplaces.
11. Despite all efforts deployed, OSH knowledge remains largely inadequate or inaccessible beyond narrow circles of individuals in a great number of countries. Experience reveals that in many countries OSH knowledge and information is the mandate of a single institute or division of a ministry often working in isolation with limited resources and little or no interaction with ILO constituents and other interested stakeholders.
12. While it is well understood that CIS Centres play a key role in knowledge sharing in their respective country, more effort is needed to foster dialogue, collaboration and cooperation. From a global perspective, the traditional network of CIS Centres would benefit from evolving towards supporting country-level initiatives that aim at bringing together OSH knowledge stakeholders in an inclusive approach. Key stakeholders include, but are not limited to, government, labour inspection services and public agencies, employers' and workers' organisations, universities, research institutes, education and training institutions, professional associations, OSH advisory service providers, and possibly others. In many countries they could work more collaboratively to strengthen their national OSH system and its governance, establish work programmes and risk-based action plans, and together build sustainable capacities for their effective implementation. Their collective knowledge and strengths are essential for leveraging societal commitment and capacity to tackle risks at work as an essential socio-economic development imperative, and respect of a fundamental human right.

### *Strengthening institutional capacities in OSH knowledge management*

13. Strengthening the capacities of institutions active in OSH knowledge and information appears as a condition for prevention initiatives to materialize and provide tangible results in many countries. For example, an increased number of ILO Member States could benefit from establishing educational and training programmes that are specifically designed to provide labour inspectors with the necessary set of skills and technical knowledge on risks in support to their enforcement and advisory roles for prevention. Network constituents could join efforts to support country-level OSH knowledge development for a wide range of potential beneficiaries. This could be achieved through the design, funding and implementation of a network supported ILO technical cooperation programme taking proper account of country similarities in terms of OSH system development needs, hazards, industrial development level, language and culture.
14. Regions or countries with an important knowledge deficit on the fundamentals of OSH would be supported as a matter of priority. For the less developed countries in dire needs for basic knowledge in OSH, the network could lead the establishment of *OSH knowledge transfer task forces* (peer-support) on specific challenges such as for the re-construction work in Haiti; or for setting the foundations of OSH in South Sudan for example.
15. Some OSH institutions are already engaged in bilateral capacity-building initiatives. A global technical cooperation programme would complement existing cooperation agreements and practices, and would allow for bringing in new partner institutions. There already exist opportunities for funding international cooperation in OSH knowledge development, e.g. programmes like EU-TEMPUS aiming at supporting international knowledge sharing between universities from EU countries and universities from a selection of beneficiary countries. It is

understood that mobilizing donors' attention and funds involves developing a sound technical programme proposal first, and some great ability to solicit support for it. In order to facilitate access to funds, the ILO could eventually undertake steps for having the value of international knowledge and information transfers between countries being taken into account when calculating official development assistance (ODA) figures.

### **Modernizing the CIS network functioning modalities**

16. The CIS was established by the ILO Governing Body as a secretariat to support a collaborative effort led by a group of 11 national European institutions wishing to share information and documents in the field of OSH as a means to avoid duplicating efforts, and extending outreach to the world. With time the network expanded to more than one hundred countries and welcomed a great diversity of organizations from various regions of the world, each having different mandates, roles, functions, governance modalities, and means. Still today various stakeholders show a strong interest in joining the network. Centres have varying levels of technical capacity and organisational means; they also demonstrate varying levels of commitment to lead OSH knowledge and information development in their country.
17. Facts on participation in CIS meetings reveal that year after year participation varied between 20 and 40% of those registered, coming in average from about 1/5 of all ILO Member States. Some Centres have continuously participated in annual CIS meetings at their expenses and demonstrate the highest level of sustained commitment to international collaboration. Despite their enthusiasm and support, overall scepticism on the utility of participating in annual CIS meetings has grown steadily as discussions on revitalization and future development of the CIS have repeatedly failed to materialize.
18. Alongside contact was lost with about half of the Centres listed in the current registry. This is linked to the steadily decreasing level of resources available to the CIS in the past 15 years with corresponding loss of capacity to interact with the Centres, and to the lack of practical means of a number of Centres, notably in LMI countries often lacking the minimal equipment needed to communicate effectively.
19. The assumption and requirement dating from 1959 that Centres are in effect monitoring scientific development in OSH and mobilizing efforts at country level, and relaying this information to the ILO CIS Secretariat for its dissemination around the world seem nowadays to be valid for only a handful of centres around the world. This situation eventually led to the decision made in 2012 to discontinue the production of the bibliographic referencing product (CISDOC-Text), thus bringing to an end the subscription scheme at the heart of the original CIS networking model. That decision was necessary as most of the relevant documents are now available for download from the internet directly from OSH institutions, publishers and authors, or from specialized services and knowledge sharing platforms for a minimum charge or without any fee.
20. In light of the above, one must admit that the original binary networking model (ILO CIS – CIS Centre) does not match the current needs like a “case of round peg and square hole”. Today most OSH institutions from advanced economy countries, and to some extent from LMI countries, interact, share information, and collaborate without needing or informing the ILO, while the less developed countries largely depend on the institution for interacting one with the others. In other words, the current functioning modalities no longer provide the expected results.

### *New organizing principles for a dynamic OSH network*

21. The main purpose of an ILO supported network in OSH is to provide a basis for international collaboration among OSH agencies, institutions and organizations. This requires motivation

of the network members themselves to collaborate and exchange knowledge and information as part of implementing a network programme of activities that remains relevant and suits the changing needs of its members. From there suitable networking arrangements are needed to implement that programme of activities.

22. The network needs to be flexible enough to allow relevant organizations with varying capabilities to participate, and ensure broad and adequate representation and involvement of all types of OSH knowledge related agencies, institutions and organizations. They have different needs and expectations, and the networking arrangements should offer the possibility to gain knowledge and capacity to make use of it regardless of their type and level of development. An international network in OSH should also encompass the possibility of, and encourage, the development of purpose-oriented sub-networks.
23. New network governance arrangements in which the ILO only plays the role of “network facilitator” are needed. Arrangements should comprise a well-constituted and functioning network steering committee guided by the sole interest of promoting and supporting international collaboration and technical cooperation in OSH. Self-governance of the network should be aimed for as a development goal.

#### *Revisiting the network constitution and structure*

24. The existing CIS network is constituted of a number of CIS National Centres (NC) and CIS Collaborating Centres (CC) distinguished on the basis of a Nation-State approach under which there can be only one NC in a country but there could be many CC. This distinction worked out well for a majority of countries but has sometimes caused difficulties in others where CC were more active in their role in OSH knowledge management than the officially recognized NC. The original networking model designates NC as focal point for the ILO at country level. The status becomes a bone of contention when little collaboration exists at country level between centres, and when their leaders perceive themselves being in competition for international recognition and related benefits, if any. At times the difference in status carries the idea of subordination of CC to NC, and becomes a hindrance to collaboration.
25. Interacting with agencies, institutions and organizations active in OSH knowledge could be made easier by revisiting the distinctive status to rather simply designate all centres as “Members of the Network” or “Collaborating Centres” as collaboration underpins the very purpose of joining the network. This could facilitate joining the network while simultaneously allowing segmentation of the membership base, and further development and adaptation of OSH knowledge and information packages that meet the specific needs of the various segments notably in relation to research, education, and training and information services, just to mention a few.
26. Segmentation of a renewed network base could be done according to some categories of OSH knowledge stakeholders:
  - a) *Public Institutions (e.g. Ministries, Labour inspectorates, Social Security organisations, OSH agencies);*
  - b) *Academia (e.g. Research Institutes, Universities, TVET Centres, Research groups, Chairs);*
  - c) *Employers’ and workers’ organisations*
  - d) *Other Professional Associations such as ASSE, IALI, IOSH, NGOs.*
27. There is no doubt that the value of the CIS network can be found in its global span and in the diversity of its membership. However, its diversity makes it difficult to respond to the variety of demands of its members. Organizing this diversity and building on it to strengthen its

global scale can prove beneficial. Nonetheless the members of the network from the various segments shall continue working together towards preventing injuries to health globally.

28. A symbolic recognition to acknowledge the sustained contribution to international OSH knowledge and information related initiatives over recent years could potentially be granted to agencies, institutions and organizations in the various segments. It could take the form of an award to be handed during the World Congress in OSH for example.

#### *Getting closer to realities and needs*

29. Reviewing the constitution and structure of the network should facilitate the emergence of technical working groups that gather institutions working on priority technical subject-matters such as musculoskeletal disorders, prevention in the informal economy, SMEs, nanotechnologies, work-related stress, others. Understandably any such initiative would need to focus on a limited number of priority topics with the aim of responding to needs and demands that are well understood and documented, taking language into account.

#### **Setting strategic objectives**

30. The description made of the current situation and challenges calls for engaging an in-depth discussion on what the work programme of a renewed international network could be, and how the network could be organized and governed for its effective implementation. The strategy proposed to bring the CIS network in the future is tentatively titled the *Knowledge for Prevention Initiative*. It consists of proposing the three following objectives that capture the essence of the proposed orientation:

1. *Facilitate international OSH knowledge sharing*
2. *Enhance international networking activities in relation to OSH knowledge management*
3. *Strengthen institutional capacities to acquire and use OSH knowledge for prevention*

The following paragraphs provide insights on what each objective could entail if they were to be adopted. Understandably these are proposed objectives only, and as such they should be reviewed to respond to the priority needs of the network members.

#### *Obj. 1: Facilitate international OSH knowledge sharing*

31. In recent years, the ILO CIS Secretariat continued to collect and disseminate bibliographic references, prepared information packages and organized annual meetings. It also consolidated the ILO OSH knowledge and information assets such as the OSH Thesaurus and International Chemical Safety Cards by harmonizing and modernizing its technological platforms, and sought to make relevant OSH country profile information available notably through an upgraded website. The new online edition of the ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety, the development of the new global database on OSH legislation, and the active steps taken to define a new strategic orientation for the international network of CIS centres are recent achievements that the network itself is now called upon to consolidate and develop further.
32. The network needs to develop its work programme, and share the workload on priority work items, understood that all concerned have a role to play and that the ILO shall continue supporting international knowledge and information sharing as a matter of priority. For instance, more chemical safety cards need to be produced and translated in more languages, while also being made available on mobile phones. Likewise, data in the global database on OSH legislation (LEGOSH) need to be obtained, validated and updated for all the countries around the world and the CIS Centres could play an active role in this regard. A number of ideas appear throughout the document such as building an international roster of OSH expertise for which the CIS Centres could contribute. Attention could also be given to

collecting, compiling data and statistics in OSH. Lastly, the project of updating and extending the content of the Encyclopaedia of OH&S could be developed and implemented in partnership with the CIS network and its constituents.

*Obj. 2: Enhance international networking activities in relation to OSH knowledge management*

33. From an ILO perspective, reconnecting and developing collaboration arrangements with leading institutions is a top priority. Re-establishing working relations with leading institutions appears as a condition to engaging work on the Encyclopaedia and other areas of work. This could be achieved by organizing the network according to new parameters, and focusing on priority subject matters, geographical regions, and common language-based initiatives.
34. Members of the CIS network need to know one another a little better as a prerequisite for collaboration. Thus a thorough mapping exercise in the form of a comprehensive survey of known OSH agencies, institutions and organizations could be conducted with the support of the ILO. This would provide the baseline information for a mutual understanding of the scope of opportunities and challenges. The information collected would also feed-in a renewed ILO registry supporting interactions with the network membership base.
35. Meetings of the CIS network members have proven being costly to support, and could be spread out to allow for organizing segment or subject-matter specific meetings in between. All meetings could be organized in collaboration with existing networks in the different regions of the world on a rotation basis making the best of forthcoming opportunities such as meeting in margin of the World Congress on OSH in Frankfurt Germany in 2014, in Latin America or in English or French speaking Africa in 2015, in a country of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 2016 or elsewhere, and in Singapore Asia in 2017 in margin of the World Congress again. The network members should be enabled to decide where and when to meet, and for what purpose, hoping that each meeting will contribute generating and sharing knowledge internationally (Objective 1 above).

*Obj. 3: Strengthen institutional capacities to acquire and use OSH knowledge for prevention*

36. Knowledge is necessary for enhancing the technical and legal competencies of labour administrators and inspectors. By making OSH knowledge and information more readily available through capacity building activities, training and information, it becomes possible to modernize the policies, structures and working practices of labour administration and inspection services towards the effective prevention of work-related accidents and diseases. Sound educational and training programmes and materials are required to support labour administration and inspection work in OSH as it enables the provision of competent technical and legal advice in enforcing legislation. Strengthening workplace compliance through sound labour inspection in both the formal and the informal economy is of critical importance for the ILO constituents, and is reflected in the new ILO policy framework for which the active contribution of the CIS network is sought and anticipated.
37. The ILO plans to initiate the preparation of a large-scale technical cooperation (TC) programme proposal to strengthen the capacities of OSH knowledge and information agencies, institutions and organisations that are providing advisory services at country level, including assistance to labour administration and inspection services. The programme will use various means of action such as peer-to-peer support, bilateral OSH knowledge exchanges, establishment of an international mobility scheme to facilitate study missions and internships, and will best be executed by working in close partnership with the members of the CIS network.
38. The new approach to ILO work in the area of OSH knowledge management aims at extending the scope of focus from collecting and disseminating OSH information only to

rather embrace the broader concept of supporting OSH knowledge development, including but not limited to the areas of research, education, training and advisory services in OSH. Should this new approach be supported by the members of the CIS network, work shall be initiated to develop an education support package to strengthen the capacity of universities in LMI countries. The development of this international capacity-building training tool would possibly materialize into a “core competencies in OSH educational programme” and its development would involve OSH institutions as well as research and academic institutions that are, or will become, members of the CIS network under new network functioning modalities.

### **A possible way forward**

39. Implementing the programme of activities for achieving the objectives of the CIS network has to become the very reason why agencies, institutions and organizations from around the world meet and collaborate to protect the health and safety of workers. Taking the CIS network into a new and improved phase will require leadership, support resources, coordination, and most importantly, team work among the network members.
40. A committee to be supported by the ILO but constituted by representatives of CIS Centres needs to steer the way forward, set the work agenda and time table, mobilize commitment from network members, coordinate action, follow-up and report on steps undertaken and progress achieved.
41. The first task of such steering committee would consist of organizing further consultation on the work programme, as well as on the network constitution, structure and governance arrangements. From these consultations, the steering committee could decide to prepare a constitutive text proposal for adoption by the network members during its next meeting. The constitutive text would set the functioning guidelines of the network and clarify how operations of the network will materialize in practice.
42. The second most important task consists of developing the work programme for the network, and mobilizing resources for its effective implementation on the basis of work-sharing arrangements primarily among the members of the network, and complementarily through working with the ILO in developing the global technical cooperation programme, and submitting it to potential donors.
43. Under this proposed *Knowledge for Prevention Initiative*, the ILO would be positioned in a support role as opposed to a coordination role which will be with the network steering committee. The ILO’s role would essentially consist in managing the interface and acting as facilitator in the progressive institutionalization of the network.

### **Conclusion**

44. This document introduced a strategy proposal for consideration by the current CIS network of National and Collaborating Centres. The network has to reassert its true purpose by defining its work programme, and adopting new working arrangements for its effective implementation. Principles for broadening and structuring its membership base to welcome other stakeholders, as well as practical steps towards its renewal were outlined. The overall aim is to rebuild working relationships with OSH institutions and other stakeholders having a role in OSH knowledge and information around the world and from there it shall be possible to engage into a major capacity-building technical cooperation programme focussed on enhancing access to knowledge for prevention.