

# Health Indicators of **sustainable jobs**

in the Context of the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development

*Initial findings from a WHO Expert Consultation: 17-18 May 2012*

## **Key messages:**

A healthy workforce is a prerequisite for social and economic development; fair terms of employment and decent working conditions are critical to the health of the working-age population.

- **More systematic measurement and reporting of workers' health** can help reduce work-related injuries, illnesses, and deaths. In 2011, an estimated 2.3 million people died from work related injuries, illnesses, and accidents.
- **Compliance with basic national occupational safety and health standards**, at country level and by sector, can support improved workers' health, including in the transition to a green economy.
- **Monitoring progress on the ratification and implementation of core international labour conventions** covering occupational safety and health policies and occupational health services is a third measure supporting improved workers' health and safety.

## **1. Linkages between sustainable job policies and better public health**

A healthy workforce is a prerequisite for social and economic development and for productivity. Protecting the health of the workforce through access to decent jobs, universally available health services, and social health protection contributes both to sustainable development as well as worker productivity.<sup>1</sup> Hazardous working conditions and unemployment currently contribute to a very large avoidable burden of disease and loss of income-earning potential.<sup>2</sup>

- Some 2.3 million people die every year from work-related diseases and injuries.<sup>3</sup>
- Nearly 1 million of these deaths are from 3 key occupational risks – injuries, carcinogens, and airborne particles (2004 data).<sup>4</sup>
- Most of the world's workforce is employed in "vulnerable" conditions, without adequate health and social protection measures – primarily in the informal sector.<sup>5</sup>

Promoting and protecting the health of workers needs to be a key concern of sustainable development policies that support a transition to an inclusive green economy, which can help achieve poverty reduction. This promotion and protection, along with health and safety measures, involves reducing occupational health and safety risks across all economic sectors while ensuring that jobs in emerging "green industries" offer decent work.

<sup>1</sup> Resolution 60.26. Workers' health: global plan of action. In: *Sixtieth World Health Assembly, Geneva 13-23 May 2007*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Commission on Social Determinants of Health. *Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health. Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2008 ([http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/thecommission/finalreport/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/thecommission/finalreport/en/index.html)).

<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization introductory report. Global trends and challenges on occupational safety and health. In: *XIX World Congress on Safety and Health at Work, Istanbul, International Labour Organization, 11- 15 September 2011*. Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2011.

([http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/publications/WCMS\\_162662/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/publications/WCMS_162662/lang-en/index.htm)).

<sup>4</sup> Driscoll T, Nelson D, Steenland K, Leigh J, Concha-Barrientos M, Fingerhut M, Prüss-Ustün A. The global burden of disease due to occupational carcinogens. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 2005, 48:419–431.

<sup>5</sup> *ILO global employment trends 2012: preventing a deeper jobs crisis*. Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2012.

## 2. Core health indicators that can monitor progress and identify success

More systematic measurement of key occupational health indicators can help monitor progress in improving workers' health and safety as well as their access to health services and other forms of social protection. Examples presented here relate to the need for improved monitoring of basic data on health effects, health risks and policies/processes that can lead to change:

### Health effects – occupational deaths, injuries and disabilities

- Occupational injury rate (fatal) disaggregated by gender, occupation, employment type (formal and informal), and economic sector;

### Health risks at the workplace

- Proportion of workplaces in public and private sectors (formal and informal) that comply with basic national occupational safety and health standards by economic sector;

### Policies/processes for improving workers' health protection

- Ratification of core international labour instruments for occupational safety and health – International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions 155 (Occupational Safety and Health Policy), 161 (Occupational Health Services) and 187 (Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health).

## 3. Expanded indicators

### Health effects – occupational deaths, injuries and disabilities

- Occupational injury rate (non-fatal) disaggregated by gender, occupation, employment type (formal and informal), and economic sector;
- Occupational disease rate disaggregated by gender, employment type (formal and informal), and economic sector;
- Occupational burden of disease – cancer, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, noise-induced hearing loss, low back pain, and depression, disaggregated by gender and economic sector;

### Health risks in the workplace

- Proportion of workforce exposed to carcinogens, air pollution, noise, risks of injuries, hazardous chemicals, biological agents, and ergonomic and psychosocial stressors at the workplace, disaggregated by gender and economic sector and type of employment (formal and informal);
- Proportion of workers covered with policies for smoke-free workplaces by economic sector and type of employment (formal and informal);

### Policies/processes for improving workers' protection

- Proportion of companies (public and private) with established health and safety committees, disaggregated by economic sector;
- Proportion of workers covered by essential interventions and basic occupational health services for prevention of occupational and work-related diseases and injuries including noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), disaggregated by gender, occupation, type of employment, and economic sector;
- Proportion of workers covered with occupational safety and health insurance, disaggregated by gender, occupation, type of employment, and economic sector;

- Proportion of companies (public and private, formal and informal) that are implementing healthy workplace programmes including interventions for prevention of NCDs, disaggregated by gender, occupation, and economic sector.

#### 4. Added value of these health indicators

The merit of most indicators here is well recognized – many already are being used for the surveillance of workers' health and the monitoring of occupational health and safety in workplaces at company, national, and/or international levels. The added value of most of the indicators is that they make a direct linkage between health and sustainable development processes, particularly with regard to transitioning to a "green economy". Some of these indicators are already being used in sustainability reporting by public and private companies.

Health indicators for monitoring the health impacts of sustainable development policies regarding jobs should be used in conjunction with the set of indicators for measuring decent work with regard to terms of employment, unemployment, the abolition of child labour, policies relating to the working poor, and minimum wages.<sup>6</sup> All of these are social determinants of workers' health.

#### 5. Feasibility of data reporting

For some of the indicators regarding the occupational injury rate, occupational burden of disease and ratification of conventions, data is available at the global level that is disaggregated by gender, country, and economic sector.<sup>7</sup> However, more systematic and rigorous data collection is important for healthy and sustainable jobs for all.

Information for indicators regarding the compliance of workplaces with basic occupational health and safety standards is available primarily at the company level. A priority needs to be placed on more systematic data collection and data-integration/data-sharing.

#### 6. Strategic issues

Including workers' health into integrated assessments of strategies to green the economy in economic sectors can have many benefits: first, it would allow for the identification and management of health risks among formal and informal workers (the latter are often excluded) across the supply chain; second, it would enable costs and benefits of preventing occupational and work-related diseases and injuries to be seen in the context of the sector's contribution to social development.

Disaggregation of data by economic sector allows for monitoring of effects of sector-specific sustainable development policies, including green policies, on the health and well-being of workers.

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<sup>6</sup> ILO revised office proposal for the measurement of decent work, Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Rantanen J, Kauppinen T, Toikkanen J, Kurppa K, Lehtinen S, Leino T. *Work and health country profiles: country profiles and national surveillance indicators in occupational health and safety*. People and Work, Research Reports 44, Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Helsinki, 2001.