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Northern Dimension
Partnership in Public Health
and Social Well-being
www.ndphs.org

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Title	Fact-sheet on SIHLWA OSH sub-group (1+2 pages)
Submitted by	OSH Chairman
Summary / Note	The fact-sheet was prepared for the PAC-4 meeting in Vilnius in November 2007. It summarises OSH sub-group activities and could act as a model for other SIHLWA sub-groups
Requested action	For information

Healthy life – healthy work

Healthy and safe work is also good business

The right to maintain one's life and health is a basic human right – this applies in particular to work life, where a tremendous annual loss of lives and health goes largely unnoticed.

A healthy working-aged population with adequate social protection is the most critical factor behind the social and economic development of enterprises, communities and nations. Poor working conditions, work-related accidents and diseases, stress and exposure to hazardous chemicals has a strong negative impact on the overall health and work ability of the population, as well as on the reproduction.

The wealth in the Northern Dimension area as elsewhere is based on human work. The workforce of the Northern Dimension area (13 countries) covers almost 125 million working people. The working-aged population (15–74 years) covers an even larger share of the whole population, including full-time and part-time workers, home-based work, migrant workers, young people, invalids, distance work, unpaid work, informal and unregistered work.

Serious situation

The ILO estimates that, globally, over 2.2 million workers die every year from work-related accidents and diseases. This figure is on the increase. These figures are supported by national data. For example, the Russian draft Programme “Safe work” for 2009–25 states that 150–190,000 workers die yearly due to hazardous working conditions; 200,000 persons suffer from occupational accidents annually. These statistics cover less than half of the working population, thus the real picture is even worse.

Poor working conditions and lack of occupational health services, including prevention, contribute to significant health inequities within the working-aged population, between the regions and countries, as well as within the countries. This is counterproductive to the sustainable and productive development of the individual countries and the Region as a whole.

Women and men workers experience a number of difficulties at the workplaces related to working conditions which hinder them to harmonically combine work and family life: long and unsocial working hours, excessive workload and work intensity, absence of affordable childcare and other family support services, little flexibility in work schedule and limited maternity protection. Practical family-friendly measures would in the long term contribute to economic security of families and improve the demographic situation.

Another side of the gender-based occupational segregation and men's concentration in the most dangerous industries is the gender distribution of fatal accidents – statistics indicate that for every women dying at work, up to fifteen men are the victims of fatal accidents.

Safe work – increases also productivity

Occupational accidents and diseases and poor working conditions cause economic havoc for whole families and are a major cost for the society. Economists estimate that 4 per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is lost due to poor working conditions, occupational accidents and diseases. International experience shows, that safe work is also good business and part of normal quality and production management. More and more enterprises understand that providing adequate work is an investment in the human resources and skills of the work force at the enterprise, in quality and productivity. This has a direct impact on the competitiveness at the world market. The improvement of working conditions needs to be based on cooperation between employers and workers at enterprises – social partnership in OSH, a crucial part of a coherent OSH management system.

Many enterprises support, financially and by allowing time off work, exercise, healthy lifestyles and encourage their workers to take care of their own health – because it decreases sick leaves and improves business.

The way forward

The heart of occupational health and safety is in prevention; all adverse health effects and injuries caused by work are in principle preventable. Risks should be prevented at their earliest possible stage to avoid diseases and injuries. Every man and woman, who suffers from work-related illness or accident represents a health care cost and a loss in the battle for health.

At the national level

- develop a national OSH programme and plan of action, following the WHO and ILO guidelines
- develop and link public and occupational health systems for prevention and cure

At enterprise level

- set up OSH management systems to cater for healthy and safe working conditions
- safety committees and occupational health services to inform, advise and prevent

At the general public level

- raise awareness and commitment among the public, including promotion of the World Day for safety at work on 28 April
- promote a safety culture in daily life, safety at work, safety on the road, as well as safe and healthy lifestyles.

There is a lot to do. Let us do it together.

The Expert Group on Social Inclusion, Healthy Lifestyles & Work Ability (SIHLWA)/OSH Group of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) is working with the Baltic Sea Network on Occupational Health and Safety (BSN), the WHO, the ILO and the European Union to improve the national OSH systems in the countries in the region. For details see www.ndphs.org/.

The Occupational Safety and Health sub-group is chaired by Mr Wiking Husberg (husberg@ilo.org), ILO/Moscow, Co chair Dr Remigijus Jankauskas (jank@dmc.lt) from Lithuania (Institute of Hygiene/MoH).