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Occupational Health and Safety Forum

Fourth Activity Report

1. The purpose of this document is to provide the HLCM with an update of the activities of the OHS Forum since its 43rd session in April 2022. The OHS Forum met twice on 3 June and on 30 August 2022, and the workstreams continued to meet on a regular basis in order to work on their deliverables.

2. Thanks to the exceptional engagement of the workstreams' leads and members, several documents are now submitted to the HLCM for its consideration and endorsement.

1/ Recommendations on the Global OHS Repository

3. Consistent with the OHS 2021-2022 Action Plan, the recommendations resulting from the 2021 OHS survey and from the COVID-19 First Line of Defense (FLOD) Lessons Learned report, the OHS Forum explored the feasibility of establishing a system-wide digital platform where OHS standards applicable to the UN system and relevant documents on the OHS framework would be made available to different types of UN audiences. Two existing UN platforms (i.e. the UN Policy Portal and the Knowledge Gateway) have been identified to host the repository and as per attached concept note (annex 1) which also specifies the purpose of such a repository, its audience, content and governance.

2/ Taxonomy and process for collecting, vetting and developing OHS standards applicable to the UN system

4. Workstream 2 (WS2) under the lead of Joaquim Pintado Nunes from ILO and Ivan Ivanov from WHO is responsible for mapping and updating OHS standards applicable to the UN system. As a starting point of its work, WS2 considered that a prerequisite for the assessment of existing OHS standards and for the development of new OHS standards applicable to the UN system is a taxonomy of occupational hazards. WS2 agreed that such a taxonomy should be based on a workplace hazard-based classification (see Annex 2). The taxonomy will be the basis for structuring the Global OHS Repository. The taxonomy and the repository should be comprehensive enough to cover the needs of different UN agencies.

5. In addition to the taxonomy, WS2 worked on the process for collecting, vetting and developing OHS standards applicable to the UN system (see Annex 3). It has started collecting the OHS standards already used or developed by UN agencies and UN technical networks, like the UNMD or IASMN, and organizing them according to the taxonomy. This first step will help identify possible gaps that need to be addressed, particularly in light of the Covid-19 lessons learned. Unless provided otherwise, OHS standards that will be posted on the OHS repository are not prescriptive but are to be considered as guidance or recommendations which UN agencies can adapt to their specific context and operations.

6. One of the major reasons for the vetting of existing OHS standards by the OHS Forum will be to ensure consistency with the ILO OHS standards which in the context of the UN system is the reference (as opposed to the ISO standards). A note on the difference between ILO and ISO standards and the comparative advantages of the ILO standards will be provided to the HLCM at its next session. Workstream 2 will also design an escalation mechanism to support OHS practitioners in selecting the most appropriate OHS standard in the event that OHS standards developed by UN entities are inconsistent or incomplete.

3/ Guideline on OHS Incident Management

7. Pursuing its work on OHS risk management, Workstream 3 under the lead of Hayford Etteh has developed a UN-specific Guideline on OHS Incident Management (see Annex 4) which consolidates best practice approaches to incident management in various organizations and across different industries based on systematic literature review. The intention is to guide UN agencies in the design of their incident management programs. The guideline provides an overview of the incident management process and its underlying principles, including; the incident recognition, reporting, classification, investigation and review, as well as its analysis, communication, and closure. It also offers recommendations on digital or software solutions that could support the deployment and administration of the incident management process.

4/ Accountability and sustainability of the UN system-wide OHS capability at field duty station

8. Following the HLCM's endorsement of the initial recommendation jointly made by DCO and the OHS Forum, DCO wrote to the Resident Coordinators on 19 May 2022 to encourage them, where appropriate, to establish a local OHS Committee. A template of the Terms of Reference for the Committee was provided.

9. As requested by the HLCM, consultations with relevant stakeholders continued to take place with a view to making further recommendations on the accountability framework and sustainable funding of the OSH capacity at country level. The result of these consultations and the suggestions on the way forward are provided in the "OHS Framework of Accountability for Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams" in Annex 5 prepared by DCO in collaboration with the Workstream 4 lead.

10. The main idea of this Framework is to document and clarify the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of Resident Coordinators and other United Nations officials and personnel, for the implemenatation of OSH measures that are recommended by local OHS Committees as a result of annual OHS risk assessments. The proposed framework does not aim at building a parallel coordination mechanism but rather leveraging existing mechanisms and providing support for the Resident Coordinators and the UN Country Teams to address OHS matters through a systematic and coordinated approach, thus strengthening their prevention and response capacity in the face of health and safety hazards.

11. When it comes to sustainability, the main principle is to leverage existing OHS resources already available in the duty station to address actions identified as part of the OHS risk assessment. Where existing capacity is not available, two scenarios are being considered:

    – Either the OSH risk assessment leads the local OSH Committee to recommend to the RCs and UNCTs remedial actions to be undertaken jointly by all UNCT entities: UNCT will cost share the resulting cost;

    – Or the OSH risk assessment leads to the conclusion that a local OSH expert has to be hired or that recurring costs are needed to address the OHS hazards identified, an upfront budget might be required which will be cost-shared by the UN entities based on actual presence of personnel in that duty station.

12. If this framework is endorsed in principle by the HLCM, it will be taken forward by the OHS Forum and the relevant stakeholders, including DCO. The next steps will include developing a similar framework applicable to H duty stations (where there is no Resident Coordinator but there is a Designated Official) as well as a concept note on a potential coordinating entity that will oversee the UN-wide OHS management system and provide support and guidance to the OHS focal points and OHS local Committees. It is expected that this work will be carried out throughout 2023 and submitted to the HLCM at its two sessions in 2023.

5/ Report on the impact of Covid-19 on mental health and well-being of UN personnel and recommendations

13. Following the initial "*review on the impact of COVID-19 on mental health of UN personnel, both from an immediate standpoint and a longer-term perspective*" tasked by the HLCM in March 2021, the dedicated working group of the UN System Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy Implementation Board (MHSIB) worked on a follow up report. This report focuses on practical short-term and longer-term recommendations and good practices (see Annex 6). The recommendations are organized around four categories: workplace factors; role of managers and leaders; psycho-social support; and groups of personnel who experienced an increased impact.

14. The progress report of the MHSIB entitled "*2018-2023 UN System Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy + 2024 and beyond*" is provided in Annex 7.

OHS Forum's next outputs

15. With the documents submitted to the HLCM at the forthcoming 44th session, the OHS Forum has delivered most of the deliverables of its 2021-2022 workplan. Its endeavour in 2023 will be to establish and populate the Global OHS Repository and to finalize the blue print of the UN-wide OHS management system. The OHS Forum will also conduct the biennial OHS survey to assess the progress made by the UN agencies in the implementation of the recommendations made by the former Cross-functional Task Force on Duty of Care.

16. It is expected that the OHS Forum – which was set up with a time-bound mandate – will be in a position to hand over its global OHS policy and repository responsibilities to the new entity established in support of the new governance of the UN-wide OHS management system, by the end of 2023.

Proposed action for the HLCM

17. The HLCM is invited to consider and endorse this report and to encourage the organizations to use the annexed documents developed by the OHS Forum and the recommendations that they contain.

Annexes

Annex 1: Concept note on the Global OHS Repository
Annex 2: Taxonomy of OHS standards
Annex 3: Process for collecting, vetting and developing OHS standards applicable to the UN system
Annex 4: OHS Incident Management Guideline
Annex 5: OHS Framework of Accountability for Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams
Annex 6: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health and Well-being of UN Personnel: Recommendations, implementable actions and good practices
Annex 7: 2018-2023 UN System Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy + 2024 and beyond - Progress Report