



ENSURING SAFE WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE WORKPLACE: ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

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ABSTRACT

Workplace safety is one of the most fundamental dimensions of labour rights and social policy, directly affecting the physical and psychological wellbeing of workers across all sectors and regions. The concept of safe working conditions encompasses a broad spectrum of preventive and protective measures, ranging from the control of industrial hazards and occupational diseases to the management of psychosocial risks and the promotion of a genuine safety culture within organisations. Despite considerable regulatory progress over the past century, work-related injuries, illnesses, and fatalities continue to impose an enormous social and economic burden on societies worldwide.

Introduction. Workplace safety is one of the most fundamental dimensions of labour rights and social policy, directly affecting the physical and psychological wellbeing of workers across all sectors and regions. The concept of safe working conditions encompasses a broad spectrum of preventive and protective measures, ranging from the control of industrial hazards and occupational diseases to the management of psychosocial risks and the promotion of a genuine safety culture within organisations. Despite considerable regulatory progress over the past century, work-related injuries, illnesses, and fatalities continue to impose an enormous social and economic burden on societies worldwide.

According to the International Labour Organization, approximately 2.3 million workers die each year as a result of work-related accidents and diseases, while an estimated 340 million non-fatal occupational accidents and 160 million cases of work-related illness occur annually. These figures underscore the continued urgency of strengthening national legislative frameworks and their alignment with international standards governing occupational health and safety (OHS).¹

This paper analyses the principal international standards on occupational health and safety, examines the extent to which national legislative frameworks align with these norms

¹International Labour Organization. (2023). World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023. ILO Publications. <https://www.ilo.org/wesodata>

with particular reference to the Republic of Uzbekistan, and identifies key implementation gaps. Special attention is devoted to recommendations for the progressive harmonisation of national OHS law with international best practice, including the standards of the International Labour Organization and the ISO 45001 management framework.

International Standards on Occupational Health and Safety: Normative Architecture. The international regulatory framework for workplace safety rests on a multi-layered normative architecture comprising ILO conventions and recommendations, international management standards, and regional regulatory instruments. The cornerstone of this architecture is the body of occupational safety and health conventions adopted by the International Labour Organization, which together establish minimum standards applicable to all member states.

Among the most significant ILO instruments are Convention No. 155 on Occupational Safety and Health (1981), which requires states to formulate, implement, and periodically review a coherent national OHS policy in consultation with employers and workers; Convention No. 161 on Occupational Health Services (1985), which establishes the right of all workers to access preventive health services at the workplace; and Convention No. 187 on the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health (2006), which introduces the concept of a national OHS system built around a preventive safety and health culture. Convention No. 187 is widely regarded as the most comprehensive contemporary instrument in the field, as it requires the integration of OHS considerations into national development planning and social dialogue processes.²

At the level of organisational practice, ISO 45001:2018, Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems, has emerged as the leading global standard for the systematic management of workplace risks. Developed by the International Organization for Standardization and replacing the earlier OHSAS 18001 standard, ISO 45001 follows a Plan-Do-Check-Act methodology and requires organisations to proactively identify hazards, assess and control risks proportionate to their severity, and continuously improve performance. A key distinguishing feature of ISO 45001 is its emphasis on worker participation and the integration of OHS management into the broader strategic management of the organisation.³

At the regional level, the European Union regulatory framework provides the most elaborated example of supranational OHS governance. The EU Framework Directive 89/391/EEC on the Introduction of Measures to Encourage Improvements in the Safety and Health of Workers at Work establishes the foundational legal basis for workplace safety regulation across all member states, introducing the principle of risk prevention at source, the obligation to provide training and information, and the right of workers to participate in safety management. A series of subsequent "daughter directives" extend these requirements to specific hazards, including chemical agents, noise, vibration, and manual handling. The EU experience demonstrates that a coherent, rights-based approach to OHS regulation, supported by effective enforcement and social dialogue, can achieve substantial and sustained reductions in occupational accidents and diseases.

²International Organization for Standardization. (2018). ISO 45001:2018 - Occupational health and safety management systems: Requirements with guidance for use. ISO. <https://www.iso.org/standard/63787.html>

³ILO Convention No. 187 on the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health (2006). International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C187

National Legislative Frameworks: The Case of Uzbekistan. The Republic of Uzbekistan has developed a substantive body of legislation governing occupational health and safety over the past three decades. The primary legislative instrument is the Labour Code of Uzbekistan, which devotes a dedicated chapter to the rights and obligations of employers and employees in the field of labour protection. The Code establishes the general duty of employers to provide safe working conditions, the right of workers to refuse hazardous work, and the obligation to compensate workers for occupational injuries.

A significant reform of the national OHS framework was undertaken with the adoption of the Law on Labour Protection in 2022, which established the organisational and legal basis for ensuring safe working conditions at enterprises of all forms of ownership. The Law introduced a modernised approach to state supervision, differentiating between high-risk and low-risk enterprises and reducing the administrative burden on compliant businesses while strengthening oversight in sectors with elevated accident rates. The Law also reinforced the obligation to conduct workplace risk assessments, though without prescribing the specific methodology for their implementation.⁴

State supervision over compliance with OHS norms is exercised by the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan and, in specific sectors such as mining and energy, by specialised inspectorates. Since 2019, Uzbekistan has pursued a broader programme of administrative reform aimed at transitioning from a punitive to a consultative inspection model, with inspectors expected to provide guidance and recommendations to enterprises before resorting to sanctions. This approach reflects international best practice in labour inspection methodology, as recommended by the ILO in the context of Convention No. 81.

Uzbekistan has ratified a number of key ILO occupational safety conventions, including Convention No. 155 on Occupational Safety and Health and Convention No. 81 on Labour Inspection. However, Convention No. 187 on the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health has not yet been ratified, and national OHS standards do not fully reflect the risk-based management approach enshrined in ISO 45001:2018. The existing regulatory model retains a predominantly prescriptive character, specifying detailed technical requirements for particular hazards rather than establishing a comprehensive, systems-based approach to hazard identification and risk control.

Comparative Analysis: Alignment Gaps and Systemic Challenges. A comparative analysis of the Uzbek OHS framework with international standards reveals several persistent structural gaps that limit the effectiveness of national workplace safety regulation. These gaps relate to the scope of hazard coverage, the mechanisms for worker participation, the management of emerging risks, and the capacity of enforcement institutions.

First, while international standards, and in particular ISO 45001:2018, emphasise the primacy of hazard elimination at source as the preferred control measure, national regulations continue to place disproportionate reliance on personal protective equipment as a primary rather than last-resort control. This reflects a broader tendency in the national regulatory culture to treat OHS compliance as a matter of equipping workers for dangerous

⁴Republic of Uzbekistan. (2022). Law on Labour Protection (No. ZRU-764 of 20 October 2022). Vedomosti Oliy Majlisi.

conditions rather than systematically eliminating or reducing those conditions at their source.⁵

Second, the management of psychosocial risks, including workplace stress, harassment, burnout, and violence, is largely absent from the national regulatory agenda. This gap is particularly significant given the growing recognition of psychosocial hazards in ILO instruments, WHO guidance, and EU legislation as major contributors to work-related illness and disability. According to joint WHO and ILO estimates, long working hours and associated risks account for a substantial proportion of work-related deaths from cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease worldwide.⁶

Third, worker participation mechanisms, a cornerstone of both the ILO framework and the EU Directive, remain underdeveloped in practice. While the Labour Code provides for the election of worker health and safety representatives, trade union density has declined significantly in recent years, and joint health and safety committees are not universally established in small and medium-sized enterprises, which account for the majority of the national workforce. Effective worker participation is not merely a procedural requirement: research consistently demonstrates that workplaces with active worker involvement in safety management achieve significantly lower rates of occupational accidents and diseases.⁷

Fourth, data collection and analysis systems for occupational accidents and diseases remain insufficiently developed. The absence of a reliable, comprehensive national OHS information system makes it difficult to identify sector-specific risk patterns, evaluate the effectiveness of regulatory interventions, and allocate inspection resources efficiently. International experience demonstrates that evidence-based OHS policy, supported by robust statistical infrastructure, is a prerequisite for sustained improvement in workplace safety outcomes.

Emerging Challenges: Digital Transformation and Non-Standard Employment. The landscape of occupational health and safety is being reshaped by two interconnected structural transformations: the digitalisation of work processes and the proliferation of non-standard forms of employment. Both developments challenge the adequacy of existing regulatory frameworks and require proactive adaptation of national OHS legislation.

The digitalisation of production and services introduces novel hazards, including increased sedentary work and associated musculoskeletal risks, the erosion of boundaries between work and rest time, heightened exposure to screen-based fatigue, and the surveillance-related psychological pressures associated with algorithmic management. International standard-setting bodies, including the ILO and ISO, have begun to address these issues, but national OHS frameworks in most jurisdictions lag significantly behind the pace of technological change.

Non-standard employment arrangements, including platform-based work, telework, temporary agency work, and informal employment, present a further challenge for OHS governance. Workers in these arrangements frequently fall outside the scope of traditional

⁵Walters, D., & Nichols, T. (2007). *Worker Representation and Workplace Health and Safety*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶Frick, K., Jensen, P. L., Quinlan, M., & Wilthagen, T. (Eds.). (2000). *Systematic Occupational Health and Safety Management: Perspectives on an International Development*. Pergamon Press.

⁷World Health Organization & ILO. (2021). WHO/ILO joint estimates of the work-related burden of disease and injury, 2000-2016: Global monitoring report. WHO. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240034945>

employer-employee relationships and are therefore excluded from the protections afforded by standard OHS legislation. The ILO has called upon member states to extend OHS coverage to all workers regardless of employment status, a call that has important implications for the legislative modernisation agenda in Uzbekistan, where informal employment remains widespread in certain sectors.

Recommendations for Strengthening the National OHS Framework. Based on the foregoing analysis, the following systemic recommendations are formulated for the improvement of occupational health and safety regulation in Uzbekistan in alignment with international standards.

In the legislative sphere, the following steps are recommended: ratification of ILO Convention No. 187 and alignment of national OHS policy with the promotional framework it establishes; amendment of the Law on Labour Protection to incorporate a comprehensive, methodology-neutral risk assessment obligation applicable to all workplaces, including small and medium enterprises; introduction of explicit legislative provisions addressing psychosocial risks; and extension of OHS coverage to workers in non-standard employment arrangements, consistent with ILO guidance.

In the institutional sphere, priority should be given to strengthening the capacity of labour inspectorates through specialised training on international OHS standards and risk-based inspection methodologies; establishing a national OHS information system for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of reliable data on occupational accidents and diseases; and promoting the voluntary adoption of ISO 45001 certification among large enterprises as a precursor to broader regulatory uptake.

In the area of social dialogue, it is recommended to reinvigorate tripartite consultation mechanisms at the national level; incentivise the establishment of joint health and safety committees at enterprise level, particularly in high-risk sectors; and develop targeted programmes to raise OHS awareness among employers and workers in small and medium enterprises.

In relation to emerging challenges, legislative amendments are needed to address the specific OHS risks associated with telework and platform-based work, including provisions on the right to disconnect and the ergonomic assessment of home workspaces. The development of a national action plan for the prevention of psychosocial risks, modelled on comparable instruments adopted in EU member states, would represent a significant step towards comprehensive coverage of all work-related health hazards.

Conclusion. The analysis demonstrates that while Uzbekistan has established a foundational legislative and institutional infrastructure for occupational health and safety, significant gaps remain between national standards and the requirements of key international instruments. Bridging these gaps requires a sustained transition from a prescriptive, compliance-driven regulatory model to a proactive, risk-based approach that places the elimination and control of hazards at the centre of enterprise safety management.

The ratification of outstanding ILO conventions, above all Convention No. 187, the progressive harmonisation of national standards with ISO 45001:2018, the strengthening of social dialogue mechanisms, and the modernisation of the OHS information infrastructure represent the most strategically significant steps towards this objective. The successful

implementation of these measures will require coordinated efforts from the legislative and executive authorities, the labour inspection system, employers, workers, and the professional legal and safety community.

This paper does not purport to provide an exhaustive analysis of all dimensions of occupational safety regulation. Promising directions for further research include a comparative assessment of OHS enforcement effectiveness across Central Asian jurisdictions, an evaluation of the impact of digitalisation on workplace safety outcomes, and a study of the specific OHS needs of workers in informal and platform-based employment in the Uzbek context.

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