



Providing A Safe Work Environment

*This editorial is based on "[Social Dialogue for Safe Workplaces](#)" which was published in *The Hindu* on 28/04/2022. It talks about the measures that can be taken to ensure occupational health and safety.*

For Prelims: Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, Labour Bureau, Silicosis, Byssinosis, International Labour Organisation, ILO Conventions.

For Mains: Occupational safety and health in India - Analysis, Challenges and Steps that can be taken.

With over six million deaths due to Covid-19 in the last two years, safety and health have become central to every local, national, and international discussion.

As accidents, injuries, and diseases are prevalent in many industries, all of which directly and indirectly affect workers' and their families' well-being, it makes **ensuring a preventative safety and health culture a critical component of any workplace.**

For the world of work to **build** forward from the pandemic in a more human-centred and resilient way, [Occupational Safety and Health \(OSH\)](#) mechanisms need to be strengthened to establish workplaces that are not hazardous for workers.

What is the Status of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)?

- Globally, an estimated **2.9 million deaths and 402 million non-fatal injuries** are attributed to occupational accidents and diseases.
 - Occupational accidents and diseases cost **5.4% of the global GDP annually.**
 - While less tangibly, they materialise as **presenteeism** (working with less effectiveness), productivity losses associated with **permanent impairment**, and **staff-turnover costs** (i.e., loss of skilled staff).

What is the Status of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in India?

- The available government statistics show a **decreasing trend** in occupational injuries in manufacturing and mining sectors.
 - However, it needs to be noted that when interpreting the statistics of the [Labour Bureau](#), the **unregistered factories and mines are not covered.**
- During 2011-16, the number of cases of occupational diseases reported to the government in India was only 562.
 - In contrast, a scientific article published in the **National Medical Journal of India**, 2016, indicates prevalence of occupational diseases such as [silicosis](#) and [byssinosis](#).

- Byssinosis is a disease of the lungs **caused by breathing in cotton dust or dust from other vegetable fibres** such as flax, hemp, or sisal while at work.
- However, India has some good practices for extending OSH coverage as well.
 - The **Government of Uttar Pradesh**, in cooperation with employers and workers, carried out participatory OSH training workshops for metal and garment home-based workers.
 - **Most of these workers are in the [informal economy](#)** and remain unreachable by other occupational health and safety initiatives.
 - **The Government of Kerala** applied the **ILO's participatory OSH training methodologies** and reached out to small construction sites for OSH improvements.
 - **The Government of Rajasthan** generated **OSH awareness among** workers and employers **in stone processing units** for preventing occupational lung diseases.

What Initiatives have been Taken to Promote OSH?

- Since 2003, the [International Labour Organisation \(ILO\)](#) has commemorated **April 28 as World Day for Safety and Health at Work** to stress the prevention of accidents and diseases at work by capitalising on our strength of tripartism and social dialogue.
 - The theme for 2022 is "**Act together to build a positive safety and health culture**".
- India has ratified International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions, the **Labour Inspection Convention, 1947** and **Labour Statistics Convention, 1985**.
- The Government of India declared the **National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at Workplace** in February 2009 and compiled the available OSH information as National OSH Profile in 2018.
- Another important step is launching a strategic **National OSH Programme**.
- The [Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020](#) spells out duties of employers and employees, and **envisages safety standards for different sectors**, focusing on the health and working condition of workers, hours of work, leaves, etc.
 - The code also **recognises the right of contractual workers**.
 - The code **provides for statutory benefits like social security and wages to fixed-term employees** at par with their permanent counterparts.

What are the Issues Associated with Ensuring Safe Workplaces?

- **Underutilised Reporting Systems:** A reliable occupational accident and disease reporting system is vital for remedying victims and making effective prevention policies for safer and healthier workplaces.
 - **While India has such a mechanism, it is underutilised**, with many injuries, accidents, and diseases going unregistered.
 - Under-reporting is **more likely to be in case of non-fatal injuries** than fatal ones for obvious reasons.
 - There is massive under-reporting of industrial injuries in small-scale industries.
- **Lack of Awareness of Occupational Diseases:** There is a lack of trained doctors on the various occupational diseases and workplace hazards and risks.
 - The lack of awareness of health hazards at workplaces leads to **misdiagnosis by doctors**.
- **Limited Industries under the Ambit:** The Labour Bureau compiles and publishes **data on industrial injuries relating only to a few sectors**, viz. factories, mines, railways, docks and ports.
 - The body has **not yet expanded the scope** of statistics on injuries by adding sectors such as plantations, construction, the service sector, etc.

What can be done to Ensure Occupational Safety and Health?

- **OSH - Committee, Compliance and Collection of Data:** Effective implementation of the code of OSH and working conditions of 2020 will **extend OSH protection to more sectors, especially to informal** workers who make up nearly 90% of India's workforce.
 - The **code should also promote active workplace OSH committees** and involve workers for identifying hazards and improving OSH. Workers are in the frontline to notice OSH risks and implement solutions
 - It is also critical that India establishes efficient OSH data collection systems to better

understand the situation for effective interventions.

- **Public Awareness:** Public awareness for preventing work-related accidents and diseases and improving hazardous working environments should also be encouraged.
 - India can **undertake stronger national campaigns** and **awareness raising activities** for workers and employers.
 - Young people are especially vulnerable to OSH risks and need to play an active role in finding OSH solutions.
- **Role of Governments:** At the national level, the government needs to **include all relevant ministries to ensure that workers' safety and health are prioritised** in the national agenda.
 - This requires **allocating adequate resources** to increase general awareness around OSH, knowledge of hazards and risks, and an understanding of their control and prevention measures.
 - **At the state level**, workers' and employers' organisations, by way of **bilateral discussions**, must **incorporate safety and health training at every level of their supply chains** to ensure protection from workplace injuries and diseases.
- **Social Dialogues:** Social dialogue is **essential for improving compliance** and plays a vital role in **building ownership and instilling commitment**, which paves the way for the rapid and effective implementation of OSH policies.
 - **Strong social dialogue mechanisms** for appropriately addressing occupational safety and health, by adequately investing in its prevention, will contribute to building a safe and healthy workforce and support productive enterprises, which form the bedrock of a sustainable economy.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the measures that can be taken to establish a work culture that is more human-centred and ensures preventative safety for all the workers.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. International Labour Organisation's Conventions 138 and 182 are related to (2018)

- (a) Child Labour
- (b) Adaptation of agricultural practices to global climate change
- (c) Regulation of food prices and food security
- (d) Gender parity at the workplace

Ans: (a)