



WHO Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health (2008-2017): Baseline for Implementation

Global Country Survey 2008/2009
Executive Summary and Survey Findings

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Only a small proportion of the global workforce has access to occupational health services for primary prevention and control of diseases and injuries caused or aggravated by work. In 2007, the 60th World Health Assembly endorsed a Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health for 2008-2017 and urged WHO member states to devise national policies and plans for its implementation¹.

ESTABLISHING A BASELINE

Implementing this plan requires measuring progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the Global Plan of Action. To establish a baseline for measuring progress, information was collected in 2008-2009 from Member States using a survey with questions measuring country status relative to five Global Plan of Action objectives:

1. Devising workers' health policy
2. Protecting and promoting health at the workplace
3. Improving performance of and access to occupational health services
4. Providing evidence for action
5. Incorporating workers' health into other policies.

This report presents the findings of that survey. Detailed information about the tools used to collect the data can be found in Annex I.

KEY FINDINGS

■ POLICY

- Two thirds of countries participating in the survey have policy frameworks for workers' health.
- Less than half of countries surveyed have endorsed or drafted a national plan of action on workers' health.

■ PROTECTING WORKERS' HEALTH

- Although respiratory diseases and musculoskeletal disorders are the most common occupational diseases, only one third of countries have special programmes to address them.
- While most countries have introduced ways of addressing risks at the workplace such as integrated management of chemicals and tobacco smoking bans, enforcement of regulations for workplace health protection remains insufficient.
- While workers' health is often incorporated into health promotion, injury prevention, and HIV programmes, it is rarely found in programmes dealing with cancer, malaria, and family health.

1. The full text of resolution WHA60.26 is available in English, Russian, French, Arabic, Spanish, and Chinese at: http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/global_plan/en/index.html

■ PERFORMANCE AND ACCESS

- Only one third of countries cover more than 30 percent of their workers with occupational health services.
- Policy- and standard-setting ministries lack capacity for enforcement and monitoring. One third of countries have no ministry of health staff dedicated to workers' health.
- While most countries have some human resources for health, academic training needs to be scaled up.

■ EVIDENCE FOR ACTION

- Although half the countries have national workers' health profiles with data on occupational diseases, injuries, and legislation, information about communicable and noncommunicable diseases among workers and about lifestyle risks are the least-covered topics.
- Most countries have national institutions carrying out research and training, but the distribution of such entities is uneven across country groups.
- Although most countries have registries of occupational diseases, few countries have developed national information systems dealing with other aspects of workers' health.
- Awareness about workers' health problems remains low, both in the media and among the general public.

■ HEALTH IN OTHER POLICIES

- Workers' health issues feature in policies concerning management of chemicals, emergency preparedness and response, employment strategies, and vocational training. However, workers' health is seldom considered in policies regarding climate change, trade, economic development, poverty reduction, and general education.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFR	WHO African Region
AMR	WHO American Region
GPA	WHO Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health
EMR	WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region
EUR	WHO European Region
SEAR	WHO South-East Asian Region
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHO	World Health Organization
WPR	WHO Western Pacific Region

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