Accelerating action

UN environment programme | Global Framework on Chemicals

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Implementation Programme

"Legal frameworks and institutional capacities for the sound management of chemicals and waste"

GFC Labour Programme: Draft Terms of Reference

Convenor(s):
International Labour Organization (ILO)
International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH)
International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Kenya
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Executive Summary
This document sets out the Terms of Reference for the Labour Programme, in response to the recognition of occupational safety and health (OSH) as a foundational pillar of GFC implementation. The Programme provides a dedicated home for coherent, sustained and measurable action to protect workers and support the productivity and sustainability of enterprises. It contributes to multiple GFC targets, including Target D7, through activities undertaken at both global and national levels. The Programme engages stakeholders across the world of work to most effectively implement the GFC. To reflect the cross-cutting nature of OSH, the Programme will also collaborate closely with actions under IP1 and the sector programmes of IP2.

GFC Labour Programme: Terms of Reference

I. Proposing stakeholders

1. International Labour Organization (ILO); International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH); International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC); Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Kenya

II. Programme rationale

2. Workers face hazardous chemical exposures at all stages of the chemicals life cycle, including production, use, and disposal. Over one billion workers are exposed to hazardous substances each year,[1] resulting in more than one million preventable deaths annually, alongside chronic illnesses, disabilities, and productivity losses. Extreme weather events and changing weather patterns may also give rise to increased chemical exposures at work. In this context, preventing these exposures is central to the realization of the fundamental right to a safe and healthy working environment,[2] while also contributing to business resilience and continuity.
3. The Labour Programme (The Programme) serves to integrate occupational safety and health (OSH) into global and national efforts by the world of work to implement the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC). It responds to the conclusions of the first meeting of the GFC Open-ended Working Group (2025), which referenced OSH as a foundational pillar of Framework implementation.[3] The 353rd Session of the ILO Governing Body (March 2025) took note of the GFC and the Bonn Declaration and endorsed follow-up actions to support their

[1] ILO, Exposure to Hazardous Chemicals at Work and Resulting Health Impacts: A Global Review, 2021.
[2] Resolution on the inclusion of a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work.
[3] UNEP, Report of the Open-ended Working Group of the Global Framework on Chemicals – for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste on the work of its first meeting [Advanced version], 2025.

implementation.[4] In this context, the Programme is anchored in the ILO Global Strategy on OSH (2024–2030),[5] which provides a roadmap for strengthening national OSH systems, partnerships and coordination to prevent work-related harms, including from hazardous chemicals.

4. The Programme serves as both a "home" and a catalyst for action. It brings together and strengthens existing efforts to protect workers and support productivity and enterprise sustainability, while stimulating new initiatives across the Framework's strategic objectives and targets - particularly on prevention, risk management, measurability and capacity-building. This approach serves to ensure the Programme is cross-cutting so that OSH is systematically integrated into the activities of the Implementation Programmes and workstreams. Through these efforts, the Programme may advance linkages, partnerships and synergies among Implementation Programmes and other relevant workstreams, while promoting social dialogue and the meaningful participation of governments, employers' and workers' organizations and other OSH actors.

III. Objectives and scope

5. The Labour Programme brings together stakeholders from the world of work committed to implementing the GFC. The programme contributes directly to Target D7 of the Framework, which stipulates that "By 2030, stakeholders implement measures and strive to ensure effective occupational health and safety practices as well as environmental protection measures in all relevant sectors and throughout the supply chain". It also supports the implementation of additional targets relevant to the world of work, including A1, A2, A7, B4, B5, B6, E1, E2 and E6.

A. Programme objectives:

[4] GB.353/INS/5.
[5] The ILO Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health and its Plan of Action (2024-2030)

6. Taking into account Target D7 and other GFC targets relevant to the world of work, the programme aims to:
    - Accelerate implementation of the GFC by the world of work, in support of the fundamental right to a safe and healthy working environment and ultimately to contribute to a decrease in fatalities, injuries and diseases caused by occupational exposure to hazardous chemicals.
    - Engage and support governments and employers' and workers' organizations in implementing GFC activities and initiatives across national, regional, international levels.
    - Advocate for a multisectoral approach so that the views of tripartite labour stakeholders are included in GFC implementation efforts.
    - Support workplaces, and in particular SMEs, in implementing the GFC by promoting and facilitating access to appropriate guidelines, best available practices and standardized tools for safe chemicals management.

IV. Core functions of the programme

7. The Labour Programme will focus on the following functions:
    a. Promotion of the ratification and implementation of International Labour Standards
    b. Knowledge development and dissemination
    c. Promotion, awareness-raising and advocacy
    d. Technical assistance and support
    e. Multilateral cooperation

V. Programme structure and components

8. The programme combines a set of global activities with national and sectoral-level efforts to strengthen OSH in the context of chemicals and waste management. These components are mutually reinforcing and grounded in the fundamental right to a safe and healthy working

environment and in the principles of tripartism, social dialogue, decent work and the principles of prevention. Workers' and employers' organizations will be meaningfully engaged, as appropriate, in the design, implementation and review of activities at global, national and sectoral levels.

A. Global programme component

9. The global component, which may include regional activities, comprises the following activities:

Activity	Indicative timeline
Contributing to ILO's work on chemical hazards, including through research on global trends for chemical use and exposure, and analysis of national law and practice to inform its chemicals standard-setting efforts.	2026 – 2028
Supporting the development of ILO reports and technical briefs on chemical hazards.	2027 – IC2
Developing research and enhancing the collection, analysis and dissemination of data, trends and best practices on chemical hazards, with a focus on regional and sectoral priorities (e.g. silica, highly hazardous pesticides, asbestos); workers in vulnerable situations and those facing heightened or differentiated risks; and emerging gaps and challenges, including those associated with extreme weather events and changing weather patterns.	2027 – IC2
Increasing the visibility of chemical safety and OSH on political and policy agendas through campaigns,	2026 – IC2

events, webinars, and global advocacy, leveraging key stakeholder networks.[6]	
Including chemical hazards as a core topic in the courses offered by the International Training Centre of the ILO (Turin Centre) and the Masters in OSH.	2026 – IC2
Collaborating with the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC).	2027 – IC2
Supporting tripartite constituents in implementing the GFC.	2026 – IC2
Cooperating with related international processes on OSH related issues, including multilateral environmental agreements, inter-agency working groups and collaborative frameworks.[7]	2027 – IC2
Ensuring coordination with other implementation programmes, including industry sector programmes, to integrate OSH as a foundational pillar for Framework implementation.	2026 – IC2

B. National and sectoral components

10. Activities will include:

Activity	Indicative timeline
Supporting the ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions addressing chemical hazards (e.g.	2027 – IC2

[6] Including the IOMC and its Toolbox initiative, the GHS Partnership, and the Global Alliance on Highly Hazardous Pesticides.
[7] Specifically: the Basel Convention, the Rotterdam Convention, the Stockholm Convention; the Minamata Convention; the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Chemical and Industrial Accidents; the GHS Partnership; the IOMC Toolbox; the IOMC Mercury Group; the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership; and the Global Alliance on Highly Hazardous Pesticides.

C170, C174, among other relevant Conventions including C155, C187, C162, C184 and C176).	
Providing technical support for incorporating issues related to chemical hazards in the development of national OSH systems, including the drafting and implementation of national OSH profiles, policies, and strategies, as well as for tripartite processes addressing chemical hazards in the working environment.	2027 – IC2
Providing capacity-building and technical support on chemical hazards to governments, and workers' and employers' organizations, including support to strengthen their effective participation in social dialogue and workplace prevention, through ILO national-level projects, as part of the Safety + Health for All programme and the ILO Vision Zero Fund.	2026 – IC2

11. Additional activities may be defined based on evolving needs and priorities as identified by Programme stakeholders, with flexibility to adapt to different country contexts and sector dynamics.

VI. Stakeholder engagement in the programme

12. This programme is open to stakeholders across the world of work committed to advancing the GFC and its targets, particularly Target D7. Consistent with the Programme's tripartite approach, particular attention will be given to enabling the effective participation of employers' and workers' organizations in Programme activities. Stakeholders encouraged to engage include, among others:

- Governments, particularly ministries of Labour and related institutions responsible for occupational safety and health, social protection, and employment policies, as well as other relevant ministries (e.g., health, environment, or industry) involved in national coordination on chemicals and GFC implementation.
- Workers' organizations and trade unions, at national, regional, and global levels.
- Employers' organizations and business associations.
- Private sector actors committed to supporting workplace chemical safety, which could be in turn engaged through employers' organizations and business associations.
- National OSH and public health institutions, including research centres, training institutes, and labour inspectorates.
- International organizations, development partners, and financial institutions providing technical or financial support for labour- and OSH-related initiatives under the GFC.
- Academic institutions and civil society groups with experience in occupational safety and health, workplace chemical risks, or related research and advocacy.

VII. Finance considerations

13. Activities to implement the programme and its workplan could be financed through various means, including through in-kind stakeholder resources, as well as through the mobilization of additional financing. These additional resources may come from multi-donor trust funds such as the GFC Fund, the Special Programme and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), as well as funding made available by governments, international and bilateral development cooperation agencies, private sector actors committed to supporting workplace chemical safety, and philanthropic organizations. Furthermore, financial and/or technical resources may be

available through participating stakeholders, e.g. by assisting stakeholders in developing project proposals.

VIII. Synergies with other Implementation Programmes

14. Given the cross-cutting nature of OSH, the programme will actively seek synergies with other GFC Implementation Programmes that address worker exposure, manage risks in high-impact sectors, or promote preventive approaches.
15. Particular attention will be given to collaboration with the sector programmes under the Sector Component of IP2, with a view to ensuring the effective participation of relevant employers' and workers' organizations, including the:
    i. Textile Industry Sector Programme
    ii. Electronics Industry Sector Programme
    iii. Healthcare Industry Sector Programme
    iv. Building and Construction Industry Sector Programme
16. In addition, strong linkages will be established, as applicable, with the Issues of Concern adopted by the International Conference.

IX. Monitoring, analysis, and feedback

A. Monitoring

17. To assess the success of the programme, indicators developed under the GFC will be used to monitor progress and assess the impact of activities under the Programme, particularly those related to occupational safety and health. Further process indicators may be proposed by the programme stakeholders to measure intermediate progress against questions such as the following:
18. Has the programme been able to:
    - reach out to and engage governments and employers' and workers' organizations, together with other relevant OSH stakeholders, and mobilize new actors from the world of work?

- catalyse new implementing activities that strengthen OSH systems and workplace chemical safety?
- identify and widely share good OSH practices related to chemicals management?
- maximise synergies between GFC implementation activities?
- provide access to and/or mobilize additional resources for labour- and OSH-related implementation?
- identify implementation bottlenecks and practical solutions in addressing chemical hazards at work?

19. The ultimate benchmark to assess the success of the programme is whether it accelerates progress towards achieving relevant GFC targets, in particular Target D7 and related targets focused on worker protection and strengthening of occupational safety and health systems.

B. Analysis and feedback to the International Conference

20. The Programme will include a “lessons learned” component to identify factors that facilitate or hinder progress in advancing OSH within the global chemicals agenda. The resulting analysis and lessons learned will inform future implementation action, strengthen coordination and synergies across GFC activities, and provide relevant feedback to the International Conference.

X. Status of this Document

21. This document provides an initial working framework for the scope and structure of the Labour Programme.