



Occupational health and safety for young workers

Health and safety is a prime area of concern among young workers. A survey of IUF's young workers confirms this. Young workers are particularly vulnerable to occupational health and safety hazards in the workplace as they often lack experience, training and awareness of health and safety risks. According to the ILO "[y]oung workers also lack the bargaining power that more experienced workers may have. [They also often work in informal, unstable and/or non-standard forms of employment. With informal work arrangements, the risks for young workers increase as precariousness increases and bargaining power declines further. For this reason, unions should work with those in informal work arrangements to transition into formalized ones so workers may better access their rights. Diminished bargaining power] can lead to [young workers] accepting dangerous work tasks, [underreporting injuries], poor working conditions, or other conditions associated with precarious employment. Often young workers are employed in hazardous economic sectors [like agriculture, hospitality and domestic work] and their exposure to the hazards found in these sectors further increase their risk of sustaining occupational injury and disease.¹"

Workers below 18 years of age are often recognized in regulatory frameworks as a vulnerable group and given special protections that prohibit forms of child labour and hazardous work. However, those between "the ages of 18 and 24 do not receive comparable legal recognition or levels of protection in the workplace, despite their continuing and increased risk of injury.²"

Young workers have much higher rates of injury on the job than adult workers. "According to recent European data, the incidence of non-fatal injury at work was more than 40 per cent higher among young workers between the ages of 18 and 24 than among adult workers (EU-OSHA, 2007). In the United States, the risk that young workers between the ages of 15 and 24 will suffer a non-fatal occupational injury is approximately twice as high as that for workers age 25 or older (CDC, 2010).³"

THE EMPLOYER MAY WANT TO BLAME YOU FOR AN ACCIDENT

While young workers may lack experience, training and awareness, it is ultimately the responsibility of an employer to provide a safe working environment. National laws and standards, ILO conventions (See conventions on page 4) and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises are clear on this responsibility; Unions that have been successful in protecting workers' health and safety in the workplace use this responsibility as their point of departure. The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises state employers should within the "framework of applicable law, regulations and prevailing labour relations and employment practices take adequate steps to ensure occupational health and safety in their operations.⁴"

Nevertheless, employers in IUF sectors have increasingly implemented Behaviour-Based Safety programs (BBS), which focus on the individual worker and shift responsibility from employers to workers to ensure safe and healthy working conditions. By focusing on the behaviour of the individual worker, safety and health hazards, which result in workers suffering injuries and illnesses, go unaddressed. Behavioural safety programs obscure the key role that workplace hazards and hazardous conditions play in injury/illness/fatalities and the fact that employers control the conditions that workers operate in.



YOUNG WORKERS IN THE HOTEL, RESTAURANT, CATERING AND TOURISM SECTOR

“Young workers in [the HRCT sector] perform physically and psychologically demanding work, often with monotonous, repetitive tasks that require no creativity or initiative. Common hazards and risks that they may face include standing for long periods; carrying heavy loads; use of dangerous machines and tools; the risk of burns, allergies and infections; poor lighting (for example, in clubs, bars and casinos); alcohol consumption; and physical violence and harassment (Kines et al., 2013, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_625223.pdf).”

Through their unions, IUF housekeepers are demanding decent pay, secure jobs, safe workplaces/workloads and negotiations on measures to prevent the sexual harassment which afflicts workers in the hotel industry. In 2018, unions in many countries focused on conveying their demands to the largest global hotel companies, concentrating principally on Marriott.



YOUNG WORKERS, SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND OTHER FORMS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Young workers, particularly young women workers, report sexual harassment in the workplace as commonplace. In the hospitality industry in particular, workers can be subject to sexual harassment from customers, bosses, supervisors and/or co-workers. Nevertheless, sexual harassment and gender based violence (GBV) is a common occurrence across all IUF sectors. Again because of the types of employment and weak bargaining power, young workers are often more vulnerable to workplace violence and harassment.

RISK ASSESSMENT

A risk assessment should be carried out by the employer before all workers start work, covering: “the workplace; physical, biological and chemical agents; work equipment and its use; work processes, operations and work organisation; and training and instruction.”⁵ By failing to identify risks/hazards in order to control and/or eliminate them, employers instead “control” workers’ behaviours, leaving them to work around hazards that should either not be in the work environment in the first place, or should be addressed through recognized environmental and workplace hazard controls. As young workers and/or those in their first jobs may not have had any health and safety training, training of young workers should be prioritized by employers (and unions).

YOUNG WORKERS IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Agriculture is the number one employer of young workers aged 15 – 17 worldwide. “Agricultural workers have high rates of occupational accident and disease, as they are faced with a variety of hazards, including work with machines, vehicles, tools and animals; excessive noise and vibration; slips, trips and falls from height; the need to lift heavy weights and do repetitive work and work requiring awkward positions that result in MSDs; exposure to dust and other organic substances, chemicals, and infectious agents; and other working conditions characteristic of rural environments, such as exposure to the sun, extreme temperatures and inclement weather (https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_625223.pdf).”

A number of publications focusing on health and safety in the agricultural sector have been developed by and/or for the IUF. These include:

- Safe farms, safe workers, safe communities
- Harvesting Hunger
- Guide for the establishment of the Programme on Occupational Safety and Health for Working Women in French speaking West Africa
- Health, safety and environment: A Series of Trade Union Education Manuals for Agricultural Workers
- Improving working conditions in the cut flower industry



THE HIERARCHY OF HAZARD CONTROL

Occupational safety and health management systems, based on employer responsibility for keeping a workplace safe, use recognized management systems and occupational safety and health principles and policies to protect workers from occupational hazards and risks. These systems employ the hierarchy of hazard control used in industry to minimize or eliminate exposure to hazards. The hierarchy recognizes that design, elimination, and engineering controls are more effective in reducing risk than lower level controls such as warnings, procedures, and personal protective equipment.



The following four health and safety recommendations are focused on young workers and their unions:

TRAINING AND REPORTING OF INJURIES

Training of all workers on health and safety is crucial. But, as young workers lack experience and training compared with older workers, a specific training emphasis should be placed on young workers. Young workers often feel ambivalent about reporting injuries because they think they may suffer negative consequences. "All workers should understand the importance of reporting occupational accidents and diseases to the employer and be able to do so without facing disciplinary measures."⁶

EDUCATING YOUNG WORKERS AND INVOLVING THEM IN UNION STRUCTURES

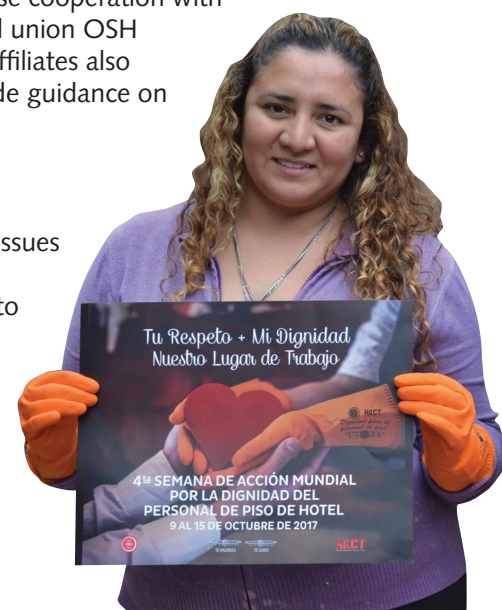
Trade union rights and organizing education are important to engaging all workers. However, because young workers are more likely to be unaware of their rights, many are afraid to speak up. Management often uses this fear as an opportunity to exploit, divide and manipulate young and also other types of workers.

UNION MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT ON OSH ISSUES

The IUF supports the right of all workers to have an elected and trained worksite health and safety worker representative; ensuring that workers, their representatives and workplace health and safety representatives participate actively in all elements of the OSH management system in close cooperation with their trade union. In doing so, young workers should be represented in all union OSH bodies as well as OSH joint labour management committees. Some IUF affiliates also have national or international health and safety committees, which provide guidance on H&S workplace rights.

HEALTH & SAFETY AS AN ORGANIZING TOOL

In any organizing effort, it is good practice not to assume what workers' issues will be. However, given the vulnerability of young workers to health and safety risks in the workplace, health and safety could emerge as an issue to organize around in a workplace where there are a lot of young workers. The health and safety issue should affect many workers and workers must feel that the health and safety issue is a real problem. There should also be a winnable solution or a range of solutions that people can see and understand. A victory with a safety and health issue can build workers' confidence to take on other issues.



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO) STANDARDS

The following ILO standards apply to occupational health and safety in the workplace and are also of particular relevance to young workers' health and safety. The ILO, which sets labour standards, is a tripartite United Nations agency that brings together governments, employers and workers.

- **77:** Convention concerning Medical Examination for Fitness for Employment in Industry of Children and Young Persons
- **78:** Convention concerning Medical Examination of Children and Young Persons for Fitness for Employment in Non-Industrial Occupations
- **138:** Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment; pursuant to the convention is not less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years
- **155:** Convention concerning Occupational Safety and Health and the Working Environment. The Convention requires that ratifying states adopt measures to promote the inclusion of OSH education at all levels of education and training, including higher education
- **161:** Convention concerning Occupational Health Services
- **171:** Convention concerning Night Work
- **182:** Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour
- **184:** Convention concerning Safety and Health in Agriculture
- **187:** Convention concerning the promotional framework for occupational safety and health

The ILO NATLEX Database allows one to search for national legislation in a specific country as it applies to topics referenced in these conventions.



This document is intended to identify the issues most specific to young workers, provide recommendations for engaging them in union health and safety initiatives, and give some resources on where to look for further information. The principles in this document apply across all IUF sectors. We encourage you to provide feedback and any additional ideas you might have to the IUF Secretariat.



- 1 Source: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_625223.pdf (Accessed October 5, 2018)
- 2 Ibid
- 3 Ibid
- 4 Source: <http://www.oecd.org/daf/inv/mne/48004323.pdf> (Accessed September 20, 2018)
- 5 Source: Facts, Protection for young people in the workplace, https://osha.europa.eu/en/node/6940/file_view (Accessed October 4, 2018)
- 6 Source: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_625223.pdf (Accessed October 5, 2018)

