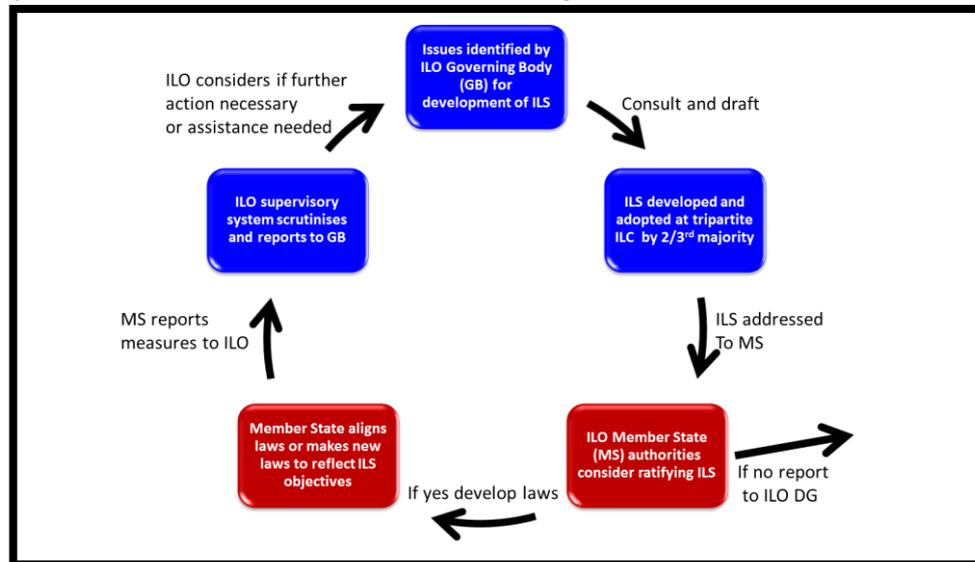


The ILO and OSH standards

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations dedicated to employment and social issues. Its headquarters in Geneva deals with the development and administration of international labour standards. ILO staff, deployed globally to implement programmes and projects, is known as the International Labour Office.

International Labour Standards (ILS) have been developed for labour administration; employment policy; working time; wages, social security, migrant workers and special categories of workers. However, more than half relate to OSH. ILS Conventions, which are legally binding on countries that decide to ratify them and Recommendations, which are non-binding guidelines are developed at the International Labour Conference which takes place annually in June and are adopted on a tripartite basis. Besides ILS, OSH-related issues are the subject of Codes of Practice which are usually developed on an ad hoc basis by a tripartite group of experts, to address specific sectors such as [mining, agriculture](#) or hazards such as [machinery, alcohol and drugs](#) and the associated risks at work. Both ILS and Codes of Practice reflect the involvement of employers, workers and governments, who provide the governance for the ILO, and who are central to helping deliver OSH performance at the workplace. For general information on ILS see the [IOE Fact sheet for Business: International Labour Standards](#).

The process for ILS development, ratification and supervision is outlined below. Workers, governments and employers should be involved in consultation at all stages.



[ILO standards on OSH](#) provide essential tools for governments, employers, and workers to establish sound prevention, reporting and inspection practices for safety and health at work. The ILO has adopted more than 40 standards specifically dealing with occupational safety and health. [ILO Codes of Practice on OSH](#) set out practical guidelines for public authorities, employers, workers, enterprises, and specialized occupational safety and health protection bodies. They are not legally binding instruments and are not intended to replace the provisions of national laws or regulations, or accepted standards.

The ILO has undertaken studies into those standards that can be considered [up-to-date](#) and those that need revision. Determined efforts have been made over recent years by the ILO and its constituents to

develop a more holistic, integrated and risk management approach to the fundamental issue of occupational safety and health (OSH), which culminated in the adoption by the ILO Governing Body at its 307th Session (March 2010) of a Plan of Action for achieving the widespread ratification and effective implementation of the three OSH instruments ([Convention No. 155](#), its [2002 Protocol](#) and [Convention No. 187](#)). This [Plan of Action](#) builds on the [2003 Global Strategy on OSH](#), the [Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 \(No. 187\)](#), and the [2009 Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations \(CEACR\) General Survey on Occupational Safety and Health](#).

The ILO Standard Review Mechanism could be an appropriate means to update where necessary, the existing standards.

The IOE position on ILO OSH standards

The ILO process for developing standards can take many years as they are discussed and adopted only at the annual International Labour Conference. The IOE supports the development of ILO standards when unchanging principles are involved and where there is broad consensus of the ILO constituents that regulation at international level is necessary to achieve relevant minimum rules that can be realistically, cost effectively and practically applied. They should be flexible enough to accommodate differences of development levels and changing needs. The IOE supports a basic legal framework, supported by effective enforcement and sanction arrangements at national level to ensure that global enterprises adopt minimum OSH standards. However, successful OSH performance requires more than this and there are many other worthy initiatives that deserve consideration. In fast-moving technical areas, guidance or codes of practice are a more appropriate way of facilitating good global standards. Now that a comprehensive policy program for OSH has been embedded at international level, the ILO should prioritize use of its expertise and resources towards practical assistance as close as possible to the workplace.

Why International Labour Standards on OSH are relevant to business

ILS on OSH are addressed to governments. Nevertheless, those governments that ratify a relevant standard have to implement it through national legislation. This can have an impact on business

- If existing national law or practice does not comply with the Convention, new laws or amendments of existing laws may result. As a consequence, businesses may have to change practices, domestically and internationally, which can involve significant administrative, process and equipment costs.
- Even if ILS are not taken up by national law, the contents of collective agreements and case law may be inspired by them;
- As ILS can be a relevant source of practical guidance for business in areas not covered by national law or collective agreements, many companies operating internationally have considered using them as the basis for global standards throughout their operations. International Framework Agreements (IFAs) negotiated between Global Union Federations (GUFs) and multinational enterprises usually make specific references to the ILO's fundamental Conventions which provide the industrial relations background for consultation and communication impacting on the management of OSH.

How does IOE work on ILS advance the agenda for business?

Serving a membership of more than 150 national business organisations around the world, through the Employers' Group at the ILO and at other international-level organisations and forums, the IOE: solicits the views of business on topics to be considered – and, importantly, set aside – for standard-setting activity. It prepares, advises and guides the Group in subsequent discussions involving governments and workers to ensure that business perspectives are reflected in debates and outcomes. Employers play a key role in the

ILO in formulating, implementing and supervising standards and ensuring that the needs of enterprises of all sizes and sectors, operating in different geographical areas and social frameworks are met.

Employers at national level must be engaged in the process of developing and implementing OSH legislation and guidance. The IOE provides assistance to members to help them implement OSH measures in an efficient and effective way. It provides assistance, when required, to help influence national programmes and systems. The IOE develops guidance on OSH areas of interest to its members and employers, in particular, focusing on topics where other international bodies have not developed authoritative guidance or information.

For more Information and Answers to your Questions

Please visit the [International Labour Standards](#) and [Occupational Safety and Health](#) sections of our website www.ioe-emp.org. If you do not find what you are looking for, please contact the IOE's Adviser on OSH Pierre Vincensini: vincensini@ioe-emp.com or call +41 22 929 00 15.