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Report Task Force 2: Integration of UN SDG 8 into professional education in African Universities

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There is firm agreement among decision-makers that the promotion of decent work, as declared by the UN SDG 8, requires concerted action from multiple sources, including employers, employees, national policies and agencies, as well as Higher Education (HE) institutions. HEIs are in charge of training future generations of occupational health and safety professionals. Trained by updated scientific evidence on the burden of work-related diseases and their prevention, skilled by socioemotional competencies and supportive leadership behavior, and guided by core ethical principles of justice and equity, these professionals will be prepared to make a difference to a world of work dominated by competition and exploitation. It is therefore important to assess the current state of implementing SDG 8 into curricula of HE training programs, specifically those offered to occupational health professionals, occupational safety experts, and HRM professionals in business life.

In 2020, a Task Group of experts in the field of occupational health and safety was set up within the Global Coalition for Safety and Health at Work (coordinated by ILO). Its first aim was to conduct an online survey on the integration of core topics related to SDG 8 to promote sustainable work into curricula of distinct study programs in a number of Higher Education Institutions in Europe. In this survey, based on 114 study programs from some 90 universities in 29 European countries, only marginal coverage of content with relevance to SDG 8 was documented. Few programs only stood out with excellent in-depth knowledge on modern work, its adverse effects on health, and ways of implementing prevention. Of interest, offering solid knowledge and stimulating critical, systems-oriented thinking were considered important teaching aims, but no major modification of traditional teaching programs was observed. The results of this survey, published together with Ulrike Bollmann last year in the journal 'Occupational Medicine' motivated the Task Group to extend this survey beyond Europe, specifically to economically less developed regions of the Global South, given their substantial challenges of improving health-conducive working and employment conditions.

Given close links between OSH networks in Europe and OSHAfrica, the Task Group decided to initiate a research cooperation with some academic program leaders in African Universities, with Professor Dingani Moyo, National University of Science and Technology in Zimbabwe, OSH Africa Council member and ICOH Council member, Professor Esther

Buregyeya, Makerere University, Uganda, and Ehi Iden, Nigeria, President of OSHAfrica , as responsible members from the African side. The current state of this research initiative is as follows:

The group has identified some 14 Universities in the five sub-regions of Africa with established academic training programs in the field of Occupational Medicine, Occupational Safety, Hygiene, and Ergonomics, and Human Resource Management (HRM). We are now preparing an online survey in which we will conduct interviews with academic leaders in these Universities to explore the institutional framework, (organizational) development and the structure and content of the current curricula of these programs. In this context, a modified version of the European online survey on implementing SDG 8 in these curricula will be conducted. With the help of Ulrike Bollmann, the team has recently submitted its project proposal to the Ethics Commission of the DGUV (German Social Accident Insurance). On May 8, 2024, the Ethics Commission has officially approved this project. In collaboration with the DGUV and supported by the SDG 8 Cluster of the International Association of Universities, led by the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, we are now preparing the data collection process, hoping that by the end of 2025, main findings of the survey will be available.

There is hope that this research collaboration will result in some formal future cooperation between European and African OSH experts and study programs, and that this initiative may stimulate further efforts to promote decent work within the challenging working and employment conditions in the African region.