



SIXTEENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Report of the Director-General

Second Supplementary Report: Activities of the International Occupational Safety and Health Information Centre (CIS) in 2000-01

1. This report on the activities of the CIS covers the 2000-01 biennium. For the report on the preceding biennium, see GB.277/17/3.

Objectives

2. The CIS pursues the Social Protection Sector's strategic objective of enhancing the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all. As the largest portion of the CIS budget is contributed by the InFocus Programme on SafeWork, the centre supports SafeWork's operational objectives of wide ratification and implementation of international standards, and mobilization of ILO constituents to target and take effective action against hazardous conditions in and around the workplace. The network of CIS centres includes labour inspectorates, social security institutions, government-chartered occupational safety and health institutes and employers' and trade union confederations; government-based centres can be found in ministries of health as well as of labour. The network of centres, in turn, serves all the actors in the world of work at the national level, particularly enterprises. This enables CIS to strengthen the ILO's knowledge base and to provide an information exchange, where those with problems and those with solutions can congregate to their mutual advantage.

Achievements

3. In a time of retrenchment in the ILO and in its member States, the CIS saw little erosion of its subscriber base, produced 12 issues of its bimonthly bulletin and supplied over 4,000 summaries of recent occupational safety and health publications to information vendors for sale on CIS's behalf.
4. To the extent possible, requests for information from individuals outside the CIS system continued to be answered or referred to centres or other qualified parties.

5. The CIS's FINNIDA-sponsored projects continued with reduced budgets. The African and Asian-Pacific Newsletters on Occupational Safety and Health published six issues each; safety-and-health information specialists from five countries were enabled to attend meetings of CIS centres and associated workshops. To provide continuity during donor consideration of a proposed project in the Mekong region, some resources were carried over into 2002. In 2000, the Asian regional project (RAS/90/M16/FIN) was overseen by an associate expert working in Bangkok with the occupational safety and health expert in EASMAT. After the associate expert's transfer to another post in Bangkok, the project was administered from Geneva with advice for the EASMAT expert. The interregional project targeting Africa (INT/89/M12/FIN) has been run from Geneva since 1995, when resources fell below the level necessary to maintain administrative staff in the field.
6. The CIS continued to participate in the ILO/WHO/UNEP International Programme on Chemical Safety, particularly in the production and dissemination of the international chemical safety cards (ICSCs). The ICSCs are produced by national-level institutions and subjected to peer review at periodic meetings of experts. Data was provided to the IPCS secretariat, and a chemist on the CIS staff participated in the four peer review meetings that took place during the biennium. The collection of ICSCs on the ILO web site was upgraded, and assistance was provided to a collaborating centre to put Hungarian versions of the ICSCs on their web site. A closed discussion forum was established on the ILO website for the benefit of the participating institutions and experts.
7. In collaboration with the Canadian National Centre, a portal site was created to enable national and collaborating centres to have more information about themselves and about their national situations than was possible with the centres directory on the CIS site. CIS provided special pages to link the ILO's web site with that of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.
8. General meetings of the CIS centres were convened in both years of the biennium. In 2000, the Health and Safety Authority of Ireland hosted the meeting, which was organized to permit participants to attend a two-day conference on occupational safety and health information that took place on the grounds of the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions near Dublin. In 2001, the CIS itself organized the meeting in Geneva. As in 2000, the meeting extended over two days and provided opportunities for the centres to communicate their needs and concerns to CIS staff. The 2001 centres meeting was preceded by two days of workshops with the general theme "Work smarter, not harder". A monthly newsletter for centres continued to be compiled and disseminated in electronic form by a volunteer editor in the United Kingdom; a paper edition of the newsletter continued to be distributed without charge by the Belgian National Centre.
9. Collaborating centres in Italy and the United States were added to the CIS network of national-level focal points, while two were consolidated into one in Germany. Ongoing contact with technical cooperation projects in Eastern Europe and Central Asia opened dialogues that, in the case of Ukraine and Kazakhstan, are expected to lead to the naming of national centres in those countries in the 2002-03 biennium. As of January 2002, the regional distribution of national centres was: Africa 20, Americas and the Caribbean 17, Arab States four, Asia-Pacific 21, Europe and Central Asia 28. For collaborating centres, the figures were: Africa five, Americas and the Caribbean five, Arab States two, Asia-Pacific 14, Europe and Central Asia 11.
10. The number of web pages viewed per month on the CIS part of the ILO web site rose from 13,400 in January 2000 to 280,500 in December 2001. (This 20-fold, or "2,000 per cent" increase was incorrectly stated as "2,000-fold" in the introduction to CIS's programme and budget for 2002-03.) The monthly number of visitors, as estimated from the number of different Internet addresses recorded for viewers of CIS pages, increased from 1,246 to

8,799 over the biennium. In so far as the geographical location of those visitors can be determined from their Internet addresses, it is clear that they are on every continent, not only in industrialized countries. The most popular category of pages was the ICSCs.

11. The second of the four volumes of the French version of the *ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety* was printed, and the indexing of a substantial proportion of the whole work was completed. In partner institutions, Spanish, Russian and Chinese translations undertaken in the previous biennium were published, and the Japanese translation was completed. Two large sections of the Encyclopaedia were translated and published in Korean.

Shortcomings

12. The Spanish version of the CIS bibliographic database was not expanded as intended. Due to misunderstanding regarding reorganization of national institutions, CIS was not aware until late in the biennium that the Spanish National Centre was continuing to produce printed translations of CIS abstracts, so no attempt was made to acquire the corresponding computer files for integration with their English and French versions. The mechanisms for this process that were put in place in 1998-99 remained fully functional, and will be reactivated in 2002-03.
13. All four volumes of the French version of the *ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety* were not available to be public.
14. Contrary to the expectation expressed in the report on the 1998-99 biennium, no further datasheets on the hazards of occupations were produced, and no data were added to the database of national occupational safety and health institutions. This is attributable to the reassignment of ILO staff who had been responsible for the projects, and in the case of the hazard datasheets, to the inability of a key national institution to participate in the process.

Financial situation

15. The regular budget allocation had to be readjusted because of newly emerging priorities in the sector, retarding the production of outputs and thus reducing extra-budgetary income from sales and royalties. In conformity with the commitment in CIS's programme and budget for the biennium,¹ expenditure was reduced accordingly, so the centre's accounts closed with the predicted level of reserves to begin the 2002-03 biennium.
16. In 2000-01, the ILO regular budget contributed 8/10 Professional work-years and 10/00 General Service work-years, compared with 11/00 Professional work-years and 11/03 General Service work-years in 1998-99. SafeWork also contributed US\$97,506 (US\$136,416 projected in GB.276/PFA/5/1) in non-staff costs in 2000-01, as against US\$175,520 in 1998-99. (CIS benefited from occasional help from General Services and Professional staff who were accounted for in SafeWork's regular budget, as well as SafeWork mission credits.) An additional US\$160,000 was contributed from ILO reserves for the French version of the *ILO Encyclopaedia*, bringing the total ILO contribution to US\$2,336,657.

¹ GB.276/PFA/5/1.

17. Extra budgetary income totalled US\$438,661 of which US\$306,943 came from the sale of information services, and US\$131,718 from contributions and royalties. Total income thus amounted to US\$2,775,318.
18. Total expenditure for the biennium was US\$3,257,340, of which US\$2,336,657 was imputed to the ILO regular budget (71 per cent of total expenditure, as against 75 per cent in 1998-99). The difference between income and expenditure was made up with funds carried over from 1998-99.
19. Expenditure on the accounts of the two technical cooperation projects mentioned in paragraph 5 above amounted to US\$38,317 in Africa and US\$108,943 in the Asia-Pacific region.
20. As in the two preceding biennia, the shortfall in income was compensated by staff attrition. A member of the Professional staff who took a field post at the end of the 1998-99 biennium was not replaced. Another member of the Professional staff whose time had been divided between CIS and another cluster in SafeWork became fully integrated in the latter. The financial officer of the CIS retired, and another member of the General Services staff accepted a post in another programme. The resulting inability of the remaining staff to ensure the continuity, and control the quality of the institutions and exposure limit databases prevented those potential outputs from appearing during the biennium.
21. Although several thousand copies of the English version of the ILO Encyclopaedia have been sold, no percentage of the receipts was returned to the CIS during the biennium. It is hoped that the agreement on revenue-sharing concluded between CIS and the Publications Bureau in 1998 will eventually be honoured.

Trends

22. The subscriber base remained adequate to cover the cost of subcontracting most abstracting and indexing work, of printing and distributing CIS's bimonthly bulletin and of making archive copies of documents. The number of subscribers to the bulletin did, however, decrease by 10 per cent. Accounts receivable remain unfortunately high: roughly one-third of billings remain unpaid, with the highest proportion in developing countries. It was decided at the end of the 2000-01 biennium to cease selling subscriptions to CD-ROMs that did not contain CIS data, to reduce demands on the official responsible for subscriptions. The decision was taken in the first instance because the subscriptions officer had taken on many of the duties of the financial officer, but it may prove possible to devote more time to the recovery of some of the outstanding subscription fees.
23. If it were true that the answer to any question can be easily found on the Internet, people would not still be sending queries to the CIS and its network; since they do it by email, they presumably have access to the Internet themselves. However, the relevance of the CIS's current bibliographic work can be questioned on the grounds that, because it lacks the resources to be exhaustive, it can only provide entry points into the literature of occupational safety and health. The fact that the Web is providing more and more entry points, if not the same ones, deserves study and reflection. This is being done within the framework of the ongoing overall review of SafeWork.
24. Time has not permitted a thorough analysis of the use that is made of the CIS web site. However, it is clear that the ICSCs are the most popular item on the site. Although no one card (that is, no one chemical) attracts more than a few hundred viewers per month, the total number of viewings of ICSCs exceeded 100,000 in December 2001, roughly 60 per cent of the total "traffic" on the CIS site. Other popular documents include the news and

events pages, the report on occupational safety and health management systems, commissioned from the International Occupational Hygiene Association a few years ago, and ILO standards (with pages linked to the ILOLEX database). The numbers suggest that full-text information, particularly “how-to” documents, should have high priority in the future. While the CIS can lead more users to more such documents by compiling references to the documents rather than by processing and publishing them itself, users prefer to have documents immediately in hand (or on the screen) instead of pursuing chains of citations, so the challenge will be to allocate resources in a sustainable way between ready-to-use publications, such as the ILO Encyclopaedia or the ICSCs on the one hand and secondary reference material on the other.

Geneva, 5 February 2002.