



SEVENTEENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Report of the Director-General

Second Supplementary Report: Activities of the International Occupational Safety and Health Information Centre (CIS) in 2002-03

1. This report on the activities of the CIS covers the 2002-03 biennium. For the report on the preceding biennium, see GB.283/16/2.

Objectives

2. The CIS pursues the Social Protection Sector's strategic objective of enhancing the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all by helping ILO constituents target and take effective action to improve safety and health and conditions of work, with special attention to the most hazardous conditions at the workplace (operational objective 3(b)). Originally constituted as a joint ILO-ISSA body with substantial support from other international and national bodies, the CIS has always sought to keep its impact on the ILO's regular budget as low as possible, consistent with the mission conferred on it.
3. The CIS is an important component of the ILO's knowledge base, continuously monitoring world literature on occupational safety and health through its contacts with publishers and with 136 focal points at the national or regional level (CIS centres). Summaries and citations of the most useful publications, as well as products based on the collected information, are disseminated electronically and in print. The network of CIS centres contributes to the exchange of information among persons responsible for the establishment and implementation of national policies and programmes.

Achievements

4. In contrast to the two preceding biennia, the CIS exceeded its forecast extra-budgetary income, though in the context of lowered expectations.
5. The CIS bibliographic and terminological databases (61,000 and 15,000 records, respectively) were successfully transferred from the MINISIS database management system to the ILO's mainstream Oracle database management system as part of

Office-wide harmonization measures. The rate of growth was maintained at 2,000 new records per year.

6. Eight new centres were added to the CIS's network, with the accession of national centres in Costa Rica, Gabon, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran and Ukraine, the recognition of second collaborating centres in Canada and the Russian Federation and the creation of the status of regional centre to formalize relations with the Arab Occupational Health and Safety Institute in Damascus. The target for the biennium was five. The total number of centres is now 136.
7. General meetings of the CIS centres were convened in Vienna (2002) and London (2003). The Vienna meeting was held in association with the XVI World Congress on Safety and Health at Work, while the London meeting was complemented by two days of seminars and workshops on occupational safety and health information provision. 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.
8. The fourth and final volumes of the French version of the ILO's *Encyclopaedia of occupational health and safety* was completed.
9. The number of International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSCs) made available to the world on the ILO's web site increased to 1,364. The ICSC collection remains one of the most frequently visited areas of the site: on average, over 150,000 ICSCs were viewed or downloaded in their HTML or PDF versions every month during the biennium. CIS staff participated in the four regularly scheduled meetings for review of the ICSCs that took place during the biennium. These meetings produced 263 new or updated ICSCs.
10. The CIS's web pages, with the ICSCs in the lead, accounted for 9 per cent of the total traffic on the ILO's web site, on a page basis. With a budget of around US\$3 million, or 0.6 per cent of the ILO's total budget of \$530 million, the unit thus provided information to ILO constituents and others far out of proportion to the distribution of resources. Page views reached the target level of 500,000 in the months of May and October 2003 (see appendix).
11. Two editions of a collection of national and international normative documents were published on CD-ROM in collaboration with POLNORM. A copy was distributed to each International Labour Conference delegate with the reports prepared for the Conference Committee on Occupational Safety and Health in 2002 and 2003. According to the ILO's Distribution Unit, 6,231 copies of Report VI were distributed in 2003 (all languages); several hundred further copies of the CD alone have been distributed to CIS centres, ILO field offices, technical cooperation projects and other interested parties.
12. Technical cooperation expenditure was \$104,575 (85 per cent of total allocations) under Asian Regional Project RAS/90/12M/FIN and \$102,488 (78 per cent of total allocations) under Interregional (mainly African) Project INT/89/16M/FIN. The largest object of expenditure under each project was a newsletter with a print run of 6,000 copies. Both are published by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health with editorial content from occupational safety and health specialists in the respective regions. Project funds also assisted staff members of CIS centres to attend the annual meetings in Vienna and London, contributed to an initiative of the Cairo Subregional Office to translate the ICSCs into Arabic and supported work by the Bangkok Subregional Office to improve the flow of information to homeworkers and the rural informal sector.

Shortcomings

13. It proved impossible to realign the publication schedule for the *Safety and health at work ILO-CIS bulletin* with the calendar. The delay being almost one year, billing of subscriptions, meeting deadlines of third-party vendors and other obligations remained difficult to meet.
14. Work on the trilingual aspect of the CIS's bibliographic database made little progress in the biennium. Although the Spanish translations of several years' abstracts were provided by the CIS National Centre for Spain, and longer term arrangements were made, higher priority was given to the "migration" of the databases from MINISIS to Oracle than to the loading of the Spanish data.
15. The CIS's web site remained incompletely trilingual. While parity in some areas (e.g. the ICSCs) can be maintained by referring visitors to other sites, a number of popular items (e.g. hazard datasheets on occupations) exist only in English, and others (e.g. chemical safety training modules) have been translated into Spanish and French but not yet made available for lack of staff resources.
16. An Internet portal site for the CIS centres network was not maintained by the centres themselves, as originally hoped, in spite of free consultation by the host of the site.

Financial situation

17. The CIS earned \$463,920.07 during the biennium and received \$2,463,231 (standard costs) from the ILO's regular budget through IFP SafeWork. Extra-budgetary income consisted of \$105,874.77 in contributions, \$65,575.86 in subscriptions, \$20,628.26 in royalties, \$265,682.21 in other sales income and \$6,158.97 in interest. CIS earnings represented 16 per cent of total income; 15 per cent was originally projected (GB.282/PFA/5/1). Total expenses were \$2,463,231 (standard costs) on the regular budget and \$375,343.26 extra-budgetary. SafeWork provided more than projected for the biennium in GB.282/5/1 to offset the immobilization of over \$566,887 in CIS earnings carried over from 2000-01. As a result, carry-over into the current biennium is expected to be in excess of \$600,000, and the CIS hopes to be allowed to allocate the bulk of the sum at the outset of the new biennium.
18. Budgetary equilibrium was helped by the retirement in 2002, without replacement, of a staff member paid from extra-budgetary resources. The CIS now counts 12 staff members.
19. The proportion of accounts receivable declined from one-third of billings in 2002 to one-quarter in 2003 – still too high though a reversal of the trend noted in paragraph 22 of the report on the last biennium (GB.283/16/2), and particularly gratifying because billings increased from \$159,690.53 to \$276,786.07 from the first to the second year.
20. No share of the income from sales of the print and CD-ROM editions of the ILO's *Encyclopaedia of occupational health and safety* was obtained during the biennium.

Trends

21. Although the Internet has spread widely during the biennium – some 115 identifiable countries and territories are represented in the addresses of visitors to the CIS's web site – far more people have computers than network connections; the digital library of

international and national normative documents compiled in collaboration with POLNORM is a response to this situation, and the positive reaction of Conference delegates and others to the collection suggests that it bridges one sort of “digital divide”.

22. In addition to the work with POLNORM and traditional active collaboration with the Bangkok Subregional Office, the CIS enjoyed a generally higher level of interaction with the ILO’s field structure during the biennium, enabling limited technical cooperation funds to be used without additional staff overheads.
23. In contrast to the 20-fold growth in use of the CIS’s web site seen in the last biennium, little growth was seen in 2002-03; the same trend was seen for the ILO as a whole. Whether this reflects saturation of the potential user community or the relatively little innovation on the site during the biennium will be revealed by the effect of redesign of the entire ILO site, including CIS pages, in 2004.
24. Delegates to the International Labour Conference have called on the ILO to make its information available to the world without cost. While it is undeniably immoral to withhold potentially lifesaving information from individuals who lack the means to buy it, resources are required to generate, organize and distribute new knowledge. This dilemma can be solved if parties exist who have an interest in assuming the costs on behalf of those who need information that they cannot afford. Governments and organizations such as the ILO have traditionally been such parties, and the Governing Body has approved the principle of the CIS renouncing some sales income in 2004-05 to provide broader free access to its information. It is hoped that the patterns of use of CIS information recorded during 2004-05 will suggest ways in which costs can be covered without full dependence on the ILO’s regular budget.

Geneva, 11 February 2004.

Submitted for information.

Appendix

The chart below shows the number of Social Protection Sector pages viewed each month of the biennium on the ILO's public web site. The segments of the bars represent the proportions of different sets of pages. The number of visitors to the CIS's pages varied, in round figures, between 25,000 and 45,000 per month, with roughly ten pages viewed per visitor. The ILO's site as a whole recorded page views between 2.7 and 6.2 million per month during the biennium, with the same maxima in spring and autumn as seen below.

Pages viewed/downloaded 2002-03

