

OSH and globalisation, challenges for today

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SUMMARY

Globalisation is a phenomenon that concerns all countries in the world at every level: economic, of course, but also political and cultural. It is hard to see any alternative to the dominant market economy model, which is asserting itself as the only way towards wealth and value creation. And within this model, it is free enterprise, generating jobs and boosting consumption, that is the unequivocal model of development for the world's economies. How can we then address the question of occupational safety and health (OSH) within the context of globalisation? How can we ensure that worker protection is not relegated to the status of a secondary concern? Safety and health inequalities between countries are such that it seems difficult to state without being hypocritical that OSH is already a value in the globalised world. The number of occupational accidents and diseases remains at a disturbingly high level, especially in developing countries. The sectors most affected are traditionally heavy industry, agriculture, mining and construction. In these sectors, there is so much economically and financially at stake that the obligation to protect workers' health is often viewed as a constraint, at odds with the requirement of immediate profitability. I sincerely believe that the prevention of occupational risks really has a different meaning depending on whether you work in an SMU or a large corporation. And, of course, depending on whether you live in a country with a high level of social protection, or one where social insurance is considered a luxury only for the richest. And the globalisation of trade is tending to further increase this gap. We have therefore elected to state that occupational safety and health "cannot be taken for granted" in a globalised world and that there are challenges facing all those, whether officials in institutions or managers of a business, who believe that working in a decent environment is a non negotiable demand.