Latin America and the Caribbean

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▶ **A 10-step tool for a safe and healthy return to work in times of COVID-19**

In times of COVID-19, occupational safety and health should be a top priority. Everyone must get used to the fact that the workplace will no longer be the same, and that it will be in this setting that a decisive battle against the pandemic will be fought.

Occupational safety and health must be considered as a fundamental investment to protect workers and their families and to ensure the continuity of companies.

The International Labour Organization makes this 10-step tool available to Latin American and the Caribbean countries. The tool provides a course of action to formulate and apply safety and health protocols at sectoral and/or company levels. It considers bipartite social dialogue between employers and workers as the basis for a safe and healthy return to work and avoiding possible new outbreaks of contagion.

Occupational safety and health is of paramount importance for the reactivation of production and for reconciling the objectives of containing the pandemic and economic recovery.

> Occupational safety and health must be considered as a fundamental investment to protect workers and their families and to ensure the continuity of companies.

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▶ Who is this tool for?

Employers and their representatives

Workers and their representatives

Joint safety and health committees

Occupational safety and health (OSH) professionals

Supervisors and middle managers

Institutions and organizations with mandate on safety and health at work

Other public bodies with responsibilities over the world of work

▶ What are the objectives of this tool?

▶ Assist employers, workers and their representatives to adopt preventive measures in the workplace against the risk of contagion of COVID-19 and other risks associated with the pandemic.

▶ Encourage effective social dialogue on OSH as a key element for a safe and healthy return to workplaces.

▶ Promote good practices at sector and establishment levels in the formulation of OSH protocols to address safety and health in times of COVID-19, based on, among others, preventive principles and social dialogue.
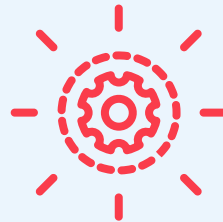
▶ What are the principles embedded in this tool?

▶ **Prioritize prevention and control measures** so that reopening of businesses and return to workplaces are healthy and safe to prevent further outbreaks of contagion that may endanger people's lives and the reopening process.

▶ Strengthen the **human-centered approach** to OSH, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019).

▶ Consider reopening of businesses within **national return-to-work policies,** regulatory frameworks and other regulations issued by public authorities in

charge of work, health, social protection, environment, as well as any other policy that is of relevance.

▶ Promote **effective social dialogue** between employers and workers in the definition of preventive measures to foster a preventive culture and achieve an increased degree of compliance to achieve greater success, through consultation and participation.

▶ Follow principles and methods defined by **international labour standards (ILS)** and ILO guidance on OSH risk management, such as the implementation of preventive measures (which can be
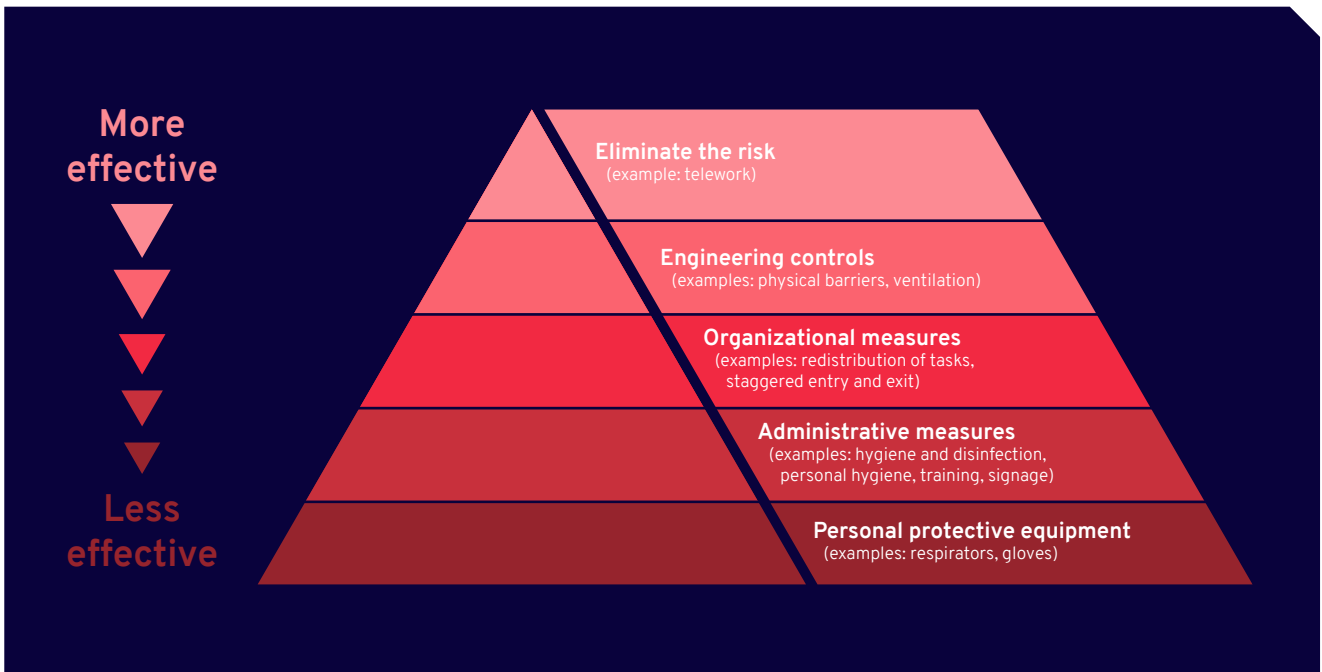
combined and applied simultaneously) in a hierarchical order that prioritizes measures offering greater effectiveness against occupational risk, as follows:

  ► measures to eliminate risks, where possible;

  ► measures to reduce risks through engineering, organizational and administrative controls;

  ► the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

► Chart 1. Hierarchy of controls

More effective

Less effective

Eliminate the risk
(example: telework)

Engineering controls
(examples: physical barriers, ventilation)

Organizational measures
(examples: redistribution of tasks, staggered entry and exit)

Administrative measures
(examples: hygiene and disinfection, personal hygiene, training, signage)

Personal protective equipment
(examples: respirators, gloves)

► **Adapt tool** to consider the epidemiological situation in each jurisdiction, characteristics of sectors of activity, workplaces, tasks performed and specific conditions of workers.

► As in any OSH management system, promote **continuous improvement,** through constant monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of measures with relevant updates and adjustments based on the review of these measures.

► Take a **crosscutting approach to gender and inclusion** in occupational safety and health, which guarantees specific treatment for women and high-risk and particularly vulnerable groups, avoiding discriminatory behaviours.

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▶ Where can this tool be applied?

▶ **In sectors of activity** to provide guidelines to companies and/or develop sectoral protocols for OSH for a safe and healthy return to work.

▶ **In companies/institutions,** whatever their size and activity, to develop OSH protocols for a safe and healthy return to work.

▶ 10 steps for a safe and healthy return to work in times of COVID-19

1 Set up a team to plan and organize return to work

2 Decide who returns to work and how

3 Adopt engineering and organizational measures

4 Adopt regular cleaning and disinfection measures

5 Promote personal hygiene measures

6 Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and inform on its correct use

7 Health surveillance of workers

8 Consider psychosocial and other risks

9 Review and update emergency and evacuation plans

**10** Review and update preventative and control measures

1 Set up a team to plan and organize return to work

- ▶ Convene social dialogue in a sector of activity where it exists, and if it does not exist consider setting up a bipartite team with the same number of members representing businesses and workers from the respective sector.

- ▶ Convene the joint OSH committee in the establishment where it exists, and if it does not exist set up a team with the same number of members representing management and workers.

- ▶ Integrate the team with the broadest representation of the different staff categories and disciplines of the sector or establishment, as well as with a gender approach.

- ▶ Integrate experts from prevention departments or health services that exist in a sector or establishment into the bipartite team.

- ▶ Train team members on the basic principles for the formulation and implementation of preventive and control measures.

- ▶ Inform team members about the steps to follow to organize a safe and healthy return to work.

- ▶ The role of the team will be the development of a work plan that includes steps to organize a safe and healthy return to work, and integrate the plan as much as possible into the business continuity plan.

- ▶ Ensure team is aware of national measures and guidance and is able to carry out the necessary consultations with the relevant bodies during the course of their activities.

- ▶ Draw up minutes of the team meetings including decisions taken, responsible persons, deadlines and implementation mechanisms.

- ▶ Ensure the availability and resources to allow full and active participation of team members.

- ▶ Effectively communicate to all workers in the establishment about the team and its work.

- ▶ Adopt prevention and control measures that are based on risk assessments that will assess the relationship between the probability of hazard occurrence and the severity of the consequences of damages, and depending on the existing or planned working conditions of each task and the particular conditions of each worker.

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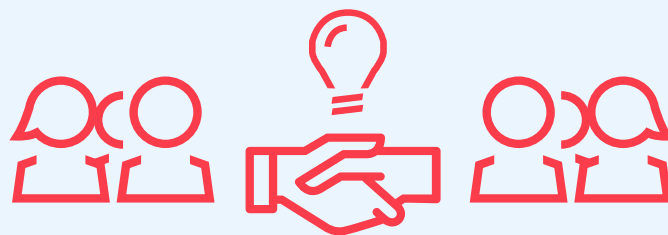
▶ Chart 2. Identification of hazards and assessment of risks
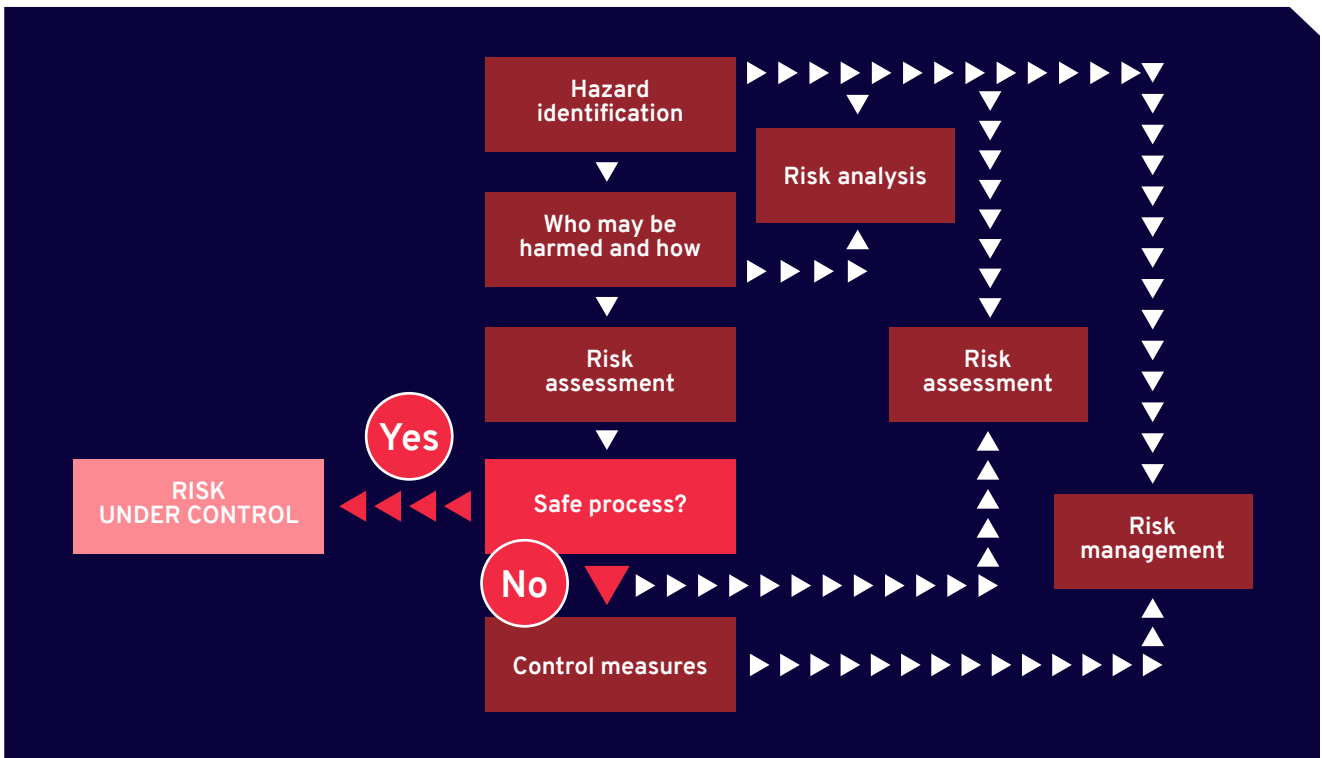

2 **Decide who returns to work and how**

- ▶ Ensure that prevention and control measures based on risk assessments are implemented before resuming business activity.
- ▶ Provide workers with all necessary information about the process and measures taken before return to work.
- ▶ Establish policies and procedures regarding the number of workers and visitors at the workplace.
- ▶ If possible, plan for resuming activities in phases from a minimum level to a normal level of operations.
- ▶ If a phased approach is adopted, identify critical staff who will assist workplaces during the phases of reopening process.

- ▶ If reopened at, or upon reaching, the normal level of operations, identify focal points to monitor prevention and control measures.
- ▶ Adopt staggered working hours, alternating working days and work rotation mechanism to avoid groupings of workers, if required.
- ▶ During the reopening process avoid the attendance of workers from higher risk groups (for example, those over 60 years of age, with pre-existing health conditions and pregnant or breastfeeding workers), and if not feasible, implement specific measures for these workers (such as telework, tasks with less exposure to risks or benefits provided for in national legislation).
- ▶ Consider the needs of specific groups associated with COVID-19 measures that

can prevent workers from resuming tasks in the workplace (for example closure of kindergartens, schools, geriatrics, childcare services).

► Prioritize private transportation for workers during the reopening phase and, if possible, facilitate parking.

► Consider public guidance for collective passenger transport and increase workers'

awareness and sensitization to prevention measures, including physical distancing and wearing of masks.

► Implement procedures to communicate and address issues related to transportation of workers.
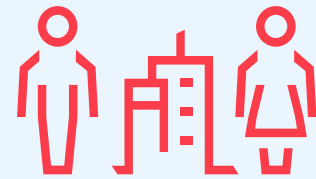
3 Adopt engineering and organizational measures

Avoid physical interaction and ensure physical distancing

► Promote remote work modalities, as much as possible.

► Review processes and workspaces to reduce interaction and physical contact between people (such as digitizing processes, digital commerce, dark stores) as much as possible.

► Ensure physical distancing of at least 6 feet.

► Install physical safety barriers and/or partitions to ensure physical distancing between workers who share the workplace, as well as between workers and third parties (such as customers, suppliers, visitors).

► Determine and signal the maximum capacity of the workplace and locals (such as meeting

rooms, offices, waiting rooms, dining rooms, elevators, bathrooms, changing rooms) in order to ensure a physical distancing of at least 6 feet.

► If necessary, and as much as possible, temporarily provide additional spaces in the workplace to ensure physical distancing.

► Organize access to the workplace for both workers and third parties to not exceed the maximum capacity and guarantee the minimum recommended separation (such as floor marking, signage of maximum occupancy).

► Organize workplace traffic lanes to avoid two-way traffic without the recommended minimum separation of 6 feet.

Ventilation

▶ Ventilate the workplace daily, preferably with natural ventilation, and in the case of work shifts, repeat the natural ventilation between each shift.

▶ In case of mechanical ventilation, maintain recirculation with outdoor air.

▶ Avoid the use of individual fans.
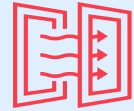
Avoid concentration of workers

▶ Promote the use of own transport for commuting.

▶ In case of use of collective passenger transport, organize on a temporary basis and as much as possible, establishment-specific mobility options which ensures a minimum recommended separation of 6 feet between persons (for example, a bus chartered by the company).

▶ Defer and/or make flexible enter and exit times to avoid the use of mass transport at peak times and groupings at the entrance and exit of the workplace.

▶ In case of work shifts, defer the start and end times of the shifts.

▶ If necessary, establish differentiated days of work attendance.

▶ Use common rooms (for example dining rooms, rest and changing rooms) in deferred hours to not exceed the maximum capacity that allows the minimum separation of 6 feet between persons.

▶ During the restart of activities, avoid external visits, and re-evaluate this measure continuously.

▶ Temporarily restrict meal preparation for workers in the workplace and allow packaged options.

Training and information

▶ Inform and train all staff on occupational risk of exposure to the virus, its consequences and the preventive measures to be taken.

▶ Organize regular training sessions and talks to ensure that all staff know and implement the agreed preventive measures, and keep records of workers who attend such events.

▶ If provided for by national law, inform staff of their right to stay away from a working situation that in their view involves, on reasonable grounds, an imminent and serious danger to their life or health, and the need to immediately inform their direct hierarchical superior.

Signage

▶ Arrange signage or visual displays with the preventive measures to be taken against COVID-19 in visible places of the workplace.

▶ In the places provided for hand washing with soap and water, or with 60 per cent alcohol gel, display visual guidance on how to wash hands correctly.

4 Adopt regular cleaning and disinfection measures

▶ Proceed with a thorough cleaning and disinfection of premises before return to work.

▶ Inform workers and third parties about cleaning and disinfection measures including a timetable for such measures.

▶ Prioritize the use of electrostatic spray surface cleaning.

▶ Use chemicals approved by national authorities.

▶ Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of facilities, machines, work equipment, surfaces and heavy traffic areas, as well as garbage collection.

▶ Promote a "I keep my workstation clean and tidy" commitment among workers and encourage frequent sanitation breaks.

▶ Avoid sharing items such as office supplies and tableware.

▶ Clearly delineate/separate workplace zones for specific tasks to avoid cross-contamination.

▶ Ensure proper maintenance/installation of heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems.

▶ Ensure cleaning and disinfection procedures for goods/supplies/mail/packages received.

▶ Restrict access to areas disinfected with chemical products that require a safety period.

▶ Implement procedures to communicate and address issues related to cleaning and disinfection of premises.

5 Promote personal hygiene measures

▶ Provide workers with the conditions and means necessary for frequent hand washing with soap and water for a duration of least 40 seconds, or with a disinfectant gel that has a minimum of 60 per cent alcohol with a duration of at least 20 seconds.

▶ If possible, install hand-washing facilities at the entrance and across the workplace/premises.

▶ Prioritize the use of liquid soap dispensers instead of soap tablets.

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- Prioritize the use of paper towels instead of fabric towels or electric air jet drying devices.

- Provide disinfectant gel with a minimum of 60 per cent alcohol to workers and third parties permanently, particularly at the workplace entrance, and if possible, install alcohol-based hand sanitizer stations at the entrance and across the workplace.

- Ensure proper drying of hands after the use of alcohol gel, particularly before coming into contact with ignition sources (such as switches, lighters, surfaces with static energy).

- Discourage the use of rings, watches or bracelets that limit the effectiveness of hand hygiene measures.

- Promote proper hygiene practices for all when entering the workplace, as well as when returning home.

- Avoid physical contact when greeting.

- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth without having previously performed hand hygiene and disinfection.

- When coughing or sneezing, cover mouth and nose with a disposable tissue or, if possible, with the inner face of the forearm/elbow (not in hands), dispose of the tissue immediately then wash hands with soap and water or with an alcohol-based disinfectant.

- Position trash containers or lidded bins, preferably with foot opening system, to dispose of tissues and promote separate waste management.

- Put measures in place to prevent the sharing of kitchen, tableware and personal toilet items, and provide disposable items as much as possible.

- Do not share of food or drinks at the workplace.

- Restrict or reduce the use of cash by prioritizing other means of payment.

- If necessary for the type of task performed, provide means for complete hygiene by shower upon arrival and departure of the workplace, with change or disinfection of shoes.

6 Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and inform on its correct use

- Implement a hierarchy in control strategy prioritizing engineering, organizational and administrative controls to prevent disease transmission.

- Identify appropriate PPE related to the tasks and health and safety risks faced by workers according to the results of risk assessment and the level of risk.

- PPE must be accompanied with instructions, procedures, training and supervision for safe and responsible work.

- Maintain, clean, disinfect and store PPE properly.

- Principle, PPE should not be shared with co-workers, however if duly justified, PPE could be shared if measures for proper cleaning

and disinfection before and after use are followed.

▶ Only use PPE approved by relevant authorities.

▶ PPE must be provided to workers free of charge to them.

▶ Workers must make proper use of PPE and report its loss, destruction or any fault in it.

▶ For disposable PPE, arrange trash containers or lidded bins, preferably with foot opening system, to dispose of them after use and promote separate management of this waste.

7 Health surveillance of workers

▶ Monitor the health status of workers and develop protocols for cases of suspected and confirmed contagion, in accordance with the instructions of national authorities.

▶ Develop protocols for workers with symptoms or confirmed contagion to not go to the workplace, to inform supervisors, to remain isolated at home and to follow the instructions of the protocol.

▶ Identify workers who have had close contact with people infected and affected by COVID-19 and follow the instructions of the medical service, health care professional and health authorities.

▶ Communicate confirmed cases in the workplace to the social security institution, for the purposes, inter alia, of access to the corresponding benefits for occupational contingencies, as well as to the national authorities for the purposes, inter alia, of their research and epidemiological control, in accordance with national legislation.

▶ If provided for by national law, take the body temperature of workers upon arrival at the workplace, preferably with contactless fever scanners and by competent staff, and apply measures from the previous paragraph to workers with a body temperature over the value adopted by health authorities (for example 100.4° F).

▶ Monitor the health of high-risk workers (for example those over 60 years of age, with pre-existing diseases or health conditions, pregnant or breastfeeding workers).

▶ Keep medical information of the workers confidential.

▶ Adopt a zero tolerance policy for discriminating behaviour against workers with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19.
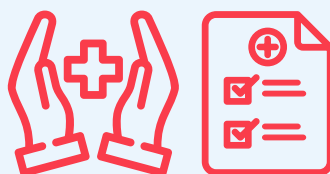
8   Consider psychosocial and other risks

▶ Ensure consistency in the design and implementation of measures across the workplace and implement effective communication of measures in place.

▶ Effectively and regularly communicate about the changing nature of work due to COVID-19 and its impact on workers and the workplace.

▶ Monitor interactions among workers, and with third parties, to identify behavioural changes that may indicate the existence of psychosocial risk factors.

▶ Make psychological counselling services available to workers in case of need.

▶ Encourage health promotion and wellbeing in the workplace through adequate rest, balance of physical and mental activity and adequate work-life balance.

▶ Promote the right to disconnect for workers performing telework.

▶ Provide information about ergonomic risks, particularly during telework and in workstations adapted to COVID-19.

▶ Pay particular attention to workers in confined spaces and performing dangerous tasks.

▶ Implement prevention and control measures for the use and storage of chemicals, particularly those used for disinfection during COVID-19.

▶ Promote a safe and healthy working environment free from violence and harassment.

9   Review and update emergency and evacuation plans

▶ Within the framework of the business continuity plan, review and update the emergency and evacuation plan of the workplace, considering, inter alia, the new distribution of tasks, the reduced number of workers, exit routes, muster points and safety zones, in order to respond to emergencies and avoid groupings.

▶ Develop an emergency and evacuation plan, if the establishment had not done so previously, with the following minimum content:

  ▶ Inventory of emergency items (such as extinguishers, dry and wet lines and first aid kits).

- ▶ Exit routes and their respective signage, meeting points and safety zones.
- ▶ Internal and external form of activation of the emergency plan.
- ▶ Evacuation time and organization of exits.
- ▶ Emergency brigades and responsible for coordinating evacuation.
- ▶ Training for members of the emergency brigades and the person responsible for coordinating evacuations.

- ▶ Diagrams of evacuation or emergency plan of the premises.
- ▶ Contact details of emergency services (fire, police, emergency medical services).
- ▶ Organize emergency and evacuation drills after review or development of the plan.

10 Review and update preventative and control measures

- ▶ Periodically monitor, in consultation with the joint committee or bipartite team, the agreed and implemented prevention and control measures to determine whether they have been adequate to avoid or minimize risk, and identify and implement corrective actions for continuous improvement.

- ▶ Investigate and document the origin and underlying causes of work-related injuries, illnesses and incidents, and implement corrective actions immediately.

- ▶ Integrate developed work plans into the establishment's existing OSH management system, and if such a system does not exist, develop one based on the work plan, with the same methodology applied and including other occupational risks.

- ▶ Ensure that the OSH management system contains the following elements: policy, organization, planning and implementation, evaluation and action for improvement.

- ▶ Include social dialogue in the OSH management system to bring together employers, owners, managers, workers and their representatives, through joint OSH committees, to implement the principles and methods of risk management for continuous improvement of OSH performance.

- ▶ Document key elements of the OSH management system, including significant occupational hazards/risks, measures, procedures, instructions, functions and responsibilities for the implementation of prevention and control measures.

- ▶ Establish and maintain records related to work-related injuries, illnesses and incidents, worker exposures, monitoring of the work environment and workers' health.

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▶ Submit the OSH management system to periodic audits to determine if its elements are adequate and effective to protect the safety and health of workers and prevent incidents.

▶ Promote a preventive culture by integrating the elements of the OSH management system into the enterprise as a component of management policies and arrangements.

💬 #ResilientWithDecentWork

▶ *Note:* this tool was elaborated by Carmen Bueno, Occupational Safety and Health Specialist of the ILO Decent Work Team and Country Office for the Southern Cone of Latin America, and Ariel Pino, Social Protection and Occupational Safety and Health Specialist of the ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean.