



OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

WORKSHOP ON SAFETY AND HEALTH IN TANNING AND LEATHER INDUSTRIES

27 – 28 JANUARY 2025
TURIN, ITALY

Information Note



International
Labour
Organization



Co-funded by
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International Training Centre

CONTEXT

The European Commission and the ILO are implementing the project “Advancing decent work in supply chains through sectoral social dialogue”.

Inspired by the [EU Communication on Decent Work Worldwide for a global just transition and a sustainable recovery](#), adopted on 23 February 2022, the project provides support to European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees (SSDCs)¹ to advance decent work in their respective sectors both at home and around the world, by enhancing their knowledge and capacity to promote more resilient, inclusive and sustainable sectors and industries.

Through a consultation process held in 2023, the Vice-Chairpersons of two SSDCs – textiles and clothing & tanning and leather – requested ILO support to facilitate an exchange of good practices and enable peer-to-peer learning with representatives of workers and employers and other key stakeholders in other regions. A safe and healthy working environment has become the fifth [ILO fundamental principle and right at work](#), which requires all ILO member States to respect, promote and realize its principles, regardless if they have ratified or not the fundamental conventions

This concept note for a workshop on safety and health in the tanning and leather industries has been developed by the ILO following conversations with representatives from COTANCE and IndustriALL Europe, who asked the ILO to focus on safety and health as this is a priority in the industry in Europe and remains an issue in the industry in other parts of the world.² In addition to the SSDC members, the Co-Chairs have explicitly requested the participation of tanning and leather representatives from other regions in view of their interest in establishing a broader social dialogue process with different stakeholders in the leather value chain.

To inform deliberations during the proposed workshop, the ILO has furthermore prepared a brief focussing on decent work challenges and opportunities in tanning and leather, including safety and health at work. The brief also includes information about relevant ILO instruments, guidance and tools that can be used to develop further action.

The proposed workshop will help ensure that employers and workers are better equipped and can engage effectively in efforts to foster a safer, socially responsible and more sustainable tanning and leather industry globally, including through the promotion of responsible business conduct.

1 The SSDCs bring together the social partners from EU Member States in specific sectors to engage in social dialogue to jointly identify solutions that address the most important issues and opportunities of our time.

2 Please see the joint COTANCE and IndustriALL-Europe joint [report on injuries and accidents at the workplace](#), developed under the project “Green Deal Leather: Towards Zero Impact of the European leather industry.”

PROMOTING A SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN TANNING AND LEATHER

The leather and tanning industries contribute to employment and income creation in many countries. These industries span a range of activities, from processing raw hides to manufacturing finished leather goods such as footwear, garments, and accessories. Key leather producing countries include China, Brazil, Russian Federation, India and Italy.³

The sector supports a diverse workforce, from skilled artisans to factory workers and administrative staff. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are particularly important, fostering entrepreneurship and local economic growth.

The European tanning industry is a leader in the sector, known for its technological maturity and high-quality standards. Human capital is critical, with a blend of experienced and young workers driving competitiveness. European tanneries emphasize corporate social business practices, enhancing relationships with stakeholders and promoting sustainability.

Moreover, the tanning industry in Europe must quickly adjust their processes and operations to new legislative and technical requirements from the EU, including the new EU [Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence](#) and the [Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market](#), as well to other international agreements. The industry faces increasing pressure to adopt more stringent sustainability practices, driven by innovations in materials and manufacturing technologies. This includes mainly environmental impacts as well as continuously improving worker safety and health. Cooperation between governments and social partners is essential for ensuring decent work conditions, anticipating skill needs, and increasing productivity.

Tanning involves chemically transforming animal hides into leather, using various acids, alkalis, tannins, and solvents. The industry includes both highly mechanized tanneries and those that use traditional methods. Despite technological advancements, significant health and safety risks remain, including exposure to hazardous chemical, as well as use of machinery and sharpen tools.

Workers in the leather and tanning industries face exposure to hazardous substances like chromium, formaldehyde, and various dyes, that can cause cancer, respiratory and skin diseases. Implementing safety protocols such as ventilation systems, air quality monitoring, and personal protective equipment (PPE) is crucial. Physical demands, including repetitive tasks, heavy lifting, can cause musculoskeletal disorders. Ergonomic interventions, proper training, and job rotation practices can help mitigate these risks.

3 International Council of Tanners. "Top 30 world leather producers (million square feet)" (<https://leather-council.org/information/statistics-sources-of-information>) - accessed on 28.08.2024.

Noise pollution from machinery is another concern, potentially causing hearing loss. Regular monitoring, providing hearing protection, and implementing noise control measures can reduce this risk. Additionally, the industry must prioritize workers' mental well-being by offering mental health resources and promoting a supportive work environment to prevent stress and burnout.

Overall, addressing both the physical and psychological aspects of workplace safety can create a healthier and more sustainable working environment and increase productivity and competitiveness in the leather and tanning industries.

In recent years, several tools were developed to address such risk in the tanning and leather sector. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU- OSHA) developed, in collaboration with COTANCE and industrAll-Europe, the [online interactive Risk Assessment for the leather and tanning industry](#). The United Nations also published a [Handbook on Occupational Safety and Health Aspects of Leather Manufacturing](#). And the ILO has developed a Code of Practice on safety and health in textile, clothing, leather, and footwear. The Code provides a roadmap for the sector to effectively address these issues and support the implement the new ILO fundamental principle on a safe and healthy working environment. It includes the provision of all OSH standards and tools relevant to the sector.

In addition to its normative work, the ILO promotes cooperation between governments and social partners at the industry level, where social partners play a key role in fostering a safe and healthy working environment and advancing other aspects of decent work. In Argentina, Pakistan and South Africa, the ILO has been developing projects to promote decent work in the sectors. The experience and lessons learned from these projects can also help to better understand the challenges ahead.

As both employers' and workers' organizations in Europe and the rest of the world are forming positions and increasing the support for their members to respect, promote and realize a safe and healthy working environment and other fundamental principles and rights at work, the proposed workshop will be a unique and timely opportunity to share experiences and find consensus on the best way forward.

OBJECTIVE OF THE WORKSHOP

The primary objective of the workshop is to promote peer-to-peer learning and exchange of good practices between social partners in Europe and other producing countries for ensuring a safe and healthy working environment in tanning industries.

It aims at:

- Better understanding new trends and developments when it comes to safety and health hazards and risks and global and regional frameworks to address these;
- Raising awareness of tripartite constituents and key stakeholders on the main risks to workers' safety and health and to the environment;
- Sharing knowledge and good practices on how to address occupational safety and health risks;
- Providing technical guidance for the implementation of the new fundamental principle and right at work and other relevant international labour standards on tannery workplace safety as well as applying sectoral tools to improve safety and health of workers in the sector;
- Enhancing the capabilities of workers and employers to further design and adopt measures to prevent and remediate occupational safety and health risks;
- Fostering collaboration and partnerships to promote a safe and healthy working.

In particular, the workshop will promote a discussion among the participants on the following questions:

1. What are the opportunities and challenges faced by the tanning industry to comply with international, regional and national legislation to ensure a safe and healthy working environment?
2. What are the measures needed to improve safety and health in tanneries and how can manufacturers, retailers and brands can be engaged to support health and safety in the leather industry?
3. What are the good practices adopted by the sector and how to promote their scale-up?

TENTATIVE AGENDA

The workshop will be conducted in 2 days.

Day 1

Opening Session: Welcome address and keynote speeches by representatives from employers and workers organizations, the EC and the ILO on the main challenges and opportunities to promote labour and environmental sustainability in tanning and leather.

First session: Promoting the implementation of international labour standards and national legislation on OSH in the sector

- Introduction to the new fundamental principle on a safe and healthy working environment: the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Right at Work and other OSH standards and tools.
- New developments and regulatory framework for the leather and tannery sectors in Europe and other countries.

World café: Practical tools and guidance to improve safety and health, including the ILO Code of Practice on safety and health in textiles, clothing, leather and footwear, the UNIDO Handbook and the EU Oira tool.

Second session: The role of social dialogue as a means to improve working conditions and productivity in the industry:

- Exchange of good practices for improving safety and health in the sector through social dialogue

Day 2

Peer-to-peer learning Interactive sessions where participants share experiences in addressing safety and health risks in leather and tanning, moderated by ILO experts.

- Based on concrete case-studies, participants will assess the main risks assessment and discuss measures to remediate the risks and promote transparency in the sector. Cases will focus on most common risks, inter alia:
 - hazardous substances (chemicals, biological agents),
 - safety in tools and machineries (staking, presses, reciprocating roller machines, drills and grinders);
 - noise and vibrations.
 - musculoskeletal disorders

Group Work: Collaborative sessions to develop proposals for improving safety and health in the sector

PARTICIPANTS

The workshop will bring together 25 participants from different groups:

- EU SSDCs members: 5 workers and 5 employers from the tanning sector
- Representatives from other producing countries: 3 employers and 3 workers from the Americas, Asia and Africa
- Representatives from employers and workers organizations: COTANCE, IOE, industriAll-Europe, IndustriALL Global Union, ITUC)
- Research persons: international experts and representatives from the EC, EU OISHA, ILO and UNIDO

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This workshop represents a contribution towards achieving a safe and healthy working environment in tanning. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, it aims to foster a collaborative approach to safety and health, equipping participants with the necessary skills and tools to address the safety risks in tanneries and promote meaningful changes in the leather value chain including in collaboration with brands and retailers. The insights and strategies developed during the workshop will serve as a foundation for ongoing efforts to promote a more safe and sustainable sector.

By the end of the workshop, participants would have:

- A deeper understanding of the main risks to the safety and health in tanning and to the reputation of leather.
- Enhanced knowledge and capacity to lever preventive and protective measures.
- Reviewed examples of OSH management systems for tanning industries and proposed corrective measures for its improvement.
- Developed actionable proposals to drive change in the sector.
- Enhanced capacity to better respond to requirements arising from different international, regional and legislation
- Identified potential areas for collaboration and partnerships.

LOGISTICS AND ORGANIZATION

DATE AND VENUE

The workshop will be held at the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITCILO), in Turin, Italy, from **27 to 28 January 2025**.

ORGANIZATION

Thanks to the European Union, the ITCILO will cover the costs of participation of delegates including the international transportation and the airport transfers in Turin as well as board and lodging in the facilities of the campus of the International Training Centre of the ILO.

CAMPUS LIFE

A THRIVING UNITED NATIONS CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY OF PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE FROM AROUND THE WORLD

- **Three organizations** from the United Nations system on campus
- **More than 300 training courses** and activities in a stimulating international environment
- **Thousands of participants** from all over the world

ENVIRONMENT AND SURROUNDINGS

Grab a campus bicycle and explore the Turin Centre. Located in a leafy park on the banks of the Po River, it's a great place for study and collaboration. Experience innovative learning and training methods in modern classrooms equipped with simultaneous translation services.

HOUSING, DINING, AND MORE

Comprising more than 280 private dormitories, the **Turin Campus provides a broad range of services for course participants and partners** including a free-flow restaurant, travel agency, laundromat, post office, gym, medical services and a reception desk open 24/7.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DIVERSITY

Participants can enjoy social events organized by the Turin Centre as well as by their course facilitators. Whether on or off campus, people from different cultural backgrounds have the opportunity to listen to live music together, cook and share traditional foods, or team up to play games and network.

INFO

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

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