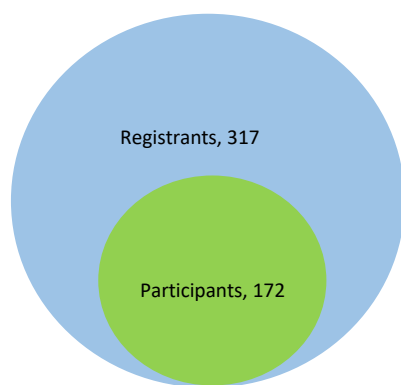


Strengthening Workers' Health and Safety in Chemicals and Waste Management Community Discussion Summary

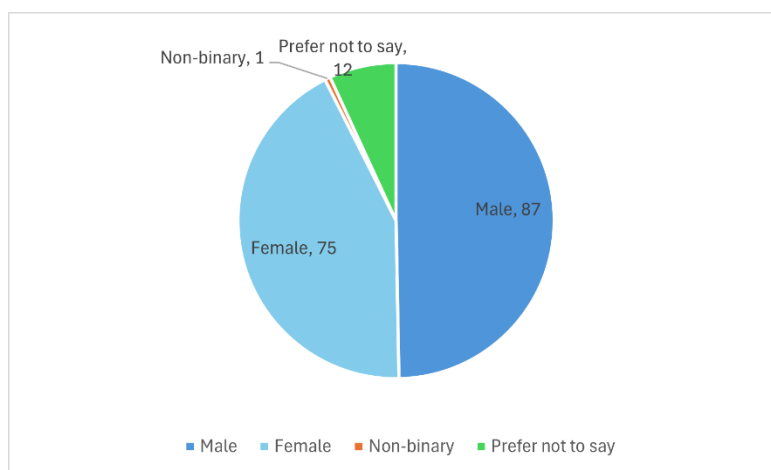
Title	Strengthening Workers' Health and Safety in Chemicals and Waste Management
Date & Time	21 May 2025, 14:00 – 15:30 (UTC+2)
Recording	https://youtu.be/WsyQPGLPtIw
GFC CoP	ggkp.org/ChemAndWasteCoP

This virtual community discussion, hosted by the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC) Secretariat, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Green Growth Knowledge Partnership (GGKP), focused on advancing occupational safety and health (OSH) for workers in the chemicals and waste management sectors. It aimed to highlight current challenges, practical solutions, and opportunities to implement the GFC's strategic objectives, particularly in the lead-up to the GFC Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) meeting in Uruguay.

Attendee Report



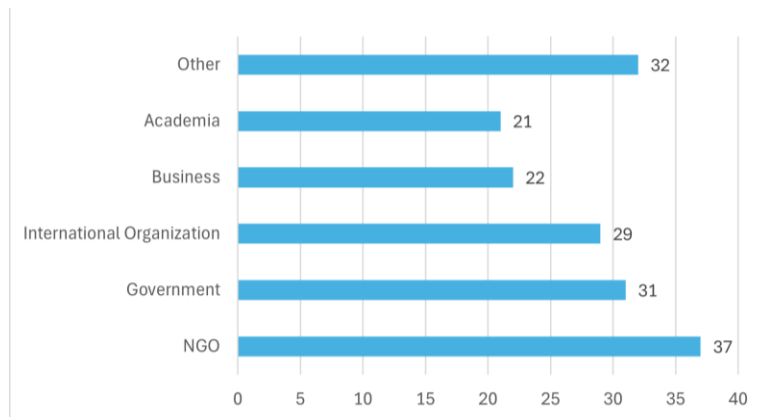
Gender Breakdown



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Affiliations



Speakers

Framing insights from experts

- Dorothy Ngajilo, Health and Labor Officer, Global Framework on Chemicals Secretariat
- Manal Azzi, Global Team Lead on Occupational Safety and Health Policy, ILO
- Halshka Graczyk, Technical Specialist on Occupational Safety and Health, ILO

Perspectives on implementing worker protection on the ground

- **Government:** Maxwell Memusi, Directorate of Occupational Safety and Health Services, Nairobi, Kenya
- **Employers:** Robert Marinkovic, International Organization of Employers
- **Workers:** Repon Chowdury, Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress and the Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation

Key Takeaways

- The Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC) offers a bold, collaborative approach to eliminating harm caused by chemicals. Launched in 2023, the GFC is a voluntary, multisectoral initiative that seeks to prevent damage from chemicals and waste through collective action. It is guided by five strategic objectives and 28 targets, bringing together governments, workers, industry, civil society, and academia. The framework aims to embed sustainability and safety in the production, use, and disposal of chemicals across their lifecycle and across all sectors.

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- **Chemical exposure in the workplace represents a major yet preventable global health crisis.** Over a billion workers are exposed to hazardous substances each year, leading to illnesses such as cancer, organ failure, and neurological damage. Vulnerable groups—including informal, migrant, and low-wage workers—often lack access to protective measures or occupational health services.
- **The GFC explicitly integrates worker protection into its targets, especially through legal frameworks, workplace practices, and multisectoral coordination.** Key targets such as A1 (national OSH laws), D7 (OSH implementation across supply chains), and E6 (policy coherence) offer a blueprint for countries to safeguard workers. The GFC calls on governments and stakeholders to ensure enforcement, training, risk assessments, and sectoral alignment to reduce exposure risks.
- **The ILO provides a foundational legal and institutional framework to support GFC implementation.** With binding labour standards such as Conventions 155, 170, and 187, the ILO offers a robust system for worker protection that aligns with at least nine GFC targets. The ILO's tripartite model—comprising governments, employers, and workers—ensures shared responsibility and helps countries build OSH legislation, strengthen inspection systems, and operationalise social dialogue for chemical safety.
- **Employers support risk-based approaches but require capacity-building and regulatory support to implement safety measures effectively.** The International Organisation of Employers emphasised the need to balance chemical use with safety by adopting risk assessment tools and OSH best practices. While some private sector actors are leading in safety innovation, many SMEs and informal businesses struggle due to limited technical knowledge, financial constraints, and unclear guidance.
- **Workers and trade unions are calling for legal safeguards, training, and meaningful participation in decision-making.** Worker representatives stressed the importance of rights-based protections—such as the right to know about chemical risks, access to training and PPE, participation in safety committees, and compensation for harm. They emphasised the inclusion of vulnerable groups, just transition principles, and supply chain accountability to ensure safe and dignified working environments across sectors.
- **Systemic barriers such as weak enforcement, under-resourced labour ministries, and low public awareness continue to hinder progress.** Even where legislation exists, poor implementation

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remains a significant obstacle. Many governments lack the resources to train inspectors or monitor workplace conditions. Informal sectors often fall outside the scope of regulation. Cultural factors, low literacy rates, and poor inter-ministerial coordination further impede effective chemical safety interventions.

- **Urgent action is needed to translate the GFC's goals into country-level outcomes through investment, inclusion, and knowledge-sharing.** Progress requires national action plans that involve all stakeholders, particularly labour ministries and workers. Countries must invest in infrastructure, legislation, education, and digital tools to improve monitoring and enforcement.

Conclusion

The GFC promotes a multisectoral approach to protecting human health and the environment from harmful chemicals and waste. This online discussion emphasised the urgent need to strengthen worker protection through legal frameworks, occupational safety practices, and intersectoral collaboration. With GFC implementation now underway, participants called for coordinated action, investment, and the exchange of knowledge to ensure safer, healthier workplaces.

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