European Bank
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BN18
Establishing an effective OSH committee

EBRD briefing note

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Introduction

A workplace occupational safety and health (OSH) committee brings management and workers together, on an equal footing, to identify hazards, agree controls and keep health and safety performance under review. Where it works well, it is one of the most effective ways an organisation can build a genuine safety culture, because the people doing the work help to shape the arrangements that protect them.

EBRD Environmental and Social Requirement 4 (ESR 4): Health, safety and security encourages clients to establish a workplace OSH committee with a balanced representation of management and elected workplace representatives that are diverse and inclusive. This was introduced as one of the notable changes to the EBRD's health and safety requirements taking effect from 1 January 2025, and it sits alongside related ESR 4 requirements on worker consultation, information, training and supervision.

This briefing note explains why an OSH committee matters, what ESR 4 expects of clients, and how to set up and run a committee that is credible, representative and genuinely useful, rather than a box-ticking exercise. It should be read alongside the client's project-specific environmental and social management plan (ESMP) or health and safety plan, and adapted to the size, risk profile and legal context of the project.

Why establish an OSH committee

An effective OSH committee delivers benefits well beyond compliance.

- It gives workers a genuine voice in decisions that affect their health and safety, which builds trust and improves reporting of hazards, near misses and concerns.
- It draws on the practical, on-the-ground knowledge of the workforce to identify hazards and shape realistic, workable controls.
- It strengthens workplace inspections, risk assessments and accident/incident investigations by involving people who understand how the work is actually done.
- It helps to embed diverse and inclusive perspectives – including those of women, migrant workers and other groups who may otherwise be underrepresented – in OSH decision-making.
- It demonstrates to the EBRD, regulators, other lenders and communities the client's commitment to health and safety and that it manages it as a shared responsibility.
- It promotes a positive safety culture by providing an opportunity for management, workers and contractors to regularly discuss health and safety matters, share lessons learned and review concerns jointly.
- Over time, it supports lower accident rates, reduced absenteeism and greater productivity.
- It provides opportunities for committee members and the wider workforce to expand their OSH knowledge and competence through shared learning, while enabling the organisation to anticipate and address changes in work practices, processes, technology, staffing or work organisation that may affect health and safety.

What ESR 4 requires

ESR 4 does not prescribe a single model for an OSH committee, but the client's approach should reflect the following principles set out in the EBRD ESR 4 Guidance Note:

Balanced representation of management and workers: the committee should not be management-only. It should include elected project worker representatives alongside management representatives, with at least equal or majority worker representation.

Diverse and inclusive membership: composition should actively reflect the diversity of the workforce (for example, by gender, employment type, different shifts, sites and nationality/language group), not just whoever volunteers.

Elected worker representatives: worker members should be chosen by their peers through a transparent election process, not simply appointed by management.

Active role in the OSH management system: the committee should participate in workplace inspections, OSH audits, risk assessments, the development of safe systems of work and accident/incident investigations, not just receive information after the event. The committee should also consider proposed changes to work practices, hazardous materials, processes, technology and work organisation, including the impact of targets and staffing levels, that could affect OSH, in good time and at the design stage.

Consultation, not just communication: the committee is a mechanism for two-way consultation with workers on OSH matters, consistent with ESR 4's wider requirements on worker information, consultation and grievance mechanisms.

Proportionate to project risk and size: the depth and formality of the committee (frequency of meetings, number of subcommittees, etc.) should be proportionate to the scale, complexity and risk profile of the project.

Setting up the OSH committee

Setting up a credible OSH committee is itself a process that benefits from planning and should be done at the start of a project. The following steps reflect good practice and should be adapted to the project's context.

Step 1: Scope and size of the committee

Determine whether one committee covers the whole project or whether site-level/contractor-level subcommittees feeding into a central committee are more appropriate, based on project size, number of sites and workforce spread.

Typically involved: senior/project management, OSH adviser, trade union representatives and/or employee representatives.

Step 2: Define composition

Set the number of management and worker seats, aiming for balanced representation, but with at least equal or majority worker representation. Actively plan for diversity – for example, seats reserved for women workers, different trades, shifts, contractors and language groups.

Typically involved: senior/project management, OSH adviser.

Step 3: Run a transparent election for worker representatives

Publicise the process to all project workers (including contractor and subcontractor staff, where relevant), invite nominations and hold a fair vote. Document the process and results.

Typically involved: OSH adviser, worker liaison, all project workers, if present at the project, trade union representatives.

Step 4: Agree terms of reference

Set out the committee's purpose, authority, membership, chair/secretary roles, minimum numbers, meeting frequency, escalation routes and how decisions/recommendations are recorded and actioned. (See example terms of reference in Annex A.)

Typically involved: committee (draft by management, agreed jointly).

Step 5: Induct and train members

Provide all members – management and worker representatives alike – with induction covering the committee's role, basic OSH principles, risk assessment and how to raise and escalate concerns.

Typically involved: OSH adviser and trade unions.

Step 6: Embed the committee in the OSH management system

Give the committee a defined role in workplace inspections, OSH audits, risk assessments, safe system of work development and accident/incident investigations, so its input can be actively used, not just noted.

Typically involved: site/project management, OSH adviser.

Step 7: Meet, record and follow up

Hold meetings at the agreed frequency, keep minutes and an action log, track corrective actions to completion, and report a summary of committee activity in project OSH reporting.

Typically involved: chair, secretary, all members.

Step 8: Review effectiveness periodically

Periodically review whether the committee is representative, active and making a difference, and adjust composition, frequency or ways of working if it is not.

Typically involved: senior management, OSH adviser, if present at the project, trade union representatives.

Roles and responsibilities

Chair: leads meetings, invites input to the agenda, sets the agenda jointly with the secretary, and ensures the committee has the authority and information it needs to function. Often a senior manager but may rotate.

Secretary: organises meetings, circulates agendas and papers in advance, takes minutes and tracks the action log to close-out.

Management representatives: bring management's perspective and authority to commit resources, report back to senior management on committee recommendations, and ensure actions are taken and resourced.

Elected worker representatives: represent the views, concerns and suggestions of their constituency (their trade, shift, site or employer), feed information back to the workers they represent during paid work time, having been provided with facilities to consult their members, and participate in inspections and investigations.

OSH adviser: provides technical input, supports risk assessments and investigations, tracks performance data and helps the committee interpret legal, health and ESR 4 requirements.

Contractor/subcontractor representatives: where contractors carry out significant work, ensure their workforce's OSH concerns and performance are represented and that lessons learned flow both ways between client and contractor.

Measuring the OSH committee's effectiveness

To be more than a discussion forum, the committee should have a defined, active role across the client's OSH management system, consistent with ESR 4.

- Workplace inspections: committee members participate in, or review the findings of, regular OSH inspections and tours.
- Risk assessments: worker representatives contribute practical, task-level knowledge to risk assessments and review of control measures.
- Safe systems of work: the committee reviews and comments on new or revised work procedures/instructions before they are rolled out.
- Accident and incident investigations: committee involvement in investigations helps to identify root causes and builds workforce confidence that events are taken seriously (see EBRD briefing note BN11 on accident and incident procedures).
- Monitoring and reporting: the committee reviews leading and lagging indicators (inspections completed, near misses, lost-time injuries, corrective actions closed) and raises trends of concern.
- Worker consultation and grievances: the committee is one channel (not the only one) through which workers can raise OSH concerns, alongside the project's grievance mechanism.
- Emerging and cross-cutting risks: the committee can help surface impacts of work organisation, psychosocial risks, gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) concerns and worker welfare/accommodation issues for management attention, working with specialised channels, where needed.
- Worker health and inclusion: the committee can review anonymised sickness absence trends, identify opportunities for preventive action, and consider whether appropriate reasonable adjustments and Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) are in place for workers who may require them, while respecting medical confidentiality and individual privacy.

Summary

An effective OSH committee arrangement should confirm whether:

- the committee has a balanced representation of management and elected worker representatives
- the election of worker representatives is transparent, fair and open to all project workers, including contractors
- the membership is diverse and inclusive of the workforce (gender, trades, employment type, shifts, language groups, employers)
- there are written terms of reference with clear roles, authority and meeting arrangements (see Annex A)
- the committee plays an active role in inspections, audits, risk assessments and investigations, rather than receiving information after the fact
- meetings are held at the agreed frequency, minuted, and whether actions are tracked to close-out
- worker representatives report back to, and gather concerns from, the workers they represent
- committee activity is reported into the project's wider OSH monitoring and management reporting
- the committee's composition and effectiveness are reviewed periodically and adjusted as the project changes.

References

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See also:

- BN06: Organising a workplace induction
- BN10: Management of contractors and subcontractors
- BN11: Accident and incident procedures
- BN12: Workplace risk assessment

Annex A: example OSH committee terms of reference

These example terms of reference should be adapted to the client's organisational structure, national legal requirements and the project's environmental and social action plan. Defined roles and numbers are illustrative.

1. Purpose and scope

This OSH committee exists to promote and oversee occupational safety and health performance on a project/site, through joint consultation between management and project workers. It applies to all employees, contractors, subcontractors and visitors working under the organisation's control on the project.

2. Membership and composition

Chair

Number: 1. Notes: [Role, e.g. Project Manager]. How filled: appointed by management.

Secretary

Number: 1. Notes: [Role, e.g. H&S Adviser]. How filled: appointed by management.

Management representatives

Number: [2-3]. Notes: [Site/discipline leads]. How filled: appointed by management.

Elected worker representatives

If Chair, Secretary and management reps add up to four, this needs to be matched by worker representatives.

Number: [4-5]. Notes: representing shifts/trades/contractors, reflecting workforce diversity. How filled: elected by project workers.

Contractor/subcontractor representatives

Number: [1-2]. Notes: where contractors form a significant part of the workforce. How filled: elected/nominated.

3. Roles and authority

- The committee is consultative and advisory; it makes recommendations to project/site management, who retain accountability for OSH decisions and resourcing.
- Management commits to responding to committee recommendations within an agreed timeframe (for example, 10 working days) and to explaining any recommendation not accepted.
- Any committee member may raise an item for discussion; worker representatives may raise concerns on behalf of the workers they represent, including anonymously, where appropriate.

4. Meeting arrangements

Frequency

[Monthly/four-weekly], with additional meetings following any serious incident.

Minimum number

[e.g. at least one management and one worker representative present].

Standing agenda items

Actions from last meeting; incidents, near misses and investigations since last meeting; inspection findings; risk assessment updates; anticipated project changes; worker concerns raised; training and induction; any other business.

Minutes and actions

Circulated within [5 working days]; action log maintained and reviewed at each meeting until closed.

Reporting upwards

Summary of committee activity included in [monthly] project OSH report.

5. Election procedure for worker representatives

Step 1: Announce the election

Announce the election to all project workers (including contractors), explaining the role, time commitment and how to stand.

Involves: H&S adviser/worker liaison.

Step 2: Invite nominations

Invite nominations (self-nomination permitted) over a set period, aiming for a spread of shifts, trades and employers.

Involves: all project workers.

Step 3: Hold a vote

Hold a vote (e.g. by shift or work group) using a method appropriate to literacy levels and site conditions.

Involves: all project workers.

Step 4: Confirm and publish results

Confirm and publish results, and record the process for transparency.

Involves: H&S adviser.

Step 5: Re-run the election

Re-run the election at agreed intervals (e.g. annually) or when a representative leaves the project.

Involves: H&S adviser.

6. Committee effectiveness self-assessment (template)

To be completed periodically (e.g. every six months) by the chair and secretary jointly.

Balanced and diverse membership maintained

Yes/No/Partial: [complete]. Comments/follow-up action: [complete].

All worker seats filled through fair election

Yes/No/Partial: [complete]. Comments/follow-up action: [complete].

Meetings held at agreed frequency and quorate

Yes/No/Partial: [complete]. Comments/follow-up action: [complete].

Committee involved in inspections/risk assessments/investigations

Yes/No/Partial: [complete]. Comments/follow-up action: [complete].

Actions from previous meetings closed out on time

Yes/No/Partial: [complete]. Comments/follow-up action: [complete].

Worker representatives reporting back to their constituency

Yes/No/Partial: [complete]. Comments/follow-up action: [complete].

Committee summary reported into project OSH reporting

Yes/No/Partial: [complete]. Comments/follow-up action: [complete].

Reviewed by:

Name and position: [complete].

Date:

[complete].

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