

The Urbino Charter: a Declaration for the well-being of working people

G. La Torre¹, G. Evangelista¹, S. Di Mario¹, D. Grima¹, A. Polimeni²

¹Department of Public health and Infectious Diseases, Sapienza University of Rome; ²Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Sciences, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Abstract

The “Urbino Charter” is a document aimed at promoting the well-being of the working person that the Olympus Observatory of the University of Urbino Carlo Bo and the Rubes Triva National Foundation, a joint body in the field of environmental hygiene, presented in Bilbao at a public conference in March 2023. The Charter has the objective of stimulating reflection on the issues related to prevention while drawing attention to the essential values for the effective protection of workers’ health, safety and well-being.

This commentary has the aim of presenting the 10 statements of the Chart, from a perspective of Occupational health and safety. *Clin Ter 2023; 174 (6):486-490 doi: 10.7417/CT.2023.5014*

Key words: well-being, workplace, prevention, health and safety, workers, Urbino Charter

The “Urbino Charter” is a document aimed at promoting the well-being of the working person that the Olympus Observatory of the University of Urbino Carlo Bo and the Rubes Triva National Foundation, a joint body in the field of environmental hygiene, presented in Bilbao at a public conference in March 2023. The Charter has the objective of stimulating reflection on the issues related to prevention while drawing attention to the essential values for the effective protection of workers’ health, safety and well-being.

At the website of the presentation of the Charter (<https://www.festivalsalutesicurezzaalavoro.it/urbino-charter/>) it is clearly reported that “people’s psychological and physical integrity is an absolute and inalienable right”. This charter is intended to make a reflection on the issues related to the prevention on the workplace, and indicates values not only for an effective protection of health and safety, but also for a real well-being of employees.

This commentary has the aim of presenting the 10 statements of the Chart, from a perspective of Occupational health and safety.

1) Work, however it may be carried out, must be inspired by values such as safeguarding a person’s life, their dignity, the free expression of their personality, and health and safety- intended as their physical, psychological, relational, social and organizational well-being

This passage underscores the importance of upholding core values in all types of work. It asserts that work should be based on essential principles, including:

Protection of Life: work should not endanger lives but rather aim to preserve and enhance them.

Dignity of the Individual: workers should be treated with respect and dignity, free from unjust or inhumane treatment such as all forms of forced or compulsory labor.

Freedom of Personal Expression: every individual should have the freedom to express their individuality at work without oppression. We must ensure the elimination of discrimination in employment and profession.

Safety and Health: work should ensure the safety and health of those involved, encompassing physical, psychological, relational, social, and organizational well-being, including a healthy work environment.

These principles reflect a holistic approach to work, placing workers’ rights and well-being at the core of work activities. Such principles are often enshrined in labor laws and regulations and are promoted by international organizations like the International Labour Organization (ILO)¹ and the European Union to ensure workers’ rights worldwide.

The ultimate goal for any organization should be to create a work environment where workers are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness, leading to their satisfaction and productivity, as well as the stability and success of the organization itself². Achieving these values can be complex and challenging in some work situations and requires the commitment of all involved parties, including workers, employers, and government institutions.

Correspondence: G. La Torre, Department of Public health and Infectious Diseases, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

2) People first, then work. Under no circumstances can the loss of life or health constitute a necessary sacrifice

Modernity has led to a heavy focus on work, often pushing health and life into the background. However, it's imperative to remember that life and health are non-negotiable priorities. Under no circumstances, whether personal or professional, can the loss of life or health be justified as a necessary sacrifice.

Human life is of immeasurable value, and health is its cornerstone. Every individual possesses intrinsic worth, and preserving life and health should be society's utmost priority.

While work is crucial for individuals, it should never compromise their health or life. Unfortunately, in many cases, working conditions put employees' health at risk. Ensuring safe workplaces and practices that do not jeopardize workers' physical and mental well-being is fundamental.

According to the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), in 2022, "accidents at work are increasing but fatal cases have decreased".³

These statistics underscore the need to improve workplace safety to preserve workers' lives and health.

The Italian Republic, through the Constitution, protects health as a fundamental right of the individual and interest of the community⁴. This provision emphasizes the importance of ensuring adequate healthcare and safe working conditions for all.

Preserving human life and health should be a primary goal, far above any economic or work-related considerations. This commitment requires a cultural, political, and economic shift that places the human being at the center of decisions and actions. Life and health are the foundations upon which to build a prosperous and sustainable society. It is time to make this unquestionable priority a tangible reality.

3) Ensuring the well-being of working people cannot be separated from an organized prevention system that is based on adequate company policies, and inspired by ethical, and not by financial principles alone

The protection of the well-being of individuals in the workplace is a fundamental principle that should guide every aspect of the world of work. The focus is on the importance of an organized system of prevention based on appropriate corporate policies inspired by ethical principles rather than solely economic ones.

Ethical corporate policies emphasize the social responsibility of businesses, recognizing that they are not just economic entities but also have a significant impact on the lives of their employees and society as a whole. An ethical approach to work involves promoting the well-being of workers as the primary objective, not only to comply with the law but to do the right thing.

According to a study conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), companies that adopt ethical corporate policies tend to record lower rates of workplace injuries and absenteeism due to occupational illnesses. This demonstrates that ethical companies invest in prevention and

the safety of their workers, resulting in a healthier and safer working environment.⁵

An organized prevention system is an essential element to guarantee the well-being of workers. This system should be aimed to promoting a culture of safety, which is fundamental for achieving improvements in workplace health⁶. According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), the implementation of occupational health and safety management systems can significantly reduce the number of workplace injuries and occupational illnesses. For example, companies that have adopted such systems in Europe have seen a reduction of the accidents at work in the EU; decreased by about 70% between 1994 and 2018⁷.

Protecting the well-being of workers should not be merely a matter of legal compliance but a priority based on solid ethical principles. Statistical data confirms that ethical corporate policies and an organized prevention system can significantly improve workplace safety and employee well-being. Companies should adopt an ethical approach that places the individual at the center, demonstrating that it is possible to pursue economic success without sacrificing the health and well-being of those who work. Ultimately, the well-being of workers should be at the heart of every business decision.

4) Organising work can be done in a healthy and safe manner only if, since its inception, all the risks are constantly assessed, according to the best knowledge and experience available and adopting the necessary prevention and protection measures

The process of evaluating the risks to safety and health arising from hazards at work, the so called risk assessment, is a worker protection measure and in Italy it is one of the employer's obligations under Legislative Decree 81/2008⁸. In fact, the purpose of this assessment is to enable the employer to effectively take the following measures: the prevention of occupational risks; the provision of information to workers; the provision of training to workers; the organisation and means to implement the necessary measures.⁸

Risk assessment is used to identify the aspects of work that can cause injury or harm, the workers potentially exposed, the hazards that can be eliminated and the preventive or protective measures for risks that cannot be eliminated. In 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined several strategies that aim to improve health and safety conditions at work, precisely including the development of evidence-based programmes for the prevention of occupational risks (physical, chemical, biological and psychosocial).⁹ It is important, as also stated in this point, that such programmes are evidence-based, which means based on the best knowledge and experience available.

According to the WHO, moreover, for a workplace to be healthy, safe and resilient, it must be an environment in which workers can perform their tasks without falling victim to illness or injury.¹⁰ Organising work, therefore, can be done in a healthy and safe manner not only through the promotion of workers' health and well-being, but also through prevention and protection from risks assessed at work, according to the Total Worker Health (TWH) approach.¹⁰

5) No injury to the health and safety of the working person is accidental or unavoidable. We mustn't give in to any risk

Injury to the health and safety of the working person may be the result of an accident or occupational disease. These are two aspects of the same organisation that doesn't protect the health and safety of the worker, but which have different characteristics. An accident is an injury event due to a violent cause acting in a time-concentrated manner at work; an occupational disease, on the other hand, is an injury event that occurs due to a prolonged action over time of a harmful factor in the work environment.

According to the National Prevention Plan (NPP) 2014 – 2018, work-related health injuries can benefit from effective interventions by public administrations. This is possible through the implementation of programmes that have as their basis qualitative and quantitative knowledge of risks and methods to prevent them, as well as knowledge of damage, both in terms of epidemiology and causal determinants.¹¹ The NPP 2020 – 2025, in line with the previous one, recognises in the Targeted Prevention Plan (TPP), the tool to ensure greater awareness by employers of the risks and consequences of non-compliance with safety regulations.¹²

No injury to the health and safety of the working person is, therefore, accidental or unavoidable if risk factors are identified and appropriate preventive measures are put in place.

“We mustn't give in to any risk” can be considered an encouragement for the participation of all institutions and social partners at national, regional and territorial level.

6) Safety and well-being concern working people and not only the work environment. Some people fall ill and die at work and because of work

Safety and well-being in the workplace and the influence, that the work environment has on worker's state of health, are two crucial issues. Organisations not only have an obligation to provide safe and hazard-free work environments but also have a responsibility to promote the health of workers and favour healthy work environments. Thus, a healthy workplace involves both health protection to prevent work-related injuries and health promotion to improve workers well-being.¹³

According to the WHO definition, the problems that can affect a healthy work environment may concern four areas: the physical work environment, the psychosocial work environment, including organisation of work and workplace culture, personal health resources in the workplace, and ways of participating in the community.¹⁴

Depending on the area concerned, workers may suffer injury, illness (physical disorders, psychological distress, health problems related to unhealthy lifestyles) or even death.

It is crucial, therefore, not only to consider the impact that unhealthy workers have on the work organisation in terms of costs and productivity, but mostly the impact that an unhealthy workplace has on the worker. Some people fall ill and die at work and because of work.

7) Safety and well-being require training that will positively affect the way people behave at work. Only informed people can help manage an effective prevention system

Organizations often adopt safety management system or behavior-based system approaches to managing their safety functions in an attempt to achieve performance excellence¹. A worker's beliefs, values, and vision are present during the design and implementation of safety management systems and eventually when they are conducting work, according to a behavioral perspective¹⁵⁻¹⁶. The degree, caliber, and consistency of engagement can be influenced by the workers' motivation to participate, which can be influenced by their ideas and values¹⁶. By increasing workers' involvement in and awareness of their jobs, surroundings, associated dangers, and potential error traps, worker engagement in safety may systematically lower the likelihood that human errors will occur¹⁵.

8) An effective organization of the prevention system requires the active and responsible participation of all the working people, thanks to a collaborative and inclusive approach that values everybody's contribution

Working people face a multitude of stressors in their work environment. Employers in the industry should consider implementing workplace wellness programs that integrate these methods to promote the well-being of their staff¹⁷. Each organization needs to develop time management procedures. To our understanding, there is still a gap between actualizing expected productivity and enhancing middle management performance¹⁸. Working efficiently involves producing high-quality work rather than a lot of work. Additionally, setting goals and priorities, planning ahead, and delegating duties can all help to increase productivity and success while promoting efficiency, keeping a healthy work-life balance, and fostering job satisfaction¹⁸⁻¹⁹.

9) A participatory prevention system implies the effective involvement in the decision-making processes of the representatives of the working people

Most healthcare employees are taught to prioritize patients. Because they could feel guilty about taking care of themselves or fear criticism from others, therapists don't always prioritize their own needs. However, engaging in self-care activities may be essential for health professionals to manage the responsibilities, workload, and demands of their line of work and to achieve a better balance or integration between work and leisure time—as well as to safeguard their health, well-being, and satisfaction with both their work and overall life²⁰. On an individual, organizational, and societal level, world leaders and other decision-makers need to fully understand the critical importance and value of investing in the mental health and well-being of the workforce. Additionally, there are societal, economic, and personal advantages to doing so²⁰. Different interventions will have to be created to implement the psychological skills of the workers involved.

Employers in healthcare should be considered implementing workplace wellness programs that integrate these methods to promote the well-being of their staff²¹.

10) Health and safety concern not only the working people, but the entire community, and require effective prevention policies set out by institutional and social players

Occupational safety and health (OSH) can be defined as the science of the “anticipation, recognition, evaluation and control of hazards arising in or from the workplace that could impair the health and well-being of workers, taking into account the possible impact on the surrounding communities and the general environment”.²²

There is the involvement of a large amount of disciplines and several workplace and environmental hazards. In this context, it is really important to include in the assessment not only the workers but also the environment.

In fact, based on this assumption, OSH’s importance has been increased, taking into account the changes occurred at the social, political, technological and economic levels. We need to recognize that in times of globalization of the world’s economies, the impact of these changes has been profound, with several pros and cons. Events such as the introduction of liberalization of world trade, the quick growing of technological progress, the changes in transport and communication, the different patterns in work organization, and the size, structure and life cycles of enterprises and of new technologies are all elements capable to generate new types and patterns of hazards, exposures and risks²², that can have an impact on health and safety. In this context, we need to consider that health and safety issues are of interest not only for the workers, but for all the community, and institutional and social players are required to put in place effective prevention policies.

References

1. ILO. Declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work, 1998. [Online] Available https://www.gruppomondadori.it/content/uploads/2012/07/04-DichiarazioneILO_ENG.pdf [Date of access 8 October 2023]
2. Conferenza Internazionale del Lavoro. Dichiarazione del Centenario dell’OIL per il Futuro del Lavoro adottata dalla Conferenza nella sua centottesima sessione Ginevra, 21 giugno 2019. [Online] Available at: <https://www.cisl.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Dichiarazione%20Centenario%20OIL%20testo%20in%20IT.pdf> [Date of access 8 October 2023]
3. Relazione annuale INAIL: nel 2022 gli infortuni sul lavoro in aumento ma sono diminuiti i casi mortali. [Online] Available at: <https://www.inail.it/cs/internet/comunicazione/sala-stampa/comunicati-stampa/com-stampa-relazione-annuale-inail-2022.html> [Date of access 9 October 2023]
4. La Costituzione Italiana. Parte I Diritti e doveri dei cittadini, Titolo II Rapporti etico-sociali, art. 32 <https://www.senato.it/istituzione/la-costituzione/parte-i/titolo-ii/articolo-32> [Date of access 9 October 2023]
5. ILO. Corporate Social Responsibility and Business Ethics, International Labour Organization, 2018. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.html> [Date of access 9 October 2023].
6. ILO. Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health Conclusions adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 91st Session, 2003. ISBN 92-2-116288-5 [Online] Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_protect/-protrav/-safework/documents/policy/wcms_107535.pdf [Date of access 8 October 2023]
7. Communication from the commission to the european parliament, the council, the european economic and social committee and the committee of the regions EU. Strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027 Occupational safety and health in a changing world of work, Brussels [Online] Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TX/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0323&qid=1626089672913#PP1Contents> [Date of access 8 October 2023]
8. Institution of Occupational Safety and Health. Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems: ILO-OSH 2001. Geneva: ILO; 2001
9. World Health Organization. Promoting healthy, safe and resilient workplaces for all; 2022. Available at: <https://www.who.int/activities/promoting-healthy-safe-and-resilient-workplaces-for-all>
10. Iavicoli I, Spatari G, Chosewood LC, et al. Occupational Medicine and Total Worker Health: from preventing health and safety risks in the workplace to promoting health for the total well-being of the worker. *Med Lav.* 2022 Dec 7;113(6):e2022054
11. Ministero della Salute. Prevenire gli infortuni e le malattie professionali. Piano nazionale della prevenzione 2014 – 2018. Marzo 2015. Available at: <https://www.salute.gov.it/portale/prevenzione/dettaglioContenutiPrevenzione.jsp?lingua=italiano&id=4279&area=prevenzione&menu=obiettivi>
12. Ministero della Salute. Infortuni e incidenti sul lavoro, malattie professionali. Piano nazionale della prevenzione 2020 – 2025. Maggio 2022. Available at: <https://www.salute.gov.it/portale/prevenzione/dettaglioContenutiPrevenzione.jsp?lingua=italiano&id=5765&area=prevenzione&menu=obiettivi2020>
13. Stoewen DL. Wellness at work: Building healthy workplaces. *Can Vet J.* 2016 Nov;57(11):1188-1190
14. World Health Organization. Healthy workplaces: A model for action, 2010. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241599313>
15. Wachter JK, Yorio PL. A system of safety management practices and worker engagement for reducing and preventing accidents: an empirical and theoretical investigation. *Accid Anal Prev.* 2014 Jul;68:117-30. doi: 10.1016/j.aap.2013.07.029. Epub 2013 Aug 7. PMID: 23993683
16. Seo DC. An explicative model of unsafe work behavior. *Safety Science* 2005; 43(3): 187-211. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1016/j.ssci.2005.05.001>
17. Di Mario S, Cocchiara RA, La Torre G. The Use of Yoga and Mindfulness-based Interventions to Reduce Stress and Burnout in Healthcare Workers: An Umbrella Review. *Altern Ther Health Med.* 2023 Jan;29(1):29-35. PMID: 36074961
18. Filomeno L, Di Muzio M, Tartaglini D, et al. A rapid review of time management strategies among nurse managers. *Clin Ter.* 2023 Jan-Feb;174(1):75-79. doi: 10.7417/CT.2023.2500. PMID: 36655648
19. Ojo LB, Olaniyan DA. Effective time management in organization Panacea or Placebo. *The Social Sciences* 2008; 3: 401-405. <https://medwelljournals.com/abstract/?doi=sscience.2008.401.405>

20. Søvold LE, Naslund JA, Kousoulis AA, et al. Prioritizing the Mental Health and Well-Being of Healthcare Workers: An Urgent Global Public Health Priority. *Front Public Health*. 2021 May 7;9:679397. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2021.679397. PMID: 34026720; PMCID: PMC8137852
21. Di Mario S, Filomeno L, Manai MV, et al. Strategies to reduce stress and burnout in healthcare workers: an RCT research protocol. *J Public Health* 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10389-023-02080-3>
22. Alli BO. Fundamental principles of occupational health and safety. International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2008