

## SOCIAL SECURITY PROTECTION FOR WORKERS IN HAZARDOUS OCCUPATIONS UNDER THE OSH CODE, 2020

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**BEST CITATION** – K. RANJITH, SOCIAL SECURITY PROTECTION FOR WORKERS IN HAZARDOUS OCCUPATIONS UNDER THE OSH CODE, 2020, INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL REVIEW (IJLR), 6 (5) OF 2026, PG. 128-136, APIS – 3920 – 0001 & ISSN – 2583-2344.

### **Abstract:**

The Indian labour codes implemented by our Indian legislation which consolidates all labour legislations into a four main codes. One of the four codes which is precautionary among the workers that is The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020, which improves a foundational reform in Indian labour law, that governs the protection of workers engaged in hazardous occupations has long been a critical concern within labour welfare jurisprudence. With rapid industrialisation and the expansion of high-risk sectors such as mining, construction, and chemical industries, the need for a comprehensive legal framework ensuring worker safety and social security has become increasingly important. The research examines the extent to which the OSH code, 2020 provide social security protection to workers employed in hazardous occupations. The research further examines the key benefits that are given under the new code and a constitutional right and it should be ensured that the new code is not violative of those rights. And it compares the new and old laws for the protection which are improved for the hazardous workers. It concludes by suggesting reforms to enhance the effectiveness of social security protections and to ensure a safer and more equitable working environment for workers in hazardous occupation.

**Keywords:** Hazardous occupation, OSH code, 2020, social security code, 2020, dangerous jobs, occupational disease, workers safety.

### **1. Introduction:**

Employees in high-risk fields such as mining, construction, chemical industries, transportation, and agriculture encounter considerable dangers, including severe injuries, long-term illnesses, and fatalities. Over the years, Indian labour law has tackled these dangers through specific legislation for each sector, including the Factories Act, Mines Act, and the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act. The OSH Code, 2020 consolidated and supersedes many of these protections with a standardized legal framework aimed at enhancing safety and welfare rights for both organized and unorganized workers.

Social security for workers in hazardous jobs serves not only as a means of compensation but also as a critical necessity for prevention and rehabilitation. It includes income protection during times of injury or illness, access to medical services, insurance coverage for job-related hazards, and rehabilitation following accidents. In dangerous work environments, a lack of proper social security frequently drives workers and their families into poverty, thereby worsening socio-economic disparities. Global labour standards, especially those established by the international labour organisation, acknowledge social security as a fundamental aspect of workplace safety and health,

connecting risk management at work with long-term welfare protection.

Hazardous jobs are those in which employees are at a greater risk of encountering physical, chemical, or biological hazards. Workers in these roles frequently do not have sufficient social security protections, such as compensation programs, employment-related insurance, healthcare benefits, and income assistance, due to informal employment situations and incomplete legal protections. The implementation of the OSH code is in line with initiatives to standardise protections, minimize occupational hazards and introduce social security support systems, even for establishments with a single worker in hazardous roles.

The passing of the Occupational Safety Act. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehend the health and working Condition Code, 2020 in the larger framework of labour law consolidation and India's dedication to enhancing compliance easy while guaranteeing worker welfare. The Code aims to simplify regulatory monitoring and provide consistent safety standards by combining thirteen labour regulations. Significantly, it represents a change from establishment-centric regulation to activity-based protection, especially with regard to dangerous jobs and hazardous processes. Because it permits the application of protective measures even to small business and informal work arrangements, this shift is important for social security coverage.

"Labour" is one of the concurrent clauses included in the Indian Constitution. Laws pertaining to the workplace may be passed by both state and federal legislatures. More than 100 state and 40 federal laws currently govern a wide range of labour-related issues, including as pay, social security, working conditions, and industrial dispute resolution. However, there hasn't been much of a shift in the laws safeguarding workers in hazardous industries in decades. Due to a rise in unintended fatalities, injuries, and occupational illness, the published

numbers are significantly lower than the actual numbers. In order to address worker health and safety issues, the ideal and necessary specialized personnel and supporting infrastructure have not yet been constructed.

Employees are subjected to daily verbal contracts, hazardous employment with no protection, outdated equipment and infrastructure, low daily payments, or unpaid wages that cannot be collected because of a network of contractors avoiding accountability, all in spite of strong labour laws. According to researchers, low wage workers are frequently unaware of the risks they confront and are desensitized to workplace abuses. When speaking up could cost them their job, most employees remain silent. Most people prioritize their employment despite the risks. One of the main causes of mortality and disability in India is thought to be hazardous working conditions.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How does constitution provide protection towards workers in hazardous occupations and that should not be violated under the labour codes?
2. What are the statutory safeguards that protect workers under hazardous workplace and how they are protected?
3. How does the occupational safety, health and working conditions code, 2020 ensure social security for workers under hazardous occupations effectively?
4. To what extent the workers under hazardous occupation are benefited under the implementation of new codes?
5. Does the transition from multiple labour laws to a consolidated code, enhance or weaken enforcement and accountability mechanisms for worker safety?

### 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

**Akshata Thakur & Gulista Ansari (2025):**

**“Navigating the New Era of Labour Safety in India’s OSHWC Code, 2020”<sup>143</sup>**

This study analyses the socio-legal impact of the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, focusing on workplace safety and labour welfare. The authors highlight that the Code aims to improve occupational safety standards by consolidating multiple labour laws. However, the study points out issues relating to enforcement, stakeholder accountability, and unequal access to benefits. It concludes that despite progressive provisions, implementation challenges continue to affect workers in hazardous occupations.

**Aryan pujari (2021):**

**A Critical Analysis “The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020”<sup>144</sup>**

This paper provides a detailed examination of the OSH code and its structural changes compared to earlier labour laws. It argues that the code is not merely a consolidation but introduces significant changes in definitions, penalties, and regulatory mechanisms. The study highlights that while the Code aims to improve working conditions and simplify compliance, it also raised concerns regarding the dilution of strict enforcement in hazardous industries.

**India Briefing (2024):**

**“The OSH Code, 2020: A Primer”<sup>145</sup>**

This article provides an overview of the key features and applicability of the OSH code across sectors such as factories, mines, and construction. It explains that the code expands coverage to include contract and migrant workers, aiming to improve working conditions and safety standards. However, it notes that the

code is yet to be fully implemented, raising concerns about its practical effectiveness.

**Aditya Gaggar (2020):**

**“Deconstructing the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020”<sup>146</sup>**

This study explains how the OSH Code replaces several earlier laws such as the Factories Act, Mines Act, and the Contract Labour Act. It highlights that the Code aims to streamline regulation and improve occupational safety standards. However, it also raises questions about whether consolidation alone can ensure effective protection for workers in hazardous occupations.

### 4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:

1. To examine the effectiveness of OSH code, 2020 in providing social security to workers under hazardous occupations.
2. To analyse the constitutional safeguard provided to workers of hazardous occupation.
3. To study the benefits provided to the workers under the code for their awareness.
4. To analyse the concept and scope of OSH code, 2020.
5. To analytically compare the pre-existing laws and new codes in protection of workers.

### 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This research is based on the doctrinal method, which means the resources were collected through secondary information. This research involves analysing and examining the existing literature and other legal materials rather than collecting the primary data. The secondary data sources include books, research articles, journals, newspaper, e-libraries and other commentaries related to this research topic. The duration of this research was approximately one month and this research is confined to India and other countries.

<sup>143</sup> Akshata Thakur & Gulista Ansari: Navigating the New Era of Labour Safety in India’s OSHWC Code, 2020, 5 IJLR. 156-165 (2025).

<sup>144</sup> Aryan pujari: A Critical Analysis “The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020”, 3 IJLLR. 3-14 (2021).

<sup>145</sup> India Briefing: The OSH Code, 2020: A Primer, INDIA BRIEFING (2024).

<sup>146</sup> Aditya Gaggar: Deconstructing the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, SCC ONLINE. (2020).

## 6. CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH:

### 6.1 CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS:

There are many rights, articles and clauses in Indian Constitution safeguard employees in hazardous and risky jobs. Protection to children under 14 from working in mines, factories, or other dangerous jobs. It guarantees maternity leave and other humane workplace treatment. It requires children to be given opportunity and resources for healthy development and protection against exploitation. The rule making authority, India's Ministry of Labour and Employment oversees workplace safety and health problems (OSH). The Ministry's Directorate of Industrial Safety and Health implements policies and instructs the Minister on national law making.

#### **Constitutional provisions:**

#### **Article 24 (Right Against Exploitation):**

Prohibits employment of children below 14 years in factories, mines, or any hazardous occupation, process, or work, ensuring their health and development.

**Article 39(e) (Directive Principles):** Directs the State to secure that the health and strength of workers, men, women, and children are not abused, and they aren't forced into work unsuitable for their age or strength.

**Article 21A (Fundamental Right):** Guarantees free and compulsory education for all children from 6 to 14 years, reinforcing the ban on child labour by promoting schooling.

**Article 23 (Right Against Exploitation):** Prohibits traffic in human beings and forced labour (beggar), which provides a broader framework against exploitation for all workers, as interpreted by courts.

### 6.2 HEALTH AND SAFETY LAWS FOR WORKERS

#### **The Factories Act, 1948**

The first factories act was passed in 1881 since most of India's health and safety laws were modelled after the British Factory Act under British rule in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Chief Inspector of Factories enforces worker

safety in industrial facilities under the Act. The Factories Act requires employers to select a hazardous chemical expert to oversee handling, maintain an updated health record of personnel, offer protective measures, and perform frequent medical examinations.

#### **The Mines Act, 1952**

As mineral extraction methods improved, concerns were raised about the safety of those working in the mining industry. Provisions for controlling employment, leave with pay, owner, agent, and management obligations, safe "drinking water, first aid, and rest sheeters, medical exams and occupational health inspections, and notifications of accidents and occupational illnesses are all outlined in the Mines Act, 1952. In addition, the Act guarantees that underground mining is not performed by women, that mines are not hazardous for mining, that tripartite committees are formed, and that inspectors have the power to conduct safety and health inspections.

#### **The Building & Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996**

The Building and Other Construction Workers Act of 1996 regulates employment, the circumstances under which building services are provided, and various other variables with the goal of protecting the safety, welfare, and health of construction workers. The Act ensures the safety of construction workers by addressing concerns including the prevention of injuries on the job, the use of appropriate safety equipment, and the elimination of hazards like structural collapse and explosives handling.

#### **ADDITIONAL LAWS**

The Indian Boilers Act, 1923(amended 2007): Consolidating and updating the legislation pertaining to steam boilers is the purpose of this Act.

The Dangerous Machines (Regulation) Act, 1983: Payment of compensation for death or physical harm incurred by any labourer while working

any hazardous devices is governed by the Act, as is their trade and commerce, supply, distribution, and usage."

The Plantation Labour Act, 1951(amended 2010): Workers' rights are protected and plantation working conditions are regulated under this Act.

The Explosives Act, 1884: The Explosives Act, the Explosives Rule 2008 (as amended in 2011), the static and Mobile Pressure Vessels Rules, 1981 and 2016, the Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012, and Gas Cylinders Rules, 1981 and 2016 all regulate the production, storage, distribution, transportation, import, and export of explosives.

The Insecticides Act. 1968(amended 2000): The purpose of the Act is to ensure the safety of humans and animals by controlling the access to, and use of, pesticides at every stage of the supply chain.

### 6.3 EFFECTIVENESS OF OSH CODE,2020:

#### 1. Legal Framework and Scope of the OSH Code, 2020

The OSH Code consolidates previous safety and welfare laws into a single statute governing standard of working in all sectors which is formal or informal. The main aim is to ensure safe working conditions, extending decent working conditions, uniform standard of health and welfare and social security to workers which includes unorganised and contract workers.<sup>147</sup>

The code expressly includes hazardous occupations within the scope and it also applies even though there is one worker is on that work.

#### 2. Social Security Clauses Concerning Dangerous Employees

Although occupational safety and welfare are the main focus of the OSH Code, a number of social security-related requirements either come from the Code or work in tandem with it:

#### a) Welfare programs and the Social Security Fund

The Code establishes a social security fund for unorganised workers that can be used for worker welfare, including those who perform dangerous job, and is funded by fines and other sources.<sup>148</sup>

#### b) Extended Benefits for Health and welfare

Workers are entitled to medical facilities, health examinations, safety gear, and welfare amenities under the OSH Code. These are essential protections for dangerous jobs where there is significant risk of chronic illness or injury.

#### c) Social Security Scheme Integration

There are overlapping benefits like insurance, maternity benefits, provident fund access, and compensation for workplace injuries that become important in hazardous work contexts, even though the OSH Code itself does not specify social security schemes (these are mainly covered under the Code on Social Security,2020).

For example, workers in hazardous occupations are now required to be covered by Employees' State Insurance (ESI), which guarantees medical, disability, and unemployment benefits, even for a single worker.

### 3. Positive Impacts and Progressive Elements

#### a) Adaptability to all situations:

The Code removes arbitrary limits that previously restricted social protection for high-risk occupations by including hazardous workers even in single-worker firms.<sup>149</sup>

#### b) Single Registration and Unified Standards:

Enforcing social and safety protections is strengthened when compliance is streamlined within a single framework.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Occupational safety, health and working conditions code,2020, ministry of labour and employment, (Jan 29, 2026, 16:30 PM), <https://www.labour.gov.in/en/occupational-safety-health-and-working-conditions-code>

<sup>148</sup> Occupational safety, health and working conditions code, 2020, greythr, (Jan 31, 2026, 12:46 PM), <https://www.greythr.com/wiki/acts/occupational-safety-health-and-working-conditions-code-2020/>

<sup>149</sup> Occupational safety, health and working conditions code, 2020, carpediemias.com, (Feb 20, 2026, 13:50 PM), <https://carpediemias.com/current-affairs/article/occupational-safety-health-and-working-conditions-osh-code-2020>

<sup>150</sup> Occupational safety, health and working conditions code, 2020, legal service india, (Feb 22, 2026, 11:14 AM),

**c) Advisory structures that are tripartite:**

The creation of worker-represented Safety board's contributes to the development of more flexible social security regulations.

**4. Limitations and Implementation Challenges.**

Despite its broad ambitions, various loopholes impede the achievement of social security objectives for hazardous workers:

**a) Weakness in Implementation and Enforcement:**

Enforcement is heavily reliant on compliance procedures that may lack enough capability, particularly in informal and small-scale hazardous settings. Critics claim that insufficient enforcement weakens worker protections.

**b) Fragmented integration with the Social Security Code:**

Although complimentary, the OSH Code relationship with social security systems in the social security code necessitates greater collaboration to minimize administrative gaps.

**c) Coverage Exclusions:**

Threshold modifications under general code principles may unintentionally exclude some workers from complete protections if state-level standards are lax or inconsistent.

**6.4 KEY BENEFITS TO WORKERS IN HAZARDOUS PROCESSES:**

The new labour codes introduced many welfare provisions for workers in hazardous occupations such as accountability, high level of protection and risk management. Workers employed in chemical industries, heavy engineering sectors, mining sectors, dock work, explosive and gas or radiation industries are collectively protected under Occupational Safety Health and Working Conditions Code 2020.

**1. Safety Standards:**

The new labour codes such as OSH code, 2020 introduced national safety standards. It should

be followed for use, storage and transport of any hazardous substances. Another condition to be imposed on employers to conduct risk assessment in order to improve the safety standards in the workplace.

**2. Health & Medical Protection:**

Prior to new labour codes, the medical and health records were maintained by the employer in a manual form but it lacked portability and traceability. But after new labour codes, the medical and health records were accessible to the employees in a transparent manner.

And the new labour codes made mandatory post exposure medical examination and free annual health check-up for all employees. It will help to find out the early detection of occupational diseases and support the workers.

**3. Protective & Welfare Measures:**

The new labour codes mandate the employers to maintain Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). It includes helmets, gloves, goggles and respirators. And it also mandates the sanitation and hygiene standards in the workplace by providing canteens, rest shelters, washing facilities and other services like ambulance rooms, cooling areas, first aid etc. The employers must follow the maximum working hours per day and per week. (8 hours & 48 hours)

**4. Training & Awareness:**

Prior to new labour codes, training was not compulsory and it may depend upon sectors. But now under new labour codes, mandatory training sessions on transport, storages and others works including disposal of hazardous substances is necessary.

**5. Social Security:**

Under Code on Social Security, 2020 occupational diseases or accidents are covered. Along with this, the workers are entitled to ESIC benefits such as medical, occupational disease and other injuries benefits. It also includes the following benefits provident fund, gratuity, employment injuries, maternity benefit

and old age protection. These benefits should be maintained by records in a transparent manner to enhance portability.

## 6. Special Rights:

These rights are specifically enjoyed by the pregnant women workers and adolescents. They are strictly barred from work in hazardous occupations or substances. It also mandated safety supervision for women workers in the workplace. This special right is explicitly recognised under the OSH Code, 2020.

### 6.5 CASE LAWS:

#### Consumer Education & Research Centre V. Union of India<sup>151</sup>

In this case, workers employed in asbestos industries were exposed to serious occupational health hazards without adequate safety measures or medical facilities. The issue before the Supreme Court was whether such conditions violated the fundamental right to life under article 21. The court held that the right to health and medical care is an integral part of article 21 and directed employers to provide health insurance, medical benefits, and compensation for occupational diseases. This judgment laid the foundation for recognising social security and health protection of workers in hazardous occupations, which is now reflected in the OSH Code, 2020.

#### Bandhuva Mukti Morcha V. Union of India<sup>152</sup>

This case arose from a public interest litigation concerning bonded labourers working in hazardous conditions in stone quarries. The issue was whether such exploitative and unsafe working conditions violated fundamental rights. The SC held that the right to live with human dignity under article 21 includes the right to humane working conditions and directed the government to ensure welfare measures, health facilities, and protection for such workers. This case strengthened the constitutional obligation

of the state to provide social security to workers in hazardous occupations.

#### M.C. Mehta V. Union of India<sup>153</sup>

In this landmark case involving the leakage of oleum gas from a hazardous industry, which caused injury to workers and the public, the SC examined the liability of enterprises engaged in dangerous activities. The issue was the extent of liability for harm caused by hazardous industries. The court evolved the principle of absolute liability, holding that such industries are strictly liable to compensate victims and must ensure the highest standards of safety. This principle directly influences the OSH code by imposing strict responsibility on employers for safety and compensation in hazardous occupations.

#### People's Union for Democratic Rights V. Union of India<sup>154</sup>

This case dealt with the exploitation of workers engaged in the construction of facilities for the Asian games, where workers were subjected to unsafe working conditions and paid less than minimum wages. The issue was whether such practices violated constitutional protections. The SC held that non-payment of minimum wages amounts to forced labour under article 23 and emphasized the duty of the state to ensure safe working conditions and compliance with labour laws. This judgment links labour welfare and social security with fundamental rights, reinforcing protections later embodied in the OSH code.

<sup>151</sup> Consumer Education & Research Centre V. Union of India (1995 3 SCC 42)

<sup>152</sup> Bandhuva Mukti Morcha V. Union of India (AIR 1984 SC 802)

<sup>153</sup> M.C. Mehta V. Union of India (1987 AIR 1086)

<sup>154</sup> People's Union for Democratic Rights V. Union of India (1982 3 SCC 235)

**6.6 COMPARISON:**

Aspects	Old framework	New framework
<b>Overall structure</b>	Hazardous workers were protected under fragmented provisions with inconsistent enforcement and limited medical coverage.	An integrated, preventive safety system with standards is in place under the OSH Code, offering provisions for free annual health checkups, training, PPE, emergency planning, etc.
<b>Social security and compensation</b>	Compensation existed but was not universal and lacked integration across sectors.	Compensation is backed by universal social security under the social security code.
<b>Legal framework</b>	Separate laws such as the Factories Act (hazardous process), Mines Act, Dock Workers Act, and BOCW Act carried their own list of hazardous operations.	Uniform definitions under the OSH Code, 2020 for all industries involving chemical, biological, and physical hazards.
<b>Standards for hazardous substances</b>	No uniform standards, provisions varied across laws.	Specific provisions lay down standards for use, handling, storage, and transportation of hazardous substances.
<b>Identifications of hazardous processes</b>	Different lists and rules under multiple Acts led to weak enforcement.	A consolidated schedule under the OSH, code lists all hazardous processes (toxic chemicals, radioactive materials, etc.).
<b>Inspection system</b>	Multiple inspectorates under different Acts with overlapping jurisdictions.	A unified inspector-cum-facilitator system is introduced.
<b>Penalties and enforcements</b>	Enforcement was weak due to fragmentation.	Stringent penalties for violations ensure better compliance.
<b>Worker welfare and safety vision</b>	Safety and welfare varied across sectors and were not uniformly enforced.	Stronger safety standards, universal social security, welfare facilities, and emergency response mechanisms are ensured.

**7. SUGGESTIONS:**

1. The provisions of the OSH Code should be connected with the Code on Social Security, 2020 effectively to ensure continuity in social security protection for workers.
2. The government should ensure that the codes are set in a standard provided by the International Labour Organization to ensure better protection for workers in hazardous occupations.
3. Regular training and awareness programmes should be conducted for employers and workers to evaluate them about workplace safety standards, occupational risks, and available social security protections.
4. Mandatory regular safety audits and risk assessment in hazardous industries to prevent accidents and occupational diseases.

5. Enforcement should be effective and the mechanisms should be strong in inspection with trained labour officers and ensure for proper implementation of safety and welfare provisions under the OSH Code, 2020, specially in hazardous occupations.

6. To establish grievance redressal mechanisms so that workers can easily complaint their issues related to safety and social security

### 8. CONCLUSION:

The goal of guaranteeing worker safety in hazardous workplaces is hampered by a number of shortcomings, despite the existence of fish legislation backed by national strategies, norms, and institutions. A number of issues, including low pay and unstable employment, have an impact on the well-being of workers in high-risk occupations. The main duty is to inform employees on the applicable rules and regulations intended to safeguard their general well-being, health and safety at work. Legislation that is ineffective or poorly executed, a lack of qualified occupational health specialists, and a lack of appropriate institutions, training initiatives, certification programs, infrastructure, facilities, and financial resources all jeopardize worker safety in hazard occupations. Low-wage workers are disproportionately found in dangerous industries including construction, mining, and agriculture, underscores the correlations between hazards and poverty. Workers in the informal sector should have the same access to occupational health and safety regulations and resources as those in the official sector. To guarantee ongoing improvement, these resources and rules should be put into effect as soon as possible and regularly assessed. The main obstacles to economic growth and the efficacy of a worker's safety and health policy are high population density, unemployment, poverty, ignorance, inadequate education, and a workplace lacking in skills. Strong enforcement measures, the creation of state-wide occupational health centres of excellence, and a centralized authority in charge of

monitoring health and safety laws concerning workers in high-risk occupations are therefore crucial.

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