

Global Partnership to Implement the GHS

Teleconference – 5 April 2023, 1400-1600 (CEST)

Summary report

1. Welcome

UNITAR, on behalf of the Partnership, opened the teleconference and welcomed the participants, who all introduced themselves. Sixteen participants joined the call, representing a range of sectors and stakeholders. See annex 1 for the list of participants.

2. Activities supporting the work of the Partnership

Oliver Wootton (UNITAR) presented two studies: The GHS and trade study, as well as the GHS and agriculture study. The GHS and trade study focused mostly on Latin America and includes research findings and information from a variety of activities. For the GHS and agriculture study, UNITAR worked with a consultant who had worked with FAO and the Rotterdam Convention (RC). The study includes a comparison between the GHS and WHO classification system (the WHO Recommended Classification of Pesticides by Hazard <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240005662>), which has become an emerging area of work. The regulations of the RC state that those countries who implement this Convention, should also start to implement the GHS. The fact that, on a global level, GHS is not mandatory, influences the will in countries to develop and implement relevant legislation on a national level. According to a survey, 83% of countries uses the WHO system and 15% uses the GHS system. Both studies seek to identify opportunities to leverage trade and agriculture points of view to promote the GHS.

This raised the question from Juergen Helbich (EC): what is the benefit of switching to the GHS system? It will be important to explain this to countries interested in implementing GHS. The GHS has been developed with the intent to provide a globally-harmonized system to address classification of chemicals, labels, and safety data sheets. Richard Brown (WHO) explains that the WHO system is simpler and could be deemed to be more accessible. It is familiarity (as the WHO system has been in use since the 1970s) and simplicity that explain why countries use it. WHO recommends the development and implementation of the GHS.

Countries do not have to use GHS everywhere, but can also choose to use GHS in certain priority sectors only. A further consideration is that the GHS covers hazard classes related to physical, (all) health and environmental hazards, while the WHO classifications only cover some health hazards, adapting to the GHS can more comprehensively cover the hazards of chemicals manufactured and used in a country.

Halshka Graczyk (ILO) explained that exposure of workers to chemicals is higher than sporadic exposure for consumers. ILO works with Ministries of Labor and labor organizations. Under Convention 155 and 157, members of ILO have to apply the Occupational Health and Safety principle. This helps to implement the GHS as it is a clear tool to keep workers safe. ILO produced a brochure on GHS and the

world of work, and they developed several training courses. In different regions ILO looks at the needs for training in relation to GHS.

Bob Diderich (OECD) explained GHS is a binding condition for members of OECD. Taking Peru as an example of an accession country, he noted they have not yet implemented it, though efforts are underway. *As of 28 May 2023, legislative decree N° 1570 was approved, bringing the GHS into legislation, with relevant regulations to be developed within one year.* Sylvie Poret (OECD) added that they have been working in Vietnam and Kenya on developing national chemicals policies.

Helena Casabona (Keml) added that they continue to support GHS capacities and developing national policies and legislation, as part of their International Training Programme.

Maria Ruiz-Cuevas (CEFIC) reminded participants of the two regional regulatory cooperation groups (consisting of regulators and industry participants), in Latin America and Asia, that have proven to be successful forums for promoting GHS implementation.

3. Update on EU and ICCA-funded project in the African region

Olivier Baldan (SAICM) gave a presentation on *Increasing the global Implementation of GHS through a pilot project focusing on Africa*. This project is implemented in Ghana, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria and funded by the EC and ICCA. The project partners are UNITAR, ECHA, UNEP and SAICM. The expected outcome for this project is for the recipient countries to have adopted a GHS implementation plan (in this way creating a sound basis to build adequate control structures for the sound management of chemicals and waste and demonstrate substantive progress in its implementation with a view of scaling up the adoption of GHS globally). The four-year project includes development of a roadmap on GHS, a GHS law adoption process and an exit strategy. The project is currently in its first year.

The presentation can be found here: [GPGHS - April 2023 update](#)

Hashka Graczyk (ILO) asks if there is multistakeholder engagement. Participants answer that it is expected that e.g. local industry will be part of the stakeholder groups, but as the project only just started, this had not yet happened. Hashka asks to reach out to ILO for the multi stakeholder relationships. This is quite critical, and as an example, ILO worked with Côte d'Ivoire on convention 170 and GHS is part of this.

4. Current status of the Beyond 2020 intersessional process

Olivier Baldan (SAICM) gave a brief update on the Beyond 2020 intersessional process. IP 4.1 was organized in Bucharest in August/September 2022, and IP 4.2 in Kenya in February/March 2023. A new session (IP4.3) will be held in September 2023. The update is included in the presentation mentioned under point 4 (see also the link above). Olivier briefly explained target B6: *Target B6- By [20XX], all [governments] [countries] [have] [should adopt] [legally] implemented [and enforce] the United Nations Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) in all relevant sectors [as appropriate for their national circumstances].*

Target A7 on the elimination of the use of Highly Hazardous Pesticides was also discussed. This target has not been resolved yet and not much progress has been achieved. There are still many elements between brackets. It is also mentioned that an alternative to A7 has been proposed.

Both the above targets (as per all the targets) will be further discussed and negotiated at IP4.3 and ICCM5 (September 2023).

5. Upcoming work

The floor was given to those who would like to add something to the previous points and provide updates on upcoming work. Richard Brown (WHO) provided an update on the International Chemical Safety Cards (the ICSCs are a joint WHO/ILO activity). They have GHS in 694 chemicals now, and the Cards are available in 15 languages via a multilingual search interface (<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/icsc/showcard.home>).

Oliver Wootton (UNITAR) gave a short update on upcoming work. Introductory materials on GHS will be developed under a project with Kemi. Roadmaps for Peru, Benin, Armenia and Tanzania are being developed. UNITAR has recently worked in El Salvador and Ecuador through a UNEP and BCRC Uruguay project, and these two countries will also publish roadmaps.

6. Introduction and discussion of the Partnership Strategy

Oliver Wootton (UNITAR) introduced the GHS Partnership strategy and presented on screen. He briefly discussed the parts on Vision, Mission, Objectives, Purpose, and Strategic Efforts. He raised some questions, such as whether it would be good to start organizing an annual GHS conference, and whether the structure of the Partnership should be more formal.

A short discussion on the strategy took place during which the following points were discussed:

- The table indicating which countries implement the GHS. Olivier Baldan (SAICM) asks if there is a list of countries that are currently working on GHS. There is no structured list being kept of countries developing GHS. It was mentioned that countries can also implement GHS in certain sectors only, which fits perfectly within the flexibilities of the GHS. This is often presented as the difference between “partial” and “full” implementation. It would be worth reflecting this in the overview of countries implementing GHS. It is also worth reflecting if a country is developing GHS legislation, but not yet implementing it yet. Oliver Wootton (UNITAR) mentioned that if a country brings in legislation in any sector, it counts as implementing the GHS. It is difficult to reflect if a country is just developing capacities and /or considering legislation as there is no indicator for it.
- Annual GHS Conference. Jorge Ocana (UNITAR) explains some ideas for the conference. The idea is to bring key partners together, and to invite countries, private industry, and GHS experts. The available funding also defines how many countries/stakeholders could be brought in to such a

conference. The stakeholders at the conference will have access to GHS experts, so the conference will be a dynamic meeting where people can share and benefit from each other's experience and knowledge. A short discussion takes place on whether such a conference should/can be organized back-to-back with other meetings and generally it is agreed that this is a good idea. An additional idea is that countries that receive support to implement the GHS should report on their progress at the annual conference (or at a side event during other meetings) as part of their agreement with the donor, as well as engage with the sub-committee of experts on the GHS. It was also briefly discussed that it is important to assess who could provide funding to the Partnership to keep it operational.

- Side event at ICCM5. Jorge Ocaña (UNITAR) proposed organising a side event at ICCM 5, in September 2023 in Bonn. It was generally agreed that it would be good to organize a side event for awareness raising and fundraising purposes, and if relevant this could be used to announce available funds that could be directed to support GHS implementation. UNITAR will contact the SAICM Secretariat and German Government. It was mentioned that the organizations in the Partnership should think about what the Partnership can offer and present this at the side event. Besides the side event, it will also be important to establish closer links to the Conventions Regional Centres and explore how they can be involved in the Partnership.

7. **Next Steps and to do**

UNITAR thanked all participants present at the meeting for their efforts in promoting the GHS. A next meeting will be organised in approximately six months.

Based on the meeting, there were some follow-up items :

- * UNITAR to share the study on GHS and trade as well as the study on GHS and agriculture;
- * UNITAR to update the strategy (and include a more structured list of countries that are currently working on developing legislation and implementing the GHS) and share around for input;
- * UNITAR to contact the SAICM Secretariat/German Government to set up a side event at ICCM5.
- * All partners to share more specific information on the projects and countries they are working with (if not mentioned in the meeting minutes) on GHS (this info can also be included in the table of countries in the strategy).

Annex I

List of Participants

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	First Name	Surname	Agency/Institution	Email
1	Olivier	Baldan	SAICM Secretariat	olivier.baldan@un.org
2	Richard	Brown	WHO	brownri@who.it
3	Helena	Casabona	KemI, Sweden	Helena.Casabona@kemi.se
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12	Jorge	Ocana	UNITAR	Jorge.OCANA@unitar.org
13	Antonio	Riganelli	Dow (CEFIC)	ARiganelli@dow.com
14	Maria	Ruiz-Cuevas	CEFIC/ICCA	MCU@cefic.be
15	Oliver	Wootton	UNITAR	oliver.wootton@unitar.org
16	Matthias	Wolf	Germany	Matthias.Wolf@bmuv.bund.de

Annex II

Global Partnership to Implement the GHS

Teleconference – 5 April 2023, 1400-1600 (CEST)

Agenda

1. Welcome (10 min)
 - Welcome
 - Introduction of participants
2. Activities supporting the work of the Partnership (suggested time: 30 min)
 - GHS and trade study – obstacles and opportunities (UNITAR)
 - GHS and agriculture study – obstacles and opportunities (UNITAR)
 - Any other activities¹ that stakeholders would like to provide updates on
3. Update on EU and ICCA-funded project in the African region (suggested time: 10 min)
 - EU and ICCA-funded proposal for the African region (SAICM secretariat)
4. Current status of the Beyond 2020 intersessional process (suggested time: 15 min)
 - proposed GHS-specific target and the GHS as an indicator (SAICM secretariat to introduce)
 - proposed HHPs global partnership (SAICM secretariat to introduce)
 - and links to the GHS
5. Upcoming work (suggested time: 20 min)
 - Open to all
6. Introduction and discussion of the Partnership Strategy (suggested time: 25 min)
 - UNITAR to introduce

Meeting close (10 min)

¹ Could include: The 2021 FAO/WHO Labelling guidance (FAO) *tbc*, and The International Training Programme (ITP) and the GHS (Keml) *tbc*