

POLISH INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT OSH EXPERTS: SUPPORTING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH COMPLIANCE (CASE PL6)

1 Introduction

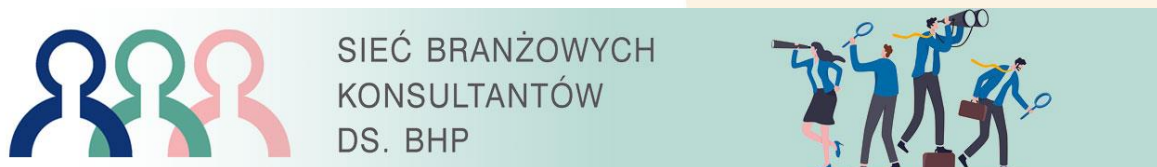
Promoting effective occupational safety and health (OSH) practices is key to safer and healthier workplaces. Improving arrangements and practices for managing OSH across a whole range of industry sectors and firm sizes — large, medium and small — is stimulated, supported and sustained by a range of institutional actors and internal and external processes to firms. Scientific research highlights, among others, the critical role that state regulators for OSH, such as Labour Inspectorates and prevention services, can play.¹ This case study is part of a research project² conducted in Poland to provide further insight into this topic.

Considering the significant role of OSH experts in Poland's workplace safety landscape, some initiatives have been set up in Poland with the aim of supporting them through professional networking and improving the quality of OSH activities, as well as introducing and reinforcing the positive and professional image of OSH specialists. Two notable initiatives, namely 'BHP Team Championships' (Mistrzostwa Kadry BHP) and 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants' (Sieć Branżowych Konsultantów ds. BHP)³ have emerged as dedicated approaches to address OSH challenges. This case study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of these initiatives, highlighting their presentation, innovative approaches and replicability potential to other countries.

Figure 1: 'BHP Team Championships' logo⁴



Figure 2: 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants' website banner⁵



¹ EU-OSHA – European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Improving compliance with occupational safety and health regulations: an overarching review*, 2021. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/improving-occupational-safety-and-health-changing-world-work-what-works-and-how>

² The full report is available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/polands-approach-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-role-labour-inspectorate-and-prevention-services>

³ BHP is an acronym for Bezpieczeństwo i Higiena Pracy. It is a broad field of ergonomics, labour economics, occupational psychology, technical safety and others. In practice, it can be mostly understood as OSH, with the exclusion of occupational medicine, which is treated separately in the Polish legislation. For a more detailed explanation, see section 2.5 of full report <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/polands-approach-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-role-labour-inspectorate-and-prevention-services>

⁴ More information: <https://www.portalbhp.pl/aktualnosci-bhp/mistrzostwa-kadry-bhp-startuje-vi-edycja-konkursu-10096.html>

⁵ More information: https://www.ciop.pl/CIOPPortalWAR/appmanager/ciop/pl?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=P66200515911693396320289

2 Description of the case

OSH experts play a key role in protecting the health and safety of Polish workers by fostering the appropriate working conditions and OSH environment at the workplace. Their main tasks are to contribute to the prevention of work-related accidents and occupational diseases and supervise compliance with workplace health and safety regulations. They also provide worker training (such as first aid), conduct risk assessments and provide advice on ergonomics. A vital aspect of the work of an OSH expert is to keep up to date and review changes in legislation to support workers and employers best.

Employers are required to appoint OSH specialists within their enterprises, who can be either internal or external staff. The number of specialists or the time allocated to their duties varies depending on the size of the enterprise. Typically, larger companies employ in-house OSH specialists, while smaller firms often outsource these services. It is important to note that the role of the organisation's OSH staff may vary depending on the specific needs.

The OSH expert must possess specialised education in the field, including university degrees and post-graduation studies in occupational safety. Further, numerous courses and training courses help them gain additional qualifications and specialisations.

2.1 Aims

The 'BHP Team Championships' competition aims to elevate the significance of professional knowledge and expertise in OSH among both OSH specialists and individuals interested in OSH-related issues. It also seeks to recognise professionals in the field by establishing a prestigious ranking of OSH experts and encourages updating expert knowledge about emerging risks.

The 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants' aims to foster professional development by providing up-to-date, state-of-the-art knowledge and improving the quality of activities in the field of OSH.

2.2 Organisations involved

The 'BHP Team Championships' — a nationwide competition — is organised by the 'Safety at Work Coalition' (Koalicja Bezpieczni w Pracy), which has been involved in education and popularisation activities since 2014, being an initiative of companies such as CWS Polska, PW Krystian and TenCate Protective Fabrics. In 2022, they were joined by MILWAUKEE.

SEKA S.A., a company in the market for outsourcing OSH and fire protection services, is currently the competition's patron, and its representative is the chair of the competition committee. The competition is also under the patronage of major state institutions, such as the [Central Institute for Labour Protection-State Research Institute](#) (Centralny Instytut Ochrony Pracy - Państwowy Instytut Badawczy (CIOP-PIB)),⁶ the [State Labour Inspection](#),⁷ the [Social Insurance Institution](#) (Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych),⁸ and NGOs, including the [All-Poland Association of Occupational Safety and Health Service Employees](#) (Ogólnopolskie Stowarzyszenie Pracowników Służby BHP),⁹ [Employers of Poland](#) (Pracodawcy RP)¹⁰ and the [Confederation Lewiatan](#) (Konfederacja Lewiatan).¹¹ The 2024 competition's media patrons are Atest Ochrona Pracy, [Behapowcy.com](#)¹²/Promotor BHP magazine and [Portal BHP](#).¹³

The 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants' is organised by the CIOP-PIB.

⁶ More information: <https://www.ciop.pl/>

⁷ More information: <https://www.pip.gov.pl/>

⁸ More information: <https://www.zus.pl/>

⁹ More information: <https://ospsbhp.pl/>

¹⁰ More information: <https://pracodawcyrp.pl/>

¹¹ More information: <https://lewiatan.org/en/about-us/>

¹² More information: <https://behapowcy.com/>

¹³ More information: <https://www.portalbhp.pl/>

2.3 What was done, and how?

2.3.1 Basic structure

The 'BHP Team Championships' consists of two stages. Participants complete a knowledge test comprising 30 multiple choice questions in the first stage. The top 50 participants with the highest scores from this stage advance to the second stage. The second stage includes closed and open-ended questions, with 20 multiple choice and five open-ended questions requiring descriptive answers. A committee evaluates the answers to open-ended questions,¹⁴ and the top 20 participants with the highest scores in this stage move forward. Ultimately, the finalists are selected based on the highest number of points accumulated in the second stage and the highest-rated solutions to the open-ended questions by the Competition Commission. The winners receive attractive prizes from a total prize pool of PLN 10,000 (around €2,350).

The 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants' members are granted special access to the CIOP-PIB training and seminar programmes. This initiative provides OSH professionals with opportunities for professional development and enhances the quality of their OSH activities. Regular interaction with the institute is also beneficial, enabling members to stay informed about the latest research in OSH and to receive expert support and advice from the scientific staff of CIOP-PIB.

Further, the 'Network' brings together experts with experience and practical skills in designing and implementing measures to improve safety and working conditions in various industry sectors. The main objective of the Network is to share knowledge, solutions and best practices in the field of OSH, building on the concept of exchanging experiences between different generations and promoting the idea of mentoring.

Members of the Network are entitled to use a certificate issued by the institute that can be used in their professional activities. As part of this certificate, they can benefit from the following advantages:

- special conditions for access to the institute's offer, including a 30% discount on training courses (courses, seminars) not including postgraduate studies, and a 50% discount on the institute's publications, including databases and software;
- the opportunity to participate free of charge in seminars and training conferences that enable them to develop their skills and acquire new knowledge in the area of OSH; and
- the possibility of obtaining the certificate of OSH specialist and OSH lecturer at the Centre for the Assessment and Improvement of OSH Competences on preferential terms.

In addition, the Network actively cooperates with the CIOP-PIB in initiatives to promote a safety culture.

2.3.2 Target group

The target group of 'BHP Team Championships' includes OSH professionals, workers and individuals interested in OSH-related issues, regardless of their professional involvement in the field. Participants must be of full legal age and reside within the territory of the Republic of Poland.

The 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants' is open to individuals with more than 10 years of health and safety experience in a specific industry,¹⁵ including:

- full-time or part-time employees dealing with health and safety in the companies where they work; and
- owners or employees of companies that provide health and safety services to other companies, provided they have at least 10 years' experience in the industry.¹⁶

¹⁴ The competition committee, consisting of representatives from the organiser and patron, is responsible for selecting winners, ensuring regulatory compliance, handling complaints and overseeing the competition's content correctness (see section 2.2).

¹⁵ Agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing, mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, gas, steam and hot water supply, water supply; sewerage and waste management, construction, wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, transport and storage, accommodation and food service activities; information and communication; finance and insurance; real estate activities; professional, scientific and technical activities; administration and support activities; public administration and defence; education, human health and social work activities; and culture, entertainment and recreation.

¹⁶ More information:

https://www.ciop.pl/CIOPPortalWAR/appmanager/ciop/pl?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=P66200615911693396365740&html_tres_c_root_id=300014965&html_tresc_id=300014961&html_klucz=123456&html_klucz_spis=

The Network is open to active OSH professionals and retired experts who bring their valuable practical experience. The Network does not restrict the number of representatives from one company.

2.3.3 Improvements

Since its inception in 2015, the 'BHP Team Championships' structure has remained consistent, focusing on promoting OSH practices in Poland. However, there have been some changes in its patronage over the years. In the current seventh edition, SEKA S.A., has taken on the role of the competition's patron. The initial industry partner was Tauron Dystrybucja S.A. Including more media patrons signifies an increased emphasis on raising awareness about the competition through various OSH-targeting channels. The core mission of the competition, aimed at promoting and recognising excellence in OSH, remains unchanged also after the changes in patronage. The competition was suspended for two years during the pandemic, returning in 2022 with its sixth edition.

The 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants' emerged as part of the CIOP-PIB's long-standing commitment to supporting Polish enterprises in enhancing workplace conditions and ensuring worker safety. The CIOP-PIB initiated networking activities in 1998 by establishing the [Safety Leaders Forum](#)¹⁷ (Forum Liderów Bezpiecznej Pracy), comprising companies dedicated to improving working conditions. Presently, 171 entities are members of this forum. In 2004, the institute introduced the [Network of Occupational Health and Safety Experts](#)¹⁸ (Sieć Ekspertów ds. BHP), uniting individuals offering services to SMEs. With 50 members serving over 4,600 companies, this particular network addresses the specific needs of smaller enterprises. Subsequently, the 'Network of Regional Occupational Health and Safety Centres' was founded in 2008, encompassing 16 training companies focused on OSH education. Despite these initiatives, there remained gaps in coverage, prompting the establishment of the 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants'. This new Network accommodates highly experienced OSH professionals who were previously unable to engage with existing structures, fulfilling a crucial niche in the OSH community.

2.3.4 Degree of innovation

- 'BHP Team Championships'

Using competitions as a learning platform encourages active participation and fosters a competitive spirit among OSH professionals, driving innovation and skills development. The initiative emphasises hands-on training modules and real-world simulations, enabling participants to apply theoretical knowledge in practical scenarios and enhance their problem-solving abilities.

- 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants'

By offering customised consultancy services, the Network addresses different industries' specific needs and challenges, ensuring relevance and effectiveness in OSH management. The Network facilitates knowledge exchange and collaboration among stakeholders through seminars, workshops and online forums, fostering continuous learning and improvement in OSH practices.

The initiatives presented are aimed at health and safety professionals. They support their professional development and the updating of their knowledge. Being up to date with all regulations and being aware of any modifications in the expectations of the modern employer plays a considerable role in the work of health and safety services. The initiatives encourage OSH experts to continually update their knowledge, recognising that work environments evolve and new risks emerge. It is essential for professionals to stay aware and responsive of the latest developments and findings to provide optimal support to companies. It is also essential for OSH professionals to exchange experiences and benefit from support and advice from institutions providing prevention services. Therefore, any initiative that allows such an exchange of ideas on good practice and aims at consolidating the OSH community deserves mention in the context of the issues examined in this project. The 'BHP Team Championships' and the Network exemplify innovative approaches to advancing OSH in Poland. Through their collaborative efforts, competition-based learning and tailored consultancy services, these initiatives have made significant strides in enhancing OSH practices and promoting a culture of safety in workplaces. Their potential for replicability to other countries underscores the

¹⁷ More information:

https://www.ciop.pl/CIOPPortalWAR/appmanager/ciop/pl?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=P49400552541559131831924

¹⁸ More information:

https://www.ciop.pl/CIOPPortalWAR/appmanager/ciop/pl?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=P24200177101399751549478

importance of sharing best practices and fostering international cooperation in addressing global OSH challenges.

3 Results

3.1 What was achieved?

The ‘BHP Team Championships’ have proven highly popular since their inception, with consistently high participation rates in each edition, as presented in Table 1. As indicated by the committee chair, the last edition saw impressive engagement, with 200 individuals entering the first stage in the first 48 hours.¹⁹ This widespread participation underscores the enthusiasm for OSH in Poland, even among individuals not directly involved in the OSH experts sector. The competition serves as a platform for popularising OSH issues among diverse audiences, ultimately improving Polish companies’ safety standards. Moreover, it provides an opportunity for professionals to update their knowledge, enhance qualifications, and stay informed about regulations and safe work practices, which are particularly crucial as witnessed during the pandemic. Beyond educational benefits, the competition fosters networking opportunities and healthy competition among participants, making it a unique and valuable initiative in the area of safety knowledge in Poland.

Table 1: Number of participants in the ‘BHP Team Championships’ across editions

Edition	Year	Number of participants
VI edition	2022	700 ²⁰
V edition	2019	1,000 ²¹
IV edition	2018	800 ²²
III edition	2017	1,400 ²³
I edition ²⁴	2015	430 ²⁵

While specific participation numbers for the ‘Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants’ are unavailable, its establishment was driven by a recognised need for a sector-specific industry network with tailored participant benefits. This indicates that the Network’s scope and coverage are aligned with the needs of professionals in the OSH sector. The Network has likely facilitated enhanced professional development, improved industry practices and strengthened relationships within the OSH community by providing a platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing and access to specialised resources. While quantitative metrics may not be readily available, the Network’s ability to address a recognised gap in the industry suggests that it has met its objectives in fostering a supportive and resourceful environment for industry professionals.

3.2 Success factors and challenges

Various factors influence the popularity of the ‘BHP Team Championships’. Targeted and broadened promotion of the competition increases awareness and attracts participation from a diverse range of professionals and non-professionals, expanding its impact within the OSH experts sector. Offering an engaging format with challenging questions, networking opportunities and attractive prizes may also enhance participant satisfaction. Also, collaborating with industry stakeholders — in the form of patronage and committee — enhances credibility. This aspect — securing adequate partnerships — emerges as a possible future challenge for the competition’s success. Effective partnerships enhance the competition’s credibility and provide access to essential resources for networking, offering attractive prizes and promoting the event. While this hasn’t been an issue in previous editions, the competition’s

¹⁹ More information: <https://bezpieczeniowpracy.pl/ryszard-szefer-w-mistrzostwach-kadry-bhp-wzielo-udzial-prawie-700-osob/>

²⁰ More information: <https://bezpieczeniowpracy.pl/znamy-zwyciezce-vi-edycji-mistrzostw-kadry-bhp/>

²¹ More information: <https://www.portalbhp.pl/aktualnosci-bhp/-znamy-zwyciezce-v-edycji-mistrzostw-kadry-bhp-8863.html>

²² More information: <https://www.pulshr.pl/prawo-pracy/znamy-laureatow-iv-mistrzostw-kadry-bhp-55163.html>

²³ More information: <https://bezpieczeniowpracy.pl/3481-2/>

²⁴ No data available for II edition.

²⁵ More information: <https://bezpieczeniowpracy.pl/znamy-laureatow-i-mistrzostw-kadry-bhp/>

success heavily relies on establishing and maintaining strong partnerships. Any difficulties in this area could significantly impact the competition's viability and reach.

The success of the 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants' hinges on several factors. Firstly, the Network's ability to provide tailored benefits, including the CIOP-PIB's specialised training and support services, enhances its appeal to participants. By facilitating collaboration and knowledge sharing among professionals within the OSH sector, the Network has the potential to foster collective learning and the dissemination of best practices. Additionally, maintaining industry relevance by staying responsive to evolving needs and trends ensures sustained engagement from participants, which is stressed by its organiser, who highlights that the participation allows for broadening the current state-of-the-art knowledge of OSH experts, encouraging them to update their expertise. The Network also holds significant potential, akin to other CIOP-PIB initiatives (see section 2.3.3), albeit not immediately apparent in catering to the needs of SMEs. Adapting the Network to meet the specific needs of diverse industries poses a potential challenge. While the Network was designed to cater to industry-specific requirements and lists eligible sectors for participation, the broad spectrum of industries involved raises questions about how to provide universally helpful resources across sectors. While this filling of the gap is a success factor, ensuring relevance and effectiveness across all participating industries may present challenges.

4 Transferability to other EU Member States

The framework and methodologies employed by the 'BHP Team Championships' and 'Network of Industry Health and Safety Consultants' can be adapted and replicated in other countries with similar OSH challenges and regulatory environments. Establishing partnerships between government agencies, industry stakeholders and educational institutions is critical to replicating the success of these initiatives in different contexts. However, while replicating the initiatives, it is essential to tailor the programmes and services to suit the target countries' specific cultural, economic and regulatory contexts.

References and resources

Centralny Instytut Ochrony Pracy - Państwowy Instytut Badawczy (Central Institute for Labour Protection-State Research Institute). *Sieć Branżowych Konsultantów ds. BHP*. <https://www.ciop.pl/CIOPPortalWAR/appmanager/ciop/pl?nfpb=true&pageLabel=P66200515911693396320289>

Koalicja Bezpieczni w Pracy (Safety at Work Coalition). *Mistrzostwa Kadry BHP*. Website. <https://bezpiecniwpracy.pl/kategoria/mistrzostwa-kadry-bhp/>

Portal BHP. *Mistrzostwa Kadry BHP*. Website. <https://www.portalbhp.pl/slowa-kluczowe/mistrzostwa-kadry-bhp-3339>

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