

# FACTSHEET ON DECENT WORK<sup>1</sup> IN AGRICULTURE

Agriculture provides a livelihood to millions of workers throughout the world, yet many, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized, experience decent work deficits. In developing countries, many jobs in agriculture do not ensure decent levels of income and sustainable livelihoods; agricultural workers are among the groups with the highest incidence of poverty in many countries. Many are employed under poor health, safety and environmental conditions; every year, many thousands of agricultural workers are killed as a result of workplace accidents, and a large number die of pesticide poisoning.

Agricultural workers are often the most socially vulnerable, and lack access to social security and protection. Moreover, levels of unionization within agricultural workers is extremely low, as these workers in a number of countries face both de facto and de jure obstacles to becoming organized. Violations of freedom of association among agricultural workers are frequent. Such violations range from regulatory restrictions and anti-union practices to physical violence, repression and even the assassination of trade union leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> Decent work is a global demand today and the ILO has translated this demand into four interrelated pillars, which together comprise the Decent Work Agenda. These pillars of decent work are: fundamental principles and rights at work; employment; social protection; and social dialogue.

**“Decent work means opportunities for jobs that are freely chosen, respect core labour standards, provide a living wage (whether through self-employment or wage labour) and ensure equal treatment for all. Workers should be able to perform their tasks under safe and healthy conditions and have a voice in the workplace.”**

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# CHALLENGES

## 1. Health & safety at work

Agriculture is one of the most hazardous occupations worldwide. In several countries the fatal accident rate in agriculture is double the average for all other industries. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates, workers suffer 250 million accidents every year. Out of a total of 335,000 fatal workplace accidents worldwide, there are some 170,000 deaths among agricultural workers. The intensive use of machinery and of pesticides and other agrochemicals has raised the risks. Machinery such as tractors and harvesters has the highest frequency and fatality rates of injury. Exposure to pesticides and other agrochemicals constitutes a major occupational risk which may result in poisoning and death and, in certain cases, work-related cancer and reproductive impairments<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms\\_110193.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/publication/wcms_110193.pdf)

**250 M**  
accidents/year

**170K**  
deaths

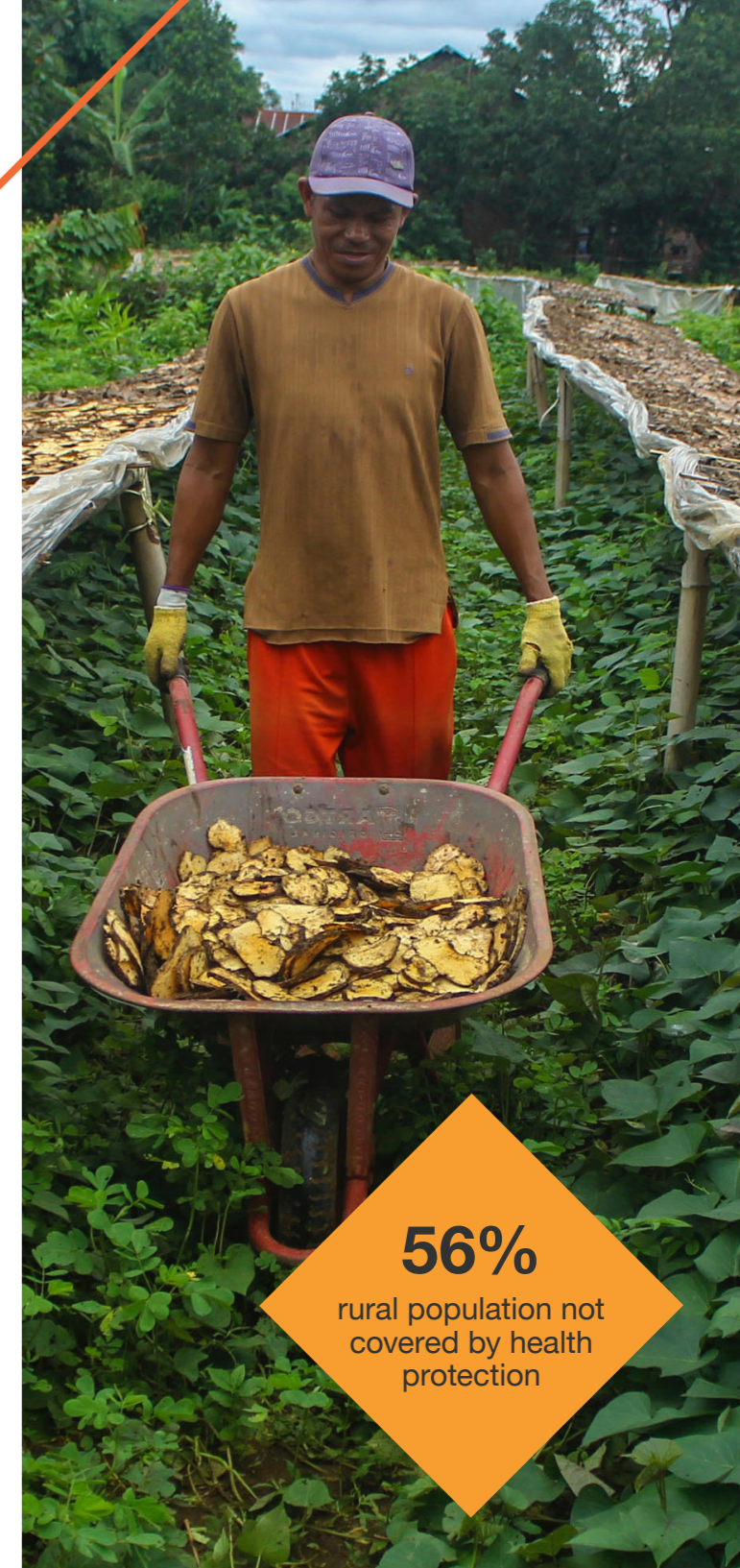
## 2. Social protection

To the rural populations in particular, with limited productive assets, unable to save or access credit, and living in remote areas, poorly integrated with factor or output market, there is evidence that regular transfers help poor households to diversify livelihoods, make investments and improve their long-term income generating potential. Moreover, social protection can help poor and vulnerable people in rural areas to cope with the increased natural and climate change related risks and shocks<sup>3</sup>. However, for many countries where agriculture is a major contributor to the national economy, there is limited capacity to finance social security, either from general tax revenues or direct contributions. Even in high-income countries where contributory social security systems have gradually been extended to waged agricultural workers, a number of gaps remain, particularly concerning seasonal and migrant workers. To illustrate the lack of social protection coverage, the proportion of the global population not covered by a health protection mechanism amounts to 56% of the rural population, while this figure amounts to 39% in total population<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4982e.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The importance of universal social protection for smallholder farmer, presentation of Christina Behrendt International Labour Office, Social Protection Department, UNCTAD 8th Multi-year Expert Meeting on Commodities and Development Geneva, 22 April 2016, [https://unctad.org/meetings/en/Presentation/CI\\_MEM2\\_2016\\_Behrendt.pdf](https://unctad.org/meetings/en/Presentation/CI_MEM2_2016_Behrendt.pdf)

**56%**  
rural population not  
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### 3. Wages & income levels for women and men in agriculture

Agricultural and other rural livelihoods are responsible for over 38% of employment in low- and middle-income countries, making the agrifood sector a major source of jobs<sup>5</sup>. Despite the major contribution of agriculture to national economies, through exports and as a source of employment, with strong forward and backward linkages with the manufacturing sector, wage levels are consistently lower in this sector than in any other. Working conditions and labour relations differ very much for permanent and non-permanent workers. Permanent workers not only receive some job security but also relatively higher wages and better housing, health and work benefits. However, most agricultural waged labour is carried out by day-labourers, seasonal labourers and temporary workers who perform the lowest-skilled tasks in poor working conditions. Much of this labour often involves a worker's whole family (including children and the elderly). Labour migration and casual employment are highly present in agriculture. Wherever they come from, migrants are always heavily disadvantaged in terms of pay, social protection, housing and medical protection.



### 4. Freedom of association & the right to collective bargaining

Although International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions guarantee all workers the right to set up representative organizations to defend their rights, rural agricultural workers in a number of countries face both de facto and de jure obstacles to becoming organized. Violations of freedom of association among agricultural workers are frequent. Such violations range from regulatory restrictions and anti-union practices to physical violence, repression and even the assassination of trade union leaders. The situation is even more critical for indigenous workers, who are often denied the right to set up or join such organizations. The various factors which have traditionally limited the level of organization among agricultural workers (such as the remoteness of agricultural undertakings, difficulties of communication, etc.), are now compounded by the apparently widespread practice of shedding permanent workers through restructuring and other means, coupled with the increasingly frequent recourse by employers to labour contractors, as well as the increasing reliance on outgrowers for the production of some crops (such as sugar and tea). Globalization has had a considerable impact on the level of trade union representation among waged agricultural workers. Representation has generally been low in most countries, except for large plantation sectors in some countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, where labour relations are more institutionalized, but even in these contexts there are reports of declining memberships<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7322e.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Decent work in agriculture. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---actrav/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_112419.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_112419.pdf)



# CASE STUDIES



CASE STUDY FROM FOS

## Outsourcing in the sugar agroindustry in El Salvador

Since the privatization of sugar mills in El Salvador<sup>1</sup>, La Magdalena and La Cabaña sugar mills have resorted to outsourcing to hire personnel, both to “save costs” and to prevent the formation of unions. These employment modalities gave rise to serious violations of workers’ rights and generally precarious working conditions, characterized by low salaries and, above all, employment instability<sup>2</sup>.

Thanks to FOS support to the Confederation of El Salvador sugar unions, and to actions such as stoppages and strikes during the harvest season, two unions were finally established and managed to ending subcontracting practices, and to secure the signing of collective agreements that have resulted in substantial improvements in working and living conditions for the working class<sup>3</sup>.



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CASE STUDY FROM SOLIDARITÉ SOCIALISTE

## Coffee farmers fight for fair trade & social justice in Burundi

The National Confederation of Coffee Growers’ Associations of Burundi (CNAC-MURIMA W’ISANGI) is a Burundian non-profit organisation, whose members are small producers operating plantations ranging from 100 to 5000 coffee trees. The CNAC represents, advocates and defends the interests of coffee farmers<sup>1</sup>.

The work of the CNAC in partnership with SOLSOC in Burundi has led to the implementation of concrete actions in favour of decent work and the social and solidarity economy. By bringing together all producers<sup>2</sup>, and organizing a large part of the coffee sector around producer-controlled cooperatives, coffee yields have been shared more equitably<sup>3</sup>.



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# RECOMMENDATIONS



## 1. Ensure health & safety at work

Governments shall respect ILO normative instruments in OSH, ensure that companies follow codes of practice in occupational safety and health, and apply provisions of the Rotterdam Convention which contributes to ensure decent work standards in rural areas by regulating the import and export of certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides.

## 2. Extend social protection to agricultural workers

The ILO's Social Protection Floor Recommendation 2012 (No. 202) requesting all ILO Member States to establish and maintain, as a priority, a social protection floor as a nationally defined set of basic guarantees, shall be fully implemented, covering effectively rural populations. Social protection programmes shall be adopted to extend coverage to all, including agricultural workers. Those programmes shall comprise among others social pensions, employment guarantee schemes for the poor, food security programmes, asset transfers, skills training programmes, and measures to enhance access to health care and maternity leave, ensuring they acquire quality education, and promoting and facilitating their engagement in decent and productive employment. In doing so, investments in social protection will contribute to reduce poverty and vulnerability, and promote decent and productive employment for all.

## 3. Provide appropriate wages and income levels for women & men in agriculture

Every worker has a right to compensation for a regular work week that is sufficient to meet the worker's basic needs and provide some discretionary income. Employers shall pay at least the minimum living wage or the appropriate prevailing wage, whichever is higher, comply with all legal requirements on wages, and provide any fringe benefits required by law or contract. Additionally, strategies shall be pursued by multi-national companies acting individually, collectively, and in cooperation with workers, governments, civil society, and others, to help raise wages where they are too low<sup>7</sup>.

## 4. Ensure freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are fundamental human rights allowing effective participation of non-state actors in economic and social policy, lying at the heart of democracy and the rule of law. Ensuring that workers and employers have a voice and are represented is, therefore, essential for the effective functioning not only of labour markets but also of overall governance structures in a country. States shall comply with ILO standards in that regard, particularly ILO Conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining: the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No.87), and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No.98)<sup>8</sup>.

7 [http://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/fair\\_compensation\\_for\\_farmworkers\\_good\\_practices\\_and\\_challenges\\_february\\_2017.pdf](http://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/fair_compensation_for_farmworkers_good_practices_and_challenges_february_2017.pdf)

8 <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/dw4sd/themes/freedom-of-association/lang--en/index.htm>



SOLIDAR has promoted Decent Work since 1999, when it was launched as a concept by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), framing its work since 2015 within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SOLIDAR members, partners and allies are present in many countries within and outside Europe and they engage in solidarity initiatives contributing to the achievement of different Sustainable Development Goals such as SDG 8 (decent work) and SDG 10 (reduced inequality) as illustrated in this Factsheet.



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