

Agriculture

The agricultural sector employs an estimated 1.3 billion workers worldwide, that is half of the world's labour force. In terms of fatalities, injuries and work-related ill-health, it is one of the three most hazardous sectors of activity (along with construction and mining). According to ILO estimates, at least 170,000 agricultural workers are killed each year. This means that workers in agriculture run twice the risk of dying on the job compared with workers in other sectors. Agricultural mortality rates have remained consistently high in the last decade compared with other sectors in which fatal accident rates have generally decreased. Millions more agricultural workers are seriously injured in workplace accidents involving agricultural machinery or poisoned by pesticides and other agrochemicals. Furthermore, widespread under-reporting of deaths, injuries and occupational diseases in the agricultural sector means that the real picture of the occupational health and safety of farm workers is likely to be worse than official statistics indicate.

Much agricultural work is, by its nature, physically demanding. The risk of accidents is increased by fatigue, poorly designed tools, difficult terrain, exposure to extreme weather conditions, and poor general health, associated with working and living in remote and rural communities. These problems are compounded by the fact that working and living conditions are interwoven. Subsistence farmers, waged workers and their families live on the land where there is much environmental spillover from the occupational risks mentioned above.

Working conditions may vary from country to country, depending on working methods – from highly-mechanised extensive methods in commercial plantations to traditional intensive methods in small-scale subsistence agriculture. The most vulnerable groups are found in family subsistence agriculture, in plantations as daily paid labourers, seasonal or migrant workers without land, and, of course, child labourers. In most countries only some categories of agricultural workers are covered by national legislation, employment injury benefits or insurance schemes. A large number of agricultural workers are thus deprived of any form of social protection. Where national regulations exist, they are often only sporadically applied. Effective enforcement may be poor due to insufficient labour inspection, a lack of understanding and training on hazards and their prevention on the part of both of employers and workers, and low levels of organization among agricultural workers.

The ILO recognised the particularly hazardous nature of agricultural work in its Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention (No. 184), adopted in 2001. SafeWork, through its OSH specialists in the field, and in collaboration with other ILO technical units ([SECTOR](#) and [TRAVAIL](#)) is also participating in the promotion of a voluntary, participatory and action-oriented training programme called [Work Improvements in Neighbourhood Development – WIND](#).