

► ILO Brief

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Decent work in food and agricultural supply chains Trends, challenges and innovations in Asia and the Pacific

Key points

- Food and agricultural supply chains are central to economic growth, employment and rural livelihoods in Asia and the Pacific, supporting millions across sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, fruit, rice, cassava, coffee, tea and livestock, with micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) playing a dominant role.
- Persistent informality, gender and migration-based inequalities, and accelerating climate risks undermine food security and decent work, especially for smallholders, women, and seasonal workers in rural and coastal communities.
- Decent work deficits include limited collective bargaining driven by low union presence, child and forced labour, hazardous working environments, and limited access to social protection.
- To address these deficits, legal and policy frameworks are being strengthened in many countries, including new laws on OSH, efforts to formalize informal workers, and moves to align national laws and practices with international labour standards.
- There is evidence that social dialogue is strengthening in food and agricultural supply chains, with unions, employers, and governments working to improve labour conditions through collaboration, especially in more formalized supply chain segments.
- Collaborative efforts among tripartite constituents and sectoral stakeholders are driving change through innovations in labour inspection, sustainability initiatives, and inclusive governance mechanisms to advance decent work in supply chains.

► Introduction¹

Food and agricultural supply chains in Asia and the Pacific hold a strategic importance as key drivers of economic development and employment.

- In South-East Asia alone, supply chains support at least 75 million workers, over a quarter of total employment, with approximately 20 per cent of jobs in agriculture, a share that has doubled over the past decade.² These supply chains are not only vital sources

of income and livelihoods but also serve as critical engines of economic growth and employment, offering important entry points for promoting decent work.

- MSMEs are the backbone of the region's economy, representing 97 per cent of all enterprises and 69 per cent of the labour force, and are especially commonplace in agribusiness and food processing.³

¹ This brief was written by Luisa Lupo with guidance from the ILO Priority Action Programme on Decent Work Outcomes in Supply Chains. Appreciation goes to colleagues in the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific for their valuable feedback.

² Christian Viegelahn, Phu Huynh, and Kee Beom Kim, *Jobs and Global Supply Chains in South East Asia*, ILO Working Paper No. 91, 2023.

³ UN ESCAP, "Overview: MSMEs in Asia Pacific Regions," *MSME Policy*, n.d.

- In 2022, fisheries and aquaculture production reached a record 223.2 million tonnes and supported the livelihoods of 61.8 million people globally, with Asia accounting for 90 per cent of production and 95 per cent of the workforce.⁴
- Indonesia is the world's second-largest seafood producer after China, with capture fishing production amounting to 7.99 million tons in 2022, around 8.6 per cent of the global total.⁵
- Thailand ranks first in ASEAN for the value of its agricultural exports, valued at over 28 billion US\$, and agro-industrial exports 23 billion US\$ in 2024.⁶ Rice cultivation covers half of Thailand's farmland, and the country is also a leading global producer and exporter of cassava (57 per cent of starch exports), tropical fruits (54 per cent of durian, 37 per cent of coconut, 31 per cent of canned pineapple), livestock (26 per cent of chicken exports), and seafood.⁷
- The Philippines has historically been a key exporter of aquaculture products such as shrimp and seaweed, especially to North America, Europe, and Japan.⁸
- Viet Nam is the world's largest producer of Robusta coffee and the second largest exporter of coffee after Brazil, as well as a major exporter of rice. Rice production, in particular, accounts for 75 per cent of the country's total agricultural production value and provides income for over 60 million people.⁹
- Nepal is the world's largest producer of large cardamom, accounting for two-thirds of total production between 2018 and 2019, primarily through smallholder farming.¹⁰
- Sri Lanka ranks among the top five global exporters of tea and coconut products, with these sectors providing employment and livelihoods to 2.5 million and 835,000 people, respectively.¹¹

Promoting decent work is essential to advancing food security, not only by enabling workers and their families to afford diverse, nutritious diets, but also by ensuring decent working environments that support both food quality and supply. This is crucial especially in food and agricultural supply chains, which can foster workers' food security through two complementary channels: directly, by increasing productivity, and thus food quality and supply in subsistence crop production; and indirectly, by improving working conditions, particularly in supply chains tied to cash crops.

In Asia and the Pacific, where these supply chains support the livelihoods of millions of workers, persistent challenges such as informality, social exclusion and legal gaps continue to weaken progress, in some instances undermining the food security of smallholders, seasonal workers and migrants. Compounding these issues, climate change poses a growing threat to agricultural productivity and food availability through increased droughts, floods and other extreme weather events. Tripartite partners across the region are responding by adopting climate-resilient practices and working to establish more inclusive supply chain governance frameworks.

This brief consolidates ILO evidence from diverse supply chain interventions, sectors and countries,¹² to examine how food and agricultural supply chains can be drivers of decent work, food security and sustainability. By highlighting key trends, challenges and innovations, it aims to inform dialogue and equips tripartite partners with actionable insights to advance decent work and sustainable agriculture for a just and resilient future in Asia and the Pacific and globally.

4 FAO, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture*, 2022.

5 ILO and Research Center for Population of the National Research and Innovation Agency of Indonesia (PRK-BRIN), *Understanding Working Conditions of Fishers in Indonesia: Evidence from the 2024 Survey on Decent Work in Marine Fishing*, 2025.

6 Bangkok Bank, *Thailand's Agricultural Sector: A Hidden Pillar of Economic Stability*, 2024; Thailand Trade Policy and Strategy Office (TPSO), "พาณิชย์เผยสถิติที่สูงสุดแห่งปี การส่งออกสินค้าเกษตรไทย ปี 67", 2025.

7 The Nation, "Thailand Tops Global Agricultural Exports with Durian and Coconut," 14 June 2025.

8 ILO, *Decent work and responsible business practices in the Philippine aquaculture sector*, 2025.

9 Vision Zero Fund, "Drivers and Constraints for OSH Improvements in the Viet Nam Coffee Supply Chain," *Assessment report* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2025); Vision Zero Fund, "Addressing Occupational Safety and Health Challenges Linked to Climate Change in Agricultural Supply Chains in Viet Nam," *Research report*, 2025.

10 ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Cardamom Sector," *Analytical summary*, 2024.

11 ILO, "Assessment of the Realization of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in the Coconut Sector in Sri Lanka," *Analytical summary*, 2024.

12 These interventions comprise the following supply chains, sectors and countries: fishery in Indonesia; cardamom and tea in Nepal; aquaculture in the Philippines; coconut and tea in Sri Lanka; cassava, fruit and livestock in Thailand; coffee, rice, and fruit and vegetables in Viet Nam. The case studies are not intended to imply any generalization or to single out particular contexts.

► Emerging trends and drivers of change

The labour landscape in food and agricultural supply chains is undergoing transformation, driven by increasing climate vulnerability, demographic shifts, and evolving regulatory requirements and market pressures.

► **Rising climate vulnerability.** Agricultural supply chains are especially vulnerable to climate shocks. For example, in Viet Nam an estimated 11.8 million people were directly exposed to intense flood risk in 2020, particularly in coastal and rural communities, and up to 7 per cent of the country's agricultural land may become submerged due to sea level rises by 2070-2100.¹³ Increasing temperatures, more frequent and severe weather events (such as droughts, floods, and typhoons), sea level rise, salinity intrusion, and the spread of biological hazards are threatening food security and endangering the health, safety, and well-being of workers. Extreme weather may also increase the use of pesticide, which affects food safety as well as workers' health and safety. These adverse effects have negative consequences for productivity, reducing it by 17 per cent in Asia and the Pacific by 2070 and up to 30 per cent in South and South-East Asia alone.¹⁴ These challenges underscore the urgent need to raise awareness about climate-related hazards among both employers and workers and build resilience among all stakeholders. They also require the development and implementation of collective adaptation strategies that are scientifically rigorous and focused on reducing inequities, taking into consideration both the physical and mental health impacts of climate change on workers.

► **Demographic shifts.** Rural-to-urban migration and declining interest in traditional agricultural work among younger generations are leading to an ageing workforce, especially in lower tiers of agricultural supply chains. Many young people are seeking higher education or employment in other industries that offer better wages, improved working conditions, and greater work-life balance. This demographic trend poses significant challenges for the future of these supply chains, which will need to develop strategies to attract and retain a skilled workforce, while ensuring sustainability and growth for the sector. Addressing this demographic shift will also require a focus on improving working conditions for this ageing workforce and, at the same time, making agricultural careers more attractive to younger generations.

► **Regulatory requirements and market pressures.** Food and agricultural supply chains, influenced by consumers, investors and regulators, are increasingly prioritizing responsible business practices, human rights, and sustainability standards. Countries and trading blocs such as the EU, US, and Japan, which are top export markets for supply chains in Asia and the Pacific, increasingly have policies and legislation that require compliance with national laws and respect for fundamental principles and rights at work, such as due diligence laws and labour provisions in trade agreements, alongside stringent food safety regulations outlining requirements for hygiene, traceability, and food additives, among others.

► Root causes and challenges to decent work

Food and agricultural supply chains, including seafood, are characterized by significant decent work deficits, often exacerbated by legal fragmentation, limited oversight and environmental pressures. This section draws on unique data and insights collected by the ILO across countries, sectors and supply chains. This section draws on unique data and insights collected by the ILO across countries, sectors and supply chains, reflecting on their critical decent work challenges and root causes.

Fundamental principles and rights at work

Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining remain limited in food and agricultural supply chains across countries. In capture fisheries, workers labour in isolation, often on small-scale vessels, with minimal oversight and opportunities to organize or engage in dialogue with employers. Findings

13 Vision Zero Fund, "Addressing Occupational Safety and Health Challenges Linked to Climate Change in Agricultural Supply Chains in Viet Nam," 2025.

14 Lorenza Campagnolo, Gabriele Mansi, Francesco Bosello and David A. Raitzer, "Quantifying the Economic Costs of Climate Change Inaction for Asia and the Pacific," ADB Background Paper, 2024.

from the first ILO's Decent Work Survey in Marine Fishing, conducted in Indonesia in 2024, illustrate that there are no collective bargaining agreements for fishers in the country, resulting in lack of access to crucial mechanisms to establish or regulate their terms of employment (see Box 1 for more details on this survey).¹⁵

In aquaculture, particularly in the Philippines' shrimp and seaweed supply chains, surveyed workers consistently reported a lack of trade unions and cited various barriers, including employer hostility, a lack of awareness about the value of unions, and an absence of formal channels to raise grievances. Among processing workers, unions are virtually non-existent, with grievances handled informally through HR departments or suggestion boxes.¹⁶

► **Box 1. Unsafe working environment and forced labour in Indonesia's fisheries: evidence from the first Decent Work Survey in Marine Fishing**

Indonesia is the world's second-largest fisheries producer, employing over 12 million people in both capture fisheries and aquaculture. The sector plays a critical role in providing income and food security for millions of Indonesians, many of whom migrate internally. Recognizing the importance of protecting these workers, Indonesia became the first country to implement the ILO's Decent Work Survey in Marine Fishing, the first of its kind globally, setting a precedent for greater transparency in fisheries supply chains. The findings highlight a strong national commitment to improving occupational safety and health, eliminating forced labour and improving labour rights protections for fishers, signalling a critical step toward safeguarding the welfare of workers in the sector.

The survey, which comprises 3,400 worker interviews, reveals widespread violations of fundamental principles and rights at work, including unsafe and unhealthy working environment and coercion. Nearly 45 per cent of workers reported exposure to hazards related to weather events, reflecting the increased risks to their safety and health. The second most common concern was lack of prevention measures including personal protective equipment (PPE). Vessel conditions also emerged as a critical safety issue. Nearly 11 per cent of workers reported safety issues, including the inadequate technical conditions on board, lack of stability due to overloading, and vessels unfit to sail. Lack of privacy and hygiene were also major concerns among workers.

Despite existing national and international regulations on fair recruitment, the survey uncovered serious enforcement gaps: over 60 per cent of respondents reported paying recruitment fees, sometimes equating to nearly a year's income for small-vessel workers.

The survey further identified that 1.5 per cent of fishers in the 18 surveyed ports were possibly trapped in forced labour. These workers frequently had their identity documents withheld (34.1 per cent) and faced severe restrictions on voicing grievances due to fear of retaliation, including job loss, pay cuts, or physical violence (28 per cent). Debt bondage was also reported, preventing workers from leaving their jobs (12 per cent). Those in forced labour reported hazardous conditions threatening their health and safety (27.6 per cent), abusive and extended working hours beyond agreed terms (21.4 per cent), and degrading access to food and water (17.5 per cent). Alarming, 0.7 per cent of fishers, predominantly on large vessels, were found in bonded labour, a particularly severe form of forced labour tied to debt obligations. Debts were often associated with loans, advance payments, or exorbitant recruitment fees, and had unclear or exploitative repayment terms. The survey also revealed that 1.2 per cent of fishers had been trafficked for forced labour.

Source: ILO and PRK-BRIN, *Understanding Working Conditions of Fishers in Indonesia*, 2025.

15 ILO and PRK-BRIN, *Understanding Working Conditions of Fishers in Indonesia*, 2025.

16 ILO, *Decent work and responsible business practices in the Philippine aquaculture sector*, 2025.

While some forms of formal representation exist, these are often inadequate to address grievances; an issue aggravated by informality and the prevalence of piece-rate work. In seaweed farming and processing, for example, even where associations or cooperatives are present, their role is often limited in addressing labour conditions or promoting freedom of association. Instead, these associations are, at times, used to meet formal eligibility criteria for government support, such as access to funding for equipment.¹⁷ Workers in agriculture face barriers to organizing, and migrant workers encounter additional challenges due to language barriers and fears of deportation.¹⁸

With respect to forced labour, the first Decent Work Survey in Marine Fishing found that 1.5 per cent of fishers across 18 Indonesian ports were possibly trapped in conditions indicative of forced labour. While some progress has been made, such as the development of a Code of Conduct by the Indonesian Pole & Line and Handline Fisheries Association that prohibits forced labour, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends on stronger enforcement and monitoring, which remain challenging on fishing vessels.

Child labour remains a pervasive problem across agricultural and seafood supply chains. In Viet Nam's coffee industry, child labour is widespread among smallholders, particularly during the harvest season when family labour is mobilized to meet time-sensitive labour demands.¹⁹ In Indonesia's fisheries, nearly 47 per cent of surveyed workers reported that they began fishing before the age of 18, often due to economic pressures and a lack of educational opportunities.²⁰

In the Philippines' aquaculture sector, child labour was detected specifically in intensive shrimp farms, where children were hired to assist during the harvest period.²¹ In Thailand, according to the latest survey conducted by the National Statistics Office, the Ministry of Labour, and the ILO, 46 per cent of the country's 409,000 working children (189,000) were engaged in agriculture,

forestry, and fishing, with 75,000 involved in hazardous agricultural work.²²

► The first Decent Work Survey in Marine Fishing found that nearly 47 per cent of workers in Indonesia began fishing before the age of 18, and that 1.5 per cent of fishers were possibly trapped in forced labour.

Discrimination in respect of employment and occupation is entrenched in food and agricultural supply chains, manifesting in the overrepresentation of women, ethnic minorities, migrants, and indigenous peoples in precarious, informal, and low-paid work. In the seafood sector, for example, women are more likely to be employed in undervalued roles in processing, sorting, or support services, tasks that are often low-wage and informal.²³ In Viet Nam, women make up approximately half of the agricultural workforce but face significant disparities in land rights, decision-making power and exposure to agrochemicals (for instance, due to secondary exposure while they clean PPE).²⁴ In Sri Lanka, women represent a large portion of the workforce in both the coconut and tea sectors, especially in small-scale farms where labour is organized within family units.²⁵ Similarly, in Nepal's tea and cardamom sectors, women represent a significant share of the workforce, though they are overrepresented in temporary, informal and low paid or unpaid tasks.²⁶

A safe and healthy working environment is elusive for many workers in agriculture and seafood supply chains. Capture fishing is among the highest-risk professions in the world, exposing workers to life-threatening weather conditions, unsafe equipment, long working hours, physical and psychological exhaustion, and poor hygiene.

17 ILO, *Decent work and responsible business practices in the Philippine aquaculture sector*, 2025.

18 ILO, "Agriculture in Thailand: Policy and working conditions for nationals and migrants," *Policy Brief*, 2025.

19 Vision Zero Fund, "Drivers and Constraints for OSH Improvements in the Viet Nam Coffee Supply Chain," 2025.

20 ILO and PRK-BRIN, *Understanding Working Conditions of Fishers in Indonesia*, 2025.

21 ILO, *Decent work and responsible business practices in the Philippine aquaculture sector*, 2025.

22 ILO, "Agriculture in Thailand: Policy and working conditions for nationals and migrants," *Policy Brief*, 2025.

23 ILO, "Agriculture in Thailand: Policy and working conditions for nationals and migrants," *Policy Brief*, 2025.

24 Vision Zero Fund, "Addressing Occupational Safety and Health Challenges Linked to Climate Change in Agricultural Supply Chains in Viet Nam," 2025.

25 ILO, "Assessment of the Realization of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in the Coconut Sector in Sri Lanka," 2024; ILO, "Assessment of the Realization of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in the Tea Sector in Sri Lanka," *Analytical summary*, 2024.

26 ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Cardamom Sector," 2024; ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Tea Sector," *Analytical summary*, 2024.

In agriculture, OSH risks are high, including exposure to hazardous chemicals, extreme heat and dusts, ergonomic factors, as well as accidents due to machines and vehicles, compounded by lack of training and inadequate use of PPE. In Thailand's agricultural sector, a 2022 ILO survey found that 85 per cent of migrant workers did not receive any training on OSH prevention measures nor PPE.²⁷ Previous survey data of migrant cassava workers indicated that nearly two in five had experienced an occupational

injury.²⁸ Moreover, exposure to pesticide including acute outcomes such as poisoning, which leaves workers vulnerable to long-term health consequences, has been documented in Viet Nam's coffee farms and among workers in Nepal's and Sri Lanka's tea plantations, while accidents were reported in Sri Lanka's coconut farms.²⁹ At the same time, several efforts are underway to advance OSH, especially through social dialogue in more formalized tea plantations (Box 2).

► Box 2. Toward a safe and healthy working environment in Sri Lanka's tea and coconut supply chains

Tea and coconut are major export products in Sri Lanka. While workers face significant challenges related to the effective realization of fundamental principles and rights at work, there are significant differences both across and within these supply chains. Enterprises in tea production, specifically large plantations, often employ a high percentage of permanent workers (87.5 per cent of surveyed workers), providing access to benefits such as provident funds. Most workers reported specific OSH hazards including working on difficult terrain, exposure to dust and agrochemicals, and risks from machinery, as well as health issues. For example, 23 per cent of surveyed crush, tear and curl (CTC) tea workers affirmed that they suffered from muscle and bone pain. In large estates, unionization is high, and most surveyed tea enterprises (97 per cent of employers) reported the presence OSH committees, suggesting a potential avenue for OSH improvement through social dialogue in more formalized settings.

Conversely, the coconut production is characterized by a high degree of informality, especially among smallholders who account for over 80 per cent of total production. Work is hazardous, with high safety risks including falls from height and falling coconuts. Accidents reported by workers include falls and snake bites (69 per cent of reported accidents). Despite those hazards, 84 per cent of workers perceived their workplace as safe, potentially indicating some gaps in OSH awareness. In fact, OSH management systems are severely lacking, and none of the surveyed enterprises had established OSH committees or safety officers. OSH risk assessments were rarely reported as conducted (only 36 per cent of employers), and PPE use was low (80 per cent of workers reported not using any).

While assessments from the ILO found that none of the surveyed workers were unionized in coconut farms, established trade unions in the tea sector, such as the Ceylon Workers' Congress and Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union worked across other crops as well.

Efforts to update the national OSH policy and ongoing labour law reforms provide opportunities to reinforce social dialogue mechanisms and ensure broader coverage and enforcement, while institutions such as the tripartite Plantation Human Development Trust anchored in the Ministry of Labour coordinate healthcare services and welfare initiatives for plantation workers and their families and embedded OSH into their services with ILO support.

Sources: ILO, "Assessment of the Realization of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in the Coconut Sector in Sri Lanka," 2024; ILO, "Assessment of the Realization of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in the Tea Sector in Sri Lanka," 2024.

27 ILO, "Agriculture in Thailand: Policy and working conditions for nationals and migrants," 2025.

28 ILO, "Agriculture in Thailand: Policy and working conditions for nationals and migrants," 2025.

29 Vision Zero Fund, "Drivers and Constraints for OSH Improvements in the Viet Nam Coffee Supply Chain," 2025; ILO, "Assessment of the Realization of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in the Tea Sector in Sri Lanka," 2024; LO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Tea Sector," 2024.

Informality

Insufficient social protection coverage, largely driven by informality, is widespread in rural agricultural and fishery employment. In Indonesia, over 70 per cent of fishers lack employment-related social security, with many working under verbal agreements or family obligations.³⁰ The Philippines' shrimp and seaweed sectors are similarly characterized by informal work, even within formal enterprises.³¹ In Viet Nam's coffee and rice sectors, informality is prevalent, with 60 per cent of workers lacking contracts and the majority working seasonally or on a casual basis.³² Similarly, in Nepal's cardamom and tea sectors, a large majority of the workforce labours informally (Box 3).

► 60 per cent of surveyed workers in Viet Nam's rice and coffee sectors, and 95 per cent in Nepal's cardamom sector labour informally.

The lack of formal employment excludes these workers from benefits such as health insurance, pension schemes, and unemployment protection, leaving them vulnerable to income shocks, illnesses and occupational accidents. Women, ethnic minorities, and migrant workers are particularly at risk, as they are disproportionately represented in these informal roles.³³

► Box 3. Informality and opportunities for improvement in Nepal's cardamom and tea production

Nepal is the world's major producer of large cardamom and a significant exporter of tea. While these sectors are key for job creation, informality and seasonal employment are pervasive. According to a recent assessment, an estimated 95 per cent of large cardamom comes from small-scale farms, which are predominantly family-based, while the tea sector employs up to 350,000 workers during the peak season, with seasonal and daily workers making up between 70 to 80 per cent of this workforce. Similarly, all surveyed workers in primary cardamom processing were employed on a temporary basis, and 83 per cent were temporary in secondary processing.

Informality and the resulting lack of legal protection lead to significant challenges in realizing fundamental principles and rights at work and fair wages. OSH management systems were largely absent or inactive in surveyed farms, none of the surveyed cardamom enterprises had OSH committees, and OSH committees were generally not well-established or inactive in the tea sector. OSH risk assessments were rarely conducted, and PPE provision was inconsistent, often lacking proper training on usage. Low awareness among employers and workers regarding OSH hazards also contributed to underreporting of occupational accidents and diseases, while some symptoms are reported: for example, 23 per cent of surveyed CTC tea workers occasionally suffered from muscle and bone pain. Both tea and cardamom workers also reported to be exposed to hazards such as chemical, heat, and poor sanitation. Freedom of association and collective bargaining are weak or non-existent in the cardamom sector, where no surveyed workers were union members, and significantly lower in the orthodox tea sector compared to CTC. Moreover, all surveyed workers in primary cardamom processing reported receiving wages below the government-approved minimum daily wage. In addition, affiliation with the national social security fund was notably low or absent, with the exception of larger orthodox tea farms.

Despite these challenges, positive momentum is building as Nepal prepares for graduation from Least Developed Country status in 2026, which is expected to bring new opportunities for economic growth and global integration, alongside higher expectations for the realization of fundamental principles and rights at work.

Sources: ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Cardamom Sector," 2024; ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Tea Sector," 2024.

30 ILO and PRK-BRIN, *Understanding Working Conditions of Fishers in Indonesia*, 2025.

31 ILO, *Decent work and responsible business practices in the Philippine aquaculture sector*, 2025.

32 Vision Zero Fund, "Addressing Occupational Safety and Health Challenges Linked to Climate Change in Agricultural Supply Chains in Viet Nam," 2025.

33 ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Cardamom Sector," 2024; ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Tea Sector," 2024.

While some countries have taken steps to encourage formalization, such as developing digital contracts and simplifying administrative procedures, greater investment and regulatory coordination are necessary to ensure that these measures are scalable and effective, especially for smallholders and microenterprises.

Climate change

Climate change and environmental degradation further amplify decent work challenges. Agriculture and fishing are inherently climate-sensitive sectors, as workers are disproportionately affected by rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and disruptions to natural

ecosystems. In the Philippines, aquaculture workers have reported damage from stronger typhoons and higher water temperatures, which increase safety and health risks and reduce income security.³⁴ Similarly, workers and farmers in agricultural supply chains in Viet Nam, report being affected by the impacts of climate change, with floods, heatwaves, and sea-level rise threatening both crop yields and livelihoods. These impacts not only undermine productivity and livelihoods but also heighten OSH risks, such as heat-related illnesses and accidents, including those due to increased use of agrochemicals against the proliferation of new pests and diseases. They might also push workers into more precarious and potentially riskier income-generating activities without adequate social protection (Box 4).

► Box 4. Climate change, decent work deficits and adaptation strategies: Evidence from agricultural supply chains in Viet Nam

Food and agricultural supply chains are especially vulnerable to climate change, which not only reduces crop yields with negative consequences for food security, but also negatively affects labour productivity as workers and farmers are increasingly exposed to environmental hazards. A recent study by the ILO's Vision Zero Fund examined the key climate change-related challenges in Viet Nam, one of the world's most affected countries, focusing on coffee, rice, and fruit and vegetable supply chains. The evidence demonstrates that climate change acts both as a direct cause and multiplier of decent work deficits.

1. By increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, including heatwaves, heavy rainfall, floods, and droughts, along with rising temperatures and sea levels, climate change exacerbates workers' exposure to occupational and health hazards, such as heat, UV radiation, exposure to vector borne diseases, and occupational accidents.
2. The rise in pests and diseases driven by climate change results in greater dependence on agrochemicals and pesticides, which pose significant health risks to workers, especially where access to PPE and proper training is lacking.
3. Salinity intrusion and extreme weather events negatively impact crop yields, contributing to financial losses and increased mental health challenges among producers.
4. The pressures of climate change can force workers into more precarious employment or deepen existing informality as they cope with income loss and are forced to adapt to rapidly changing environmental conditions.

In response, the study developed a comprehensive framework for prioritizing adaptive strategies that balance prevention and mitigation. This framework points to the need to address physical and mental health impacts, reduce inequalities among vulnerable groups, and prioritize scientific evidence. The implementation of adaptive strategies can leverage existing strengths, including training and support from value chain actors, especially sustainability initiatives within coffee supply chains, regular government and stakeholder-led events such as annual OSH Month and National Coffee Day, and a robust national legal framework encompassing the Law on Health Insurance (2014), the Law on Social Insurance (2014, 2019), the Occupational Safety and Health Law (2015), and the Labour Code (2019).

Source: Vision Zero Fund, "Addressing Occupational Safety and Health Challenges Linked to Climate Change in Agricultural Supply Chains in Viet Nam," 2025.

Legal gaps and fragmentation

Legal gaps and fragmentation remain critical barriers to ensuring decent work. The scope of existing law often does not extend to smallholders, seasonal workers, or informal workers, who form the majority in agricultural and fishery supply chains. Even where laws exist, enforcement is limited by resource constraints, geographic inaccessibility, and lack of institutional coordination. In fisheries, the isolation of vessels makes labour inspection challenging, while inadequate monitoring systems leave labour violations undetected. In agriculture, primary processing units such as tea gardens

or cardamom sorting facilities predominantly employ temporary workers, excluding them from coverage under standard labour laws.

In Sri Lanka and Viet Nam, certification schemes such as Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance provide some incentive for improved practices, particularly in OSH, but these schemes often fail to reach smallholders and informal enterprises. Nevertheless, promising efforts are underway, such as Indonesia's private sector working group for sustainable fisheries, the establishment of a Tripartite Council in the Philippines for aquaculture, and sustainability initiatives in Viet Nam.

► Good practices and innovations

Several good practices and innovations have emerged to advance decent work in the countries, sectors and supply chains examined in this brief. These include efforts to strengthen legal and policy frameworks, formalize informal work and improve protections, promote worker participation and social dialogue, and foster institutional collaboration, illustrating important actions already underway.

Strengthening legal and policy frameworks

- In 2022, tripartite constituents amended the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW) to include a “safe and healthy working environment” as the fifth fundamental principle and right at work, alongside freedom of association, elimination of forced labour, abolition of child labour, and elimination of discrimination. Several countries have taken concrete steps to align national laws with international labour standards.
- Indonesia has ratified the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), and launched the National OSH Programme 2024–29 to strengthen OSH governance, compliance and enforcement mechanisms, and tripartite collaboration.³⁵ Viet Nam has ratified both Convention No. 187 and the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), and is implementing the

National Programme on Occupational Safety and Health (2021–25), which focuses on prevention, health services, training, compensation, and reporting. Multiple state agencies, along with employer and worker organizations, are involved in implementing this programme.

- The Philippines has strengthened its legal and policy frameworks through amendments to promote OSH compliance and adoption of National OSH Strategy 2024–28, while finalizing the ratification of ILO Convention No. 81 on Labour Inspection. In addition, laws such as R.A. No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women) prioritize women's rights, drawing from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while the Social Reform Alleviation Act (R.A. No. 8425) provides development and financing programs specifically targeting vulnerable sectors, including fisheries. National plans such as “Ambisyon Natin 2040” and the Development Plan (2023–2028) include the modernization of agriculture and fisheries and the expansion of social protection coverage among their goals.³⁶
- In Nepal, there has been increasing recognition by tripartite constituents of the need to intensify the promotion of a safe and healthy working environment, with interventions taking place at different levels. At the national level, the government adopted the National OSH Programme in 2024 and developed technical OSH guidelines for the tea sector. At the municipality level, Suryodaya Municipality launched a pilot initiative to establish a municipal-level OSH management system.³⁷

35 ILO and PRK-BRIN, *Understanding Working Conditions of Fishers in Indonesia*, 2025; ILO, *Improving Workers' Rights in Indonesia's Rural Sectors: Key Achievements 2021–2024* (Jakarta and Geneva: International Labour Organization, June 2025).

36 ILO, *Decent work and responsible business practices in the Philippine aquaculture sector*, 2025.

37 ILO, “Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Cardamom Sector,” 2024; ILO, “Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Tea Sector,” 2024.

► In Nepal, there has been increasing recognition by tripartite constituents of the need to intensify the promotion of a safe and healthy working environment.

- ASEAN has taken important steps to strengthen the protection and rights of migrant fishers through the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers and its accompanying guidelines. With support from the ILO, ASEAN's 13th Labour Inspection Conference focused on strengthening OSH and labour inspection, particularly in agriculture.
- Thailand was the first country in Asia to ratify the ILO's Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No.188), which protects the living and working conditions of fishers on board vessels. It has also ratified the Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention (P29) and implemented reforms in the fishing industry.
- Indonesia's legislative framework includes Law No. 21 of 2007 on the Eradication of Human Trafficking, that criminalizes all forms of human trafficking, including forced labour. The government has also updated sectoral profiles for the fish processing and palm oil sectors.

Formalization of informal workers and improved protections

- In Viet Nam, the OSH Law (2015) includes informal workers within its scope and contains provisions intended to protect farm workers in the informal sector against OSH risks. Moreover, the Decision on "Care and Improvement of Workers' Health and Prevention of Occupational Diseases in the period 2020 – 2030" aims to integrate healthcare services for workers without employment contracts into primary health care activities at the grassroots level by 2025.³⁸
- In Indonesia, the government has implemented the PERISAI programme under the Social Security

Administration for Employment, which uses independent agents at the community level to expand social security coverage, particularly for informal and underserved workers, including fishers. Discussions are also ongoing to simplify registration processes and explore digital solutions such as mobile-based e-contract systems to streamline contract management and promote formalization.³⁹

Fostering participation and social dialogue

- In Nepal, though collective bargaining and workplace cooperation are limited in the agricultural sector, legal frameworks support freedom of association and collective bargaining. In the tea sector, unions have been engaging in industrial action to improve compliance with wage legislation, as well as awareness raising on non-discrimination and OSH management systems.⁴⁰

► Viet Nam's OSH Law covers informal workers and integrates goals regarding healthcare for those without employment contracts. Indonesia's PERISAI program uses community agents to expand social security coverage for informal fishers.

- The Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour has promoted OSH through its trade unions and by engaging in policy discussions, while the Viet Nam Farmers' Union has organized support activities for farmers, although its engagement in OSH promotion for farmer communities is at an early stage.⁴¹
- In Sri Lanka, legal frameworks support freedom of association and collective bargaining, and the plantation sector has worked with the ILO to form bipartite OSH committees within estates. By 2024, 250 OSH committees were established across tea and coconut sectors, as well as rubber.⁴²

38 Vision Zero Fund, "Addressing Occupational Safety and Health Challenges Linked to Climate Change in Agricultural Supply Chains in Viet Nam," 2025.

39 ILO and PRK-BRIN, *Understanding Working Conditions of Fishers in Indonesia*, 2025.

40 ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Cardamom Sector," 2024; ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Tea Sector," 2024.

41 Vision Zero Fund, "Addressing Occupational Safety and Health Challenges Linked to Climate Change in Agricultural Supply Chains in Viet Nam," 2025.

42 ILO, "Assessment of the Realization of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in the Coconut Sector in Sri Lanka," 2024; ILO, "Assessment of the Realization of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in the Tea Sector in Sri Lanka," 2024.

- In Indonesia, a Trade Union Network has been established in the fishing sector to foster a unified voice among trade unions and reinforce bipartite and tripartite social dialogue. Six national trade union confederations have committed to promoting decent work and eliminating forced and child labour in the fishing sector.⁴³ With ILO support, the Network is currently advocating for the ratification of the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188).

Promoting institutional collaborations

- In Nepal, the Association of Tea Cooperatives, and the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries, with ILO support, developed voluntary guidelines on OSH for the plantation sectors. Some of the affiliated enterprises conducted OSH risk assessments and prepared action plans, involving workers in the development of locally sustainable measures.⁴⁴
- In Viet Nam, implementation of the OSH Law and national OSH programmes has involved coordination among multiple state agencies at national and provincial levels, and employer and worker organizations. Multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Sustainable Trade Initiative and the Global Coffee Platform (GCP) bring together diverse stakeholders, including producers and civil society. The GCP engages in multistakeholder dialogue events, research, facilitation of best practices among coffee actors, and capacity building to increase the supply of sustainably produced coffee. It also promotes the social wellbeing of coffee farmers, including OSH and considerations related to gender and ethnic minority groups.⁴⁵
- In Sri Lanka, trade unions in the tea sector, especially the Ceylon Workers' Congress and Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union, are active across other export crops, contributing to address gaps in worker representation. The Plantation Human Development Trust in charge

of the welfare of plantation workers integrated OSH services under its Health Services Department, ensuring that OSH initiatives are formalized and systematically delivered.⁴⁶

- In Indonesia, the government is implementing a joint multidisciplinary inspection mechanism among the Ministry of Manpower, the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, and local provincial offices with ILO support. Multi-stakeholder collaboration involving government agencies, civil society organizations, and vessel owners is considered essential to increase employment and social security coverage. The Indonesian Employer Association has established a private sector working group to promote decent work and sustainable growth in the fishing industry, collaborating with other stakeholders.⁴⁷
- In Thailand, important advancements have been made in multidisciplinary labour inspections in the fishing sector, notably through the port-in, port-out inspection system, which brings together the Ministry of Labour and the Department of Fisheries to monitor working conditions on board fishing vessels. In addition, the Seafood Good Labour Practice Programme fostered collaboration between the private sector and civil society organizations.
- In the Philippines, tripartite partners are exploring the creation of Industry Tripartite Councils for the seaweed and shrimp sectors and supply chains. In addition, the Fisheries Code establishes Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Councils, which represent established mechanisms involving various stakeholders for fisheries development planning and regulation enforcement at the local level.⁴⁸

These examples of good practices and innovations highlight important steps underway towards the realization of decent work in food and agricultural supply chains, though more decisive and integrated actions are needed to ensure that no one is left behind.

43 ILO and PRK-BRIN, *Understanding Working Conditions of Fishers in Indonesia*, 2025.

44 ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Cardamom Sector," 2024; ILO, "Assessment of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in Nepal's Tea Sector," 2024; ILO, *Safety + Health for All Plantation Workers in Nepal: Key Achievements* (Kathmandu: ILO Country Office for Nepal, October, 2024).

45 Vision Zero Fund, "Drivers and Constraints for OSH Improvements in the Viet Nam Coffee Supply Chain," 2025.

46 ILO, "Assessment of the Realization of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in the Coconut Sector in Sri Lanka," 2024; ILO, "Assessment of the Realization of the Fundamental Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment in the Tea Sector in Sri Lanka," 2024.

47 ILO and PRK-BRIN, *Understanding Working Conditions of Fishers in Indonesia*, 2025.

48 ILO, *Decent work and responsible business practices in the Philippine aquaculture sector*, 2025.

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