



► Policy Brief

October 2022

Advancing social justice and decent work in rural economies

“We acknowledge the importance of the prosperity of rural areas and the role of family farmers and smallholders in contributing to sustainable growth and the need to improve employment and business opportunities, and decent living and working conditions to make agriculture more attractive to women and youth.”

► G20 Italy 2021, [Agricultural Ministers Communiqué](#), 2021

► Introduction

The rural economy holds significant potential for creating decent and productive jobs and contributing to a human-centred future of work. As underlined during the United Nations Food Systems Summit in 2021, with less than 10 years left to 2030, many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be achieved unless we take action to make decent work a reality for all those working in agri-food systems and rural economies, thus ensuring that we leave no one behind¹.

With almost half of the world's population living in rural areas, rural economies play a major role in ensuring food

security and creating decent jobs. Yet, decent work deficits persist, with many rural workers living in poverty and working informally². While rural non-farm employment is gaining prominence in some locations³, agriculture is the mainstay of many rural economies, and many people in rural areas are dependent on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods. They are often deprived of effective infrastructure and quality services, as rural investments have been lagging⁴. Women, youth, migrant workers, and indigenous and tribal peoples are disproportionately affected.

The global economic situation is dominated by the impact of multiple and interlinked crises, including health crisis, conflicts and protracted crises, and the climate crisis. Social justice is threatened in many countries. The impacts of this global context on agri-food systems and rural economies

¹ UN, “Secretary-General’s Chair Summary and Statement of Action on the UN Food Systems Summit”, 2021.

² ILO, *Portfolio of Policy Guidance Notes on the Promotion of Decent Work in the Rural Economy*, 2019; World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2018: Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle*, 2018; ILO, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, 2018.

³ ILO, *Empleo informal en la economía rural de América Latina 2012 - 2019: Un panorama y tendencias regionales pre-pandemia COVID-19*, 2021.

⁴ UNDESA, *World Social Report 2021: Reconsidering Rural Development*, 2021.

have laid bare prevailing decent work deficits and widened inequalities⁵. Such pre-existing challenges are dampening the prospects of a sustainable recovery in many regions⁶. Rural workers who were vulnerable before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic are in a more difficult position to face current and future shocks⁷. Moreover, long-term trends in the world of work and of agri-food systems, such as demographic shifts, climate change, urbanization and technological innovation, have significant impacts on the prospects of life and work in rural areas worldwide⁸.

Looking ahead, we can seize the momentum to trigger transformative changes and advance towards more revitalized and dynamic rural economies. To do so, we need to place decent jobs at the centre of efforts towards revitalizing rural economies and strengthening their resilience. Consequently, rural areas will not only become more attractive places to work and live, but also springboards for inclusive, sustainable and resilient development. This is key to build back forward towards social justice and a human-centred future of work.



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⁵ ILO, "Impact of COVID-19 on People's Livelihoods, their Health and our Food systems - Joint Statement by ILO, FAO, IFAD, and WHO", 2020; ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2022*, 2022; ILO, *COVID-19 and the Impact on Agriculture and Food Security*, 2020; ILO, *COVID-19 and its Impact on Working Conditions in the Meat Processing Sector*, 2021; ILO, *Impact of COVID-19 on the Forest Sector*, 2020.

⁶ ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2022*, 11.

⁷ ILO, *COVID-19 and the Impact on Agriculture and Food Security*, 2020; ILO, *ILO Monitor on the World of Work. Ninth Edition*, 2022.

⁸ IFAD, *Rural Development Report 2021: Transforming Food Systems for Rural Prosperity*, 2021; UNDESA, *World Social Report 2021*; OECD, *Rural Well-being: Geography of Opportunities*, 2020; T.S. Jayne, F. Kwame Yeboah, and C. Henry, "The Future of work in African Agriculture: Trends and Drivers of Change", ILO Research Department Working Paper No. 25, 2017.

► Global trends in rural economies: future of work and the impact of multiple crises

Poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon

Seven out of ten people living in extreme poverty reside in rural areas, and 1.5 billion people who are moderately poor live in rural areas, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia⁹. Importantly, two-thirds of the extremely poor are engaged in agriculture¹⁰. Global extreme poverty rose in 2020 for the first time in over 20 years. Already hindered by conflicts and climate change, progress in poverty reduction also suffered a setback due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹ Around 97 million more people are living in poverty, and the recovery may not be sufficient to close the gap, especially in least developed countries¹². Furthermore, 84.2 per cent of those in acute multi-dimensional poverty are living in rural areas, based on the 2020 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index¹³. This implies that people living in rural areas are deprived in different dimensions, including health, education and standard of living. Hence, eradicating poverty by 2030 will require paying increased attention to rural poverty, including through investment programmes targeted to address spatial poverty traps in rural areas¹⁴.

⁹ Moderately poor is the population living below the international poverty line of US\$3.20 a day. IFAD, *Rural Development Report 2021*, 275.

¹⁰ Extremely poor is the population living below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 a day. ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook 2016: Transforming Jobs to End Poverty*, 2016.

¹¹ D. Gerszon Mahler, N. Yonzan, C. Laknerr, A. Castaneda Aguilar, and H. Wu, "Updated Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on Global Poverty: Turning the corner on the Pandemic in 2021?", *World Bank Blogs (blog)*, 24 June 2021.

¹² Mahler *et al.*, "Updated Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on Global Poverty".

¹³ OPHI and UNDP, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2020: Charting Pathways out of Multidimensional Poverty*, 2020.

¹⁴ UN, *Eradicating Rural Poverty to Implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - Report of the Secretary-General*,

Achieving global food security is intrinsically linked to the future of work in rural economies

The world is not on track to meet the commitment of ending hunger by 2030. Between 702 and 828 million people were affected by hunger in 2021, 150 million more since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁵.

Geographically, regions of greater concern are Africa and Asia. Hunger affects 278 million people in Africa and 425 million in Asia, respectively 20.2 and 9.1 per cent of the population. At the global level, food insecurity was higher among women than men in 2021¹⁶. Nutritious and affordable food is particularly needed to feed those engaged in the agricultural sector itself, who are often food insecure.

Growing concerns over inequalities across and within countries

In recent decades, some decline in inequality levels across countries was reported, mainly driven by rapid growth in emerging economies; and yet, such progress has been offset by rising inequality within most countries, regardless of their income level.

Within countries, spatial disparities between rural and urban areas are a cause of concern¹⁷. In an analysis of 65 middle- and low-income countries, urban-rural inequality

A/74/257 Seventy-fourth session, 2019; IFAD, *Rural Development Report 2016: Fostering Inclusive Rural Transformation*, 2016. Spatial poverty gaps are here understood as where 'geographic capital' (the physical, natural, social, political and human capital of an area) is low and poverty is high, partly as a result of geographic disadvantage. (K. Bird, K. Higgins, and D. Harris, 2010. "Spatial poverty traps - An overview", ODI Working Paper 321/CPRC Working Paper 16, ODI, London).

¹⁵ FAO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022: Repurposing food and Agricultural Policies to Make Healthy Diets More Affordable*, 2022.

¹⁶ FAO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022*, 30.

¹⁷ UNDESA, *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World*, 2020; ILO, *Inequalities and the World of Work*, ILC.109/IV(Rev.), 2021, para. 35.

accounted for 40 per cent of all inequality¹⁸. Such disparities can undermine development by leaving behind a significant share of the rural population, fuelling discontent and destabilizing societies. In addition to significant income gaps between urban and rural areas, residents in rural areas are facing increasing inequalities in access to social protection and public services, including schools and healthcare, as well as unequal digital access.

Decent work deficits faced by rural workers prevent rural economies from reaching their potential

More than one in four workers work in agriculture worldwide (Fig. 1) mostly as own-account workers and

contributing family workers¹⁹. In low-income countries, agricultural employment constitutes more than half the labour force²⁰. Rural populations are twice as likely to be in informal employment than those in urban areas, with the largest rates of informality in rural areas in Africa and Asia and the Pacific. Looking at informality in the agriculture sector, 93.6 per cent of workers are in informal employment²¹. In many contexts, poor occupational safety and health (OSH) practices, and lack of social protection and labour protection are a cause of concern. Agriculture is also characterized by a high incidence of child labour and forced labour. 70 per cent of all children in child labour, 112 million boys and girls worldwide, are in agriculture²². Forced labour, too, is prevalent in remote rural areas and in agriculture and fishing, where 11 per cent of forced labour is estimated to take place²³.

¹⁸ A. Young, “[Inequality, the Urban–Rural Gap, and Migration](#)”, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 128, No. 4 (2013): 1727–1785.

¹⁹ ILO, [Spotlight on Work Statistics no. 11: Rural and Urban Labour Markets](#), 2020.

²⁰ ILOSTAT, “[ILO Modelled Estimates \(November 2021\)](#)”, accessed on 8 August 2022.

²¹ ILO, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy, A Statistical Picture*, 2018.

²² ILO and UNICEF, [Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward](#), 2021, 9.

²³ ILO and Walk Free Foundation, [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage](#), 2017.

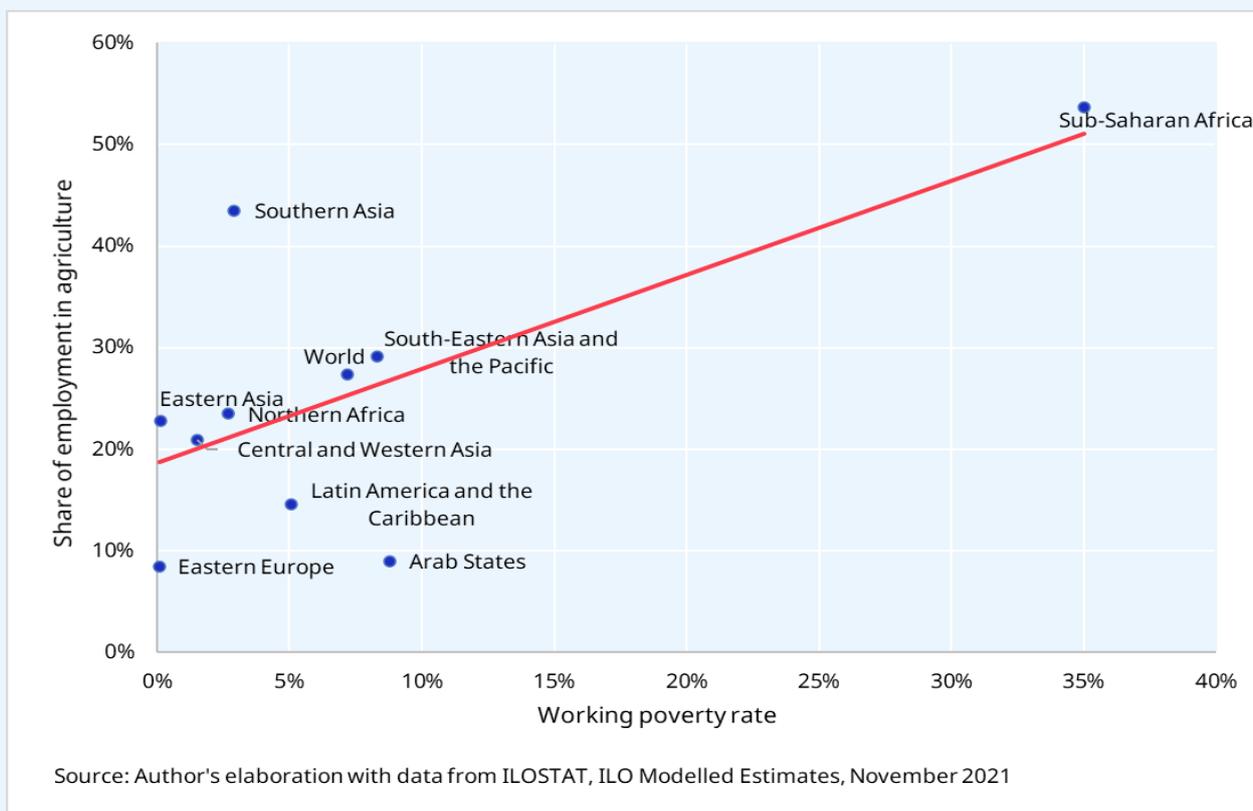


Figure 1 - Correlation between employment in agriculture and working poverty across regions, 2020 (percentages)

Demographic trends shaping the rural labour landscape

A growing global population is one of the main drivers of the increased demand for food, which is mainly sourced from rural areas. By end of 2022, the world's population is projected to reach 8 billion people, and by 2050, there could be 9.7 billion people on the planet²⁴. For more than 9 billion people, it is estimated there will be a need to produce almost 50 per cent more food, animal feed and biofuel than in 2012²⁵.

Moreover, many of the countries with the highest population growth projections are largely rural, and their economies rely significantly on agriculture for employment and income generation. At the same time, the demographic profile of rural areas largely determines their labour supply dynamics²⁶.

The youth bulge offers a window of opportunity to accelerate rural development in countries with high population growth if new labour market entrants can find employment. Nearly 1 billion youth live in developing countries, almost half of them in rural areas²⁷. This could provide a demographic dividend and growth in domestic

²⁴ UNDESA, *World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results*, 2022.

²⁵ FAO, *The Future of Food and Agriculture: Trends and challenges*, 2017, 46. This FAO estimate takes into account the UNDESA Population Prospects 2019 that the world's population would reach 9.73 billion in 2050. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, agricultural output would need to more than double by 2050 to meet increased demand, while in the rest of the world the

projected increase would be about one-third above current levels.

²⁶ This brief acknowledges that demographic changes are complex with considerable variations across regions, as well as among countries in a same region, and even within countries.

²⁷ IFAD, *Rural Development Report 2019: Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth*, 2019.

markets²⁸. However, despite improved levels of education and training, young men and women in rural areas continue to suffer disproportionately from insufficient decent job opportunities, and tend to seek (self-)employment in the informal economy²⁹.

Young women and men are particularly exposed to the impact of the crises, especially in terms of unemployment and inactivity, as well as missed skill development opportunities and worsening of job prospects. For instance, the global employment loss between 2019 and 2020 is estimated at 8.7 per cent for young people, compared with 3.7 per cent for adults, albeit considerable variation by gender and country income level would need to be accounted for³⁰.

There are growing concerns about the increases of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET). This was already an issue for youth in rural areas, especially young women, even before the pandemic. In 2019, ILO estimated that the share of rural youth NEET was 24.4 per cent compared to 20.2 per cent in urban areas³¹.

Over the next decades, agri-food systems will witness changes in the distribution of landholdings, with implications for the younger generations in terms of access to farm assets. Medium-sized farms are expected to increase, especially in Africa³². Yet, without the right support in place, many youth-led small- and medium-sized farms may lack the assets and scale to make the necessary changes to prosper sustainably.

Population loss and ageing in rural areas are emerging issues, especially in developed countries and some parts of

Latin America and Asia³³. For instance, in the European Union (EU), the number of farmers has declined over recent decades, and there is no generational renewal as only one in ten farmers is under the age of 40³⁴. These trends affect the composition of the rural workforce, agricultural production and rural economic performance, as well as the socio-economic organization of rural communities and even the environment³⁵. Therefore, they can have major implications for livelihoods and food security, but also for the vitality and attractiveness of rural economies³⁶.

Women are the backbone of many agri-food systems and rural economies

Rural women make up about almost half of the world's agricultural labour force, working as farmers, wage earners and entrepreneurs³⁷. However, rural women are often concentrated in low-skilled, low-productivity, informal jobs characterized by low pay, poor working conditions, and limited access to social protection. They also shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and household work, including food provision and caring for children, the sick and the elderly. In poor households of developing countries, rural women's unpaid work often includes collecting wood and water.

Restrictive social norms and gender stereotypes can limit women farmers' access to productive resources such as land, or even key services such as financial services and agricultural extension services. Rural women also face constraints in accessing education and training

²⁸ FAO, *The Future of Food and Agriculture*, 4.

²⁹ ILO, *Decent Work for Rural Youth*, 2019. ILO, *Empleo informal en la economía rural de América Latina 2012 - 2019: Un panorama y tendencias regionales pre-pandemia COVID-19*, 2021.

³⁰ A. Barford, A. Coutts, and G. Sahai, "*Youth Employment in Times of COVID: A Global Review of COVID-19 Policy Responses to Tackle (Un)employment and Disadvantage among Young People*", ILO, 2021; N. O'Higgins and S. Verick, "*Statistical Brief: An Update on the Youth Labour Market Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis*", ILO, 2021; ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021*, 2021; ILO, *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work. Seventh Edition*, 2021.

³¹ ILOSTAT, *ILO Modelled Estimates (November 2020)*, accessed on 3 August 2022.

³² R. Ruben and G. Beekman, "*Agrarian Change and Inclusive Rural Development: Gaps and Challenges*", Keynote presentation UNDESA Expert Group Meeting on Eradicating

Rural Poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNECA, Addis Ababa, 27 February – 1 March 2019.

³³ OECD 2020, *Rural Well-being*, para. 2; FAO, *The Future of Food and Agriculture*, 11.

³⁴ M.L. Augère-Granier and J. McEldowney, *Older People in the European Union's Rural Areas*, ERPS, 2020.

³⁵ K.M. Johnson and D.T. Lichter, "*Rural Depopulation: Growth and Decline Processes over the Past Century*", *Rural Sociology* 84 (2019): 1-27; D. MacDonald, J.R. Crabtree, G. Wiesinger, T. Dax, N. Stamou, P. Fleury, J. Gutierrez Lazpita, and A. Gibon, "*Agricultural Abandonment in Mountain Areas of Europe: Environmental Consequences and Policy Response*", *Journal of Environmental Management* 59 (2000): 47-69.

³⁶ Consejo Económico y Social de España, "*Informe 02/2021 Un medio rural vivo y sostenible*", 2021.

³⁷ ILO, *Empowering Women in the Rural Economy*, 2019.

opportunities, and employment services or business advisory support. There are major gender gaps in terms of voice and representation to consider, as women, in particular those living and working in rural areas, are often under-represented in workers' and employers' organizations as well as in other rural organizations, especially in leadership and managerial positions.

Many countries are witnessing a feminization of agriculture and rural areas, with working-age men moving into non-farm activities as well as migrating out of rural areas³⁸. There are gendered generational aspects to consider. Older women in rural areas who take over the family farm may lack access to networks and productive assets, social protection and care services³⁹. At the same time, investing in the empowerment of young women in rural areas, including through education and addressing discriminatory social norms, contributes to break intergenerational cycles of gender inequality.

Many rural women are at even larger levels of vulnerability as a result of crises. In the event of a shock, many of them are not covered by health insurance or income protection. In the context of a health crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures and the additional care needs of sick household members can lead to additional burden of unpaid work for many women.

Rural labour migration has gained increased relevance

The role of **rural areas as home and host of migrants** and displaced populations is gaining increased attention⁴⁰. UNDESA estimated that, in 2019 there were 272 million international migrants, and ILO estimated that the number of international migrant workers totalled 169 million in the same year⁴¹. In many regions, international migrant workers account for an important share of the labour force.

They are often employed in critical sectors like health care, transportation, services, agriculture and food processing. ILO estimates showed that, in 2019, there were around 7.1 per cent of migrant workers engaged in agriculture⁴², compared to 11.1 per cent (16.7 million) in earlier ILO estimates⁴³. Yet, migrant workers in rural areas and agriculture may be exposed to temporary, informal or unprotected jobs, which, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, has exposed them to an even greater risk of insecurity, layoffs and worsening working conditions⁴⁴. In rural areas of origin, migration can alleviate pressures on local labour markets, but also increase the work burden on those who stay back, exacerbating risks of child labour. Areas of origin benefit from migrants' remittances and diaspora contributions, as well as from the skills acquired during their migration experience if they decide to return. In areas of destination, migration fulfils major labour needs in the rural economy, including agriculture, construction, tourism, mining, and other activities. Migrant workers maintain many rural locations alive and productive⁴⁵, and a number of agri-food systems rely on migrant workers in face of labour shortages. Considering these dynamics, the conditions of recruitment and work of migrant workers in the rural economy, including through seasonal migrant workers' schemes, are increasingly important⁴⁶.

Rural areas can tap into the potential of growing urban demand through rural-urban linkages and small towns

By 2050, two-thirds of the global population will live in urban areas (Fig. 2)⁴⁷. Sharp differences continue to characterize the world of work and standards of living between rural and urban areas.

An increasing number of developing countries are experiencing the impacts of urbanization on rural

³⁸ V. Slavcheska, S. Kaaria, and S.L. Taivalmaa, "[Feminization of Agriculture in the Context of Rural Transformations: What Is the Evidence?](#)", World Bank, 2016.

³⁹ UNECE, [Policy Brief on Ageing No. 18: Older Persons in Rural and Remote Areas](#), 2017; Gustavo Anríquez and Libor Stloukal, "[Rural Population Change in Developing Countries: Lessons for Policy-making](#)", FAO Agricultural Development Economics Working Paper No. 08-09, 2008.

⁴⁰ This paragraph is based on ILO, [Promoting Fair and Effective Labour Migration Policies in Agriculture and Rural Areas](#), 2019.

⁴¹ ILO, [ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology](#), 2021.

⁴² ILO, [Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers](#), 2021, 13.

⁴³ ILO, [ILO Global Estimates on Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology - Special focus on migrant domestic workers](#), 2015.

⁴⁴ ILO, [Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers](#), 2021, 17.

⁴⁵ See also B. Jentsch, "[Migrant Integration in Rural and Urban Areas of New Settlement Countries: Thematic introduction](#)", *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 9, No. 1 (2007): 1-12.

⁴⁶ ILO, [Promoting Fair and Effective Labour Migration Policies](#), 3.

⁴⁷ UNDESA, [World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision](#), 2019.

livelihoods⁴⁸. Urbanization not only changes the geographical distribution of the population, but it also impacts agri-food systems and rural economies, where

most of the food is produced⁴⁹. It also affects food consumption patterns, land use, and employment distribution within the agri-food system and beyond⁵⁰.

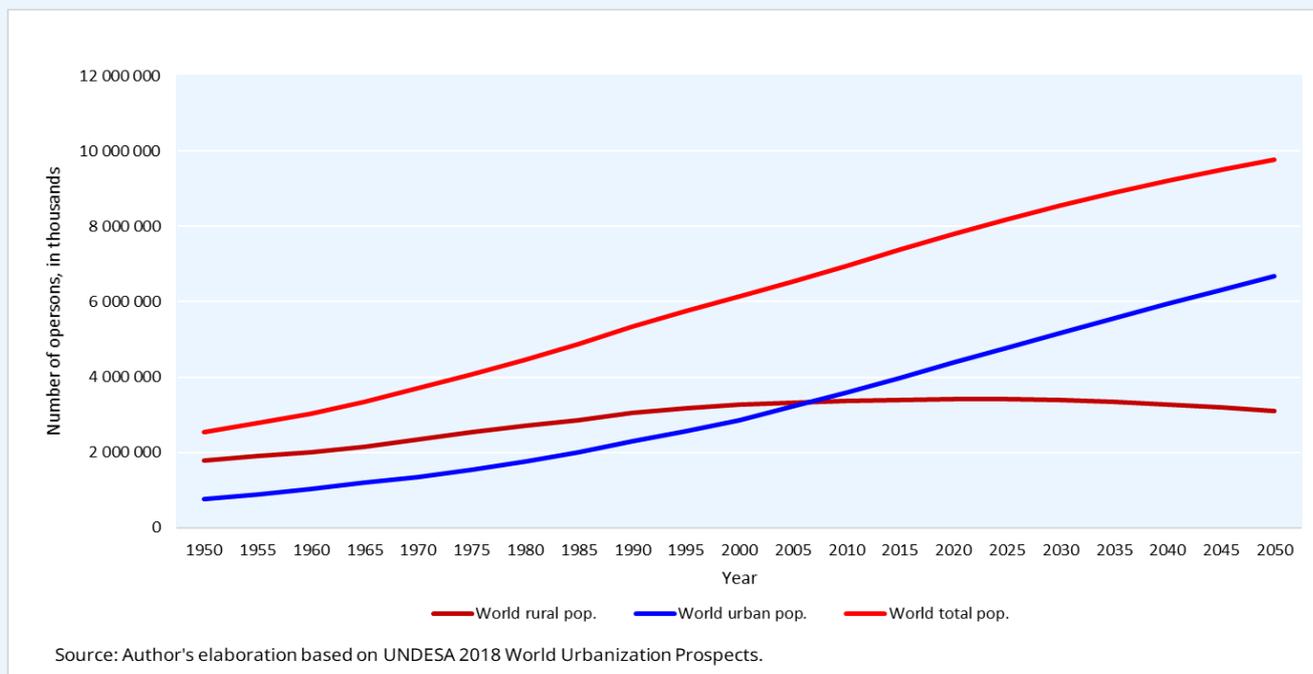


Figure 2 – World Rural – Urban population, projections, 1950-2050

It is worth noting that some of the fastest-growing urban agglomerations are cities with less than 1 million inhabitants, many of them in Africa and Asia⁵¹. This pattern underlines the potential of **small and secondary towns** in rural areas for inclusive structural transformation and faster poverty reduction, through increased opportunities in the “missing-middle”⁵². By fostering rural-urban linkages and diversified employment opportunities, there may be more rural workers in or connecting to small urban centres,

which could gradually turn into regional nodes for the revitalization of the rural economy⁵³.

Rural economies are increasingly integrated into national and international markets

Through modern logistics and digital technologies, the production of goods and services is increasingly dispersed across and within countries⁵⁴. Rural economies that are

⁴⁸ ILO, *Rural-Urban Labour Statistics*, 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 2018; S. De Bruin, J. Dengerink, and J. Van Vilet, “Urbanisation as Driver of Food System Transformation and Opportunities for Rural Livelihoods”, *Food Security* 13, (2021): 781-798.

⁴⁹ FAO, *The Future of Food and Agriculture*, 29.

⁵⁰ De Bruin *et al.*, “Urbanisation as Driver of Food System Transformation”, 781.

⁵¹ UNDESA, *World Urbanization Prospects*.

⁵² Christiaensen and Todo (2014) define as the “missing middle” including rural non-farm activities and jobs in the construction, transport or commercial sectors in rural towns. L.

Christiaensen and Y. Todo, “Poverty Reduction during the Rural-Urban Transformation: The role of the Missing Middle”, *World Development* 63, (2014): 43-58.

⁵³ L. Christiaensen and R. Kanbur, “Secondary Towns, Jobs and Poverty Reduction: Introduction to World Development Special Symposium”, *World Development* 108, (2018): 219-220; Christiaensen and Todo, “Poverty Reduction during the Rural-Urban Transformation”.

⁵⁴ J. Greenville, K. Kawasaki, and M.A. Jouanjean, “Value Adding Pathways in Agriculture and Food Trade: The Role of GVCS and Services”, OECD Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Papers No. 123, 2019.

more out-ward looking and capable of mobilizing their comparative advantage could benefit from this. At the same time, spatial polarization could increase in regions with lower productivity and limited opportunities for agribusiness and rural non-farm economic investment⁵⁵. In view of that, investments to foster productivity, export promotion and skills development can contribute to boosting rural competitiveness and a more equal spatial distribution of economic activities⁵⁶.

Agri-food supply chains increasingly seek to secure supply all year around, both in terms of product availability and diversity. Such a process involves sourcing from multiple locations with diverse seasonal calendars⁵⁷. This can bring opportunities for agricultural producers and others involved in rural economic activities. However, small-scale producers and rural workers could be at risk of falling behind, as they face underlying obstacles in accessing markets, information, skills development, among others, impeding them from fully prospering in supply chains⁵⁸.

The transformational potential of a just transition in rural economies remains untapped

Given their relatively large dependence on natural resources, many rural communities are directly exposed to the impacts of climate change and can be affected by structural shifts in manufacturing and natural resource-based industries. About 40 per cent of global employment depends directly on the environment and ecosystem services⁵⁹. Rural areas are often hotspots for climate change hazards and natural disasters, which are increasing

in number and intensity. Decent work deficits in the rural economy can contribute to further environmental degradation. For example, poor rural households who lack access to social protection may resort to unsustainable forms of natural resource extraction for subsistence⁶⁰.

Changing weather patterns threaten agricultural incomes and rural jobs. For instance, major implications are expected in rain-fed agriculture, which currently provides around 60 per cent of the world's agricultural production and covers 96 per cent of cultivated land in sub-Saharan Africa⁶¹. Without adaptation measures, farmers practising rain-fed agriculture in vulnerable regions could be displaced or have little choice but to migrate. Moreover, global food production is bound to expand in response to increasing global demand. However, this could undermine the world's capacity to meet its longer-term food needs.

Adopting sustainable practices and enhancing resilience in rural areas is vital to climate change adaptation efforts. Sustainable farming practices are gaining importance. For example, there is more attention paid to approaches such as conservation agriculture, organic agriculture, and agroecology⁶². These approaches aim not only at efficiency gains, but also at conserving natural resources and reducing waste, while connecting with the social needs in rural areas⁶³.

Green jobs can also be created in other sectors of the rural economy, such as in renewable energy and the circular economy⁶⁴. Almost 6 million jobs can be created by moving away from an extract-manufacture-use-discard model and embracing the recycling, reuse, re-manufacture, rental and longer durability of goods⁶⁵. Re-designing food systems based on the principles of the circular economy can help in

⁵⁵ F.J. Proctor and J.A. Berdegúé, "[Food Systems at the Rural-Urban Interface](#)", RIMISP Working Papers No. 194, 2016.

⁵⁶ Greenville *et al.*, "[Value Adding Pathways](#)".

⁵⁷ Proctor and Berdegúé, "[Food systems at the rural-urban interface](#)", 12.

⁵⁸ FAO, *The Future of Food and Agriculture*; Jane Nelson, "[No Smallholder Farmer Left Behind](#)" in *Leave No One Behind: time for Specifics on the Sustainable Development Goals*, Brookings Institution Press, 2020, 59-78.

⁵⁹ ILO, *World Employment Social Outlook 2018: Greening with Jobs*, 2018.

⁶⁰ ILO, *Greening with Jobs*, 28;

⁶¹ ILO, *Greening with Jobs*; ILO, *A Just Transition*.

⁶² ILO, *Greening with Jobs*; FAO, *Final Report for the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition*, 2015; O. De Schutter, "[Why We Need an Agroecological Revolution](#)",

Rural 21 The International Journal for Rural Development 52, (2018): 6-7.

⁶³ FAO, *The Future of Food and Agriculture*, 49.

⁶⁴ ILO, *Greening with Jobs*; C. Saget, A. Vogt-Schilb, and T. Luu, *Jobs in a Net-Zero Emissions Future in Latin America and the Caribbean*, IADB and ILO, 2020.

⁶⁵ Circular economy refers to the shift in industrial production to reduce waste and minimise impacts on the natural environment with the aim of gradually decoupling growth from the consumption of natural resources. Almost 6 million jobs could be created by moving away from an extract-manufacture-use-discard model and embracing the recycling, reuse, remanufacture, rental and longer durability of goods. Notably, it may involve a reallocation from the mining and manufacturing sectors to waste management (recycling) and services (repair, rent). See also: ILO, *Greening with Jobs*, 1.

making agri-food supply chains shorter and resource-efficient⁶⁶. With rising energy prices, there can be greater opportunities for rural areas as producers of renewable energy⁶⁷.

Making the most of technological change for rural economies

The deployment of technology in the world of work is rapidly intensifying with major changes in production processes and work practices worldwide. The digitalization of the rural economy can deliver economic, social and environmental benefits if promoted in an inclusive manner.

Technologies such as aerial satellite imagery, greenness sensors, soil maps and weather data points can help in boosting productivity and promoting more sustainable production practices⁶⁸. For example, mobile phones can help in improving on-farm activities (irrigation, soil and pest management) and connecting farmers to extension services. Moreover, together with improved prevention efforts, ICT and other new technologies can improve OSH outcomes in rural areas⁶⁹. Certain technological solutions can contribute to eradicate exposure of children to hazardous and developmentally disruptive work in agriculture⁷⁰. Advances in communications technologies and digital literacy can open new job opportunities in the rural non-farm economy, especially for the younger generations. For example, drones can be used for transporting goods to more remote rural areas⁷¹.

Through mobile-based applications, rural populations can gain access to financial services as well as skills development and job search engines, and more broadly, to public employment services. Similarly, digital technologies may be used to monitor compliance with labour regulations and to provide virtual labour administration services⁷².

However, in view of existing inequalities in access to technology, digital innovations need to be accessible and affordable to small-scale farmers, with due consideration to women in rural areas. In this regard, promoting rural connectivity and skills development, especially digital literacy, become priorities. As digitalization will make rural labour markets more skills-intensive, investments are needed to support rural workers in labour market transitions over the course of their lives and as the process of structural transformation advances and new job opportunities emerge in diverse occupations and sectors⁷³.

The COVID-19 pandemic reached rural areas placing further strain

With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global labour market suffered unprecedented losses in working hours, worth the equivalent of 125 million full-time jobs in 2021⁷⁴. Lockdowns and other measures adopted to curb the spread of the coronavirus disrupted labour markets worldwide, leaving few workers unaffected⁷⁵. Although the pandemic and the ensuing crisis initially affected urban areas, it also reached rural areas further exacerbating many of the pre-existing challenges and inequalities⁷⁶.

⁶⁶ FAO, *The 10 Elements of Agroecology: Guiding the Transition to Sustainable Food and Agricultural Systems*, 2018; FAO, "Agroecology Knowledge Hub".

⁶⁷ L. Raderschall and A. Sanabria, "Rural Areas to the Rescue: How Rural Renewables are Driving the Green Transition", *OECD Cogito Blog*, accessed on 8 July 2022.

⁶⁸ FAO and ITU, *E-Agriculture in Action: Drones for Agriculture*, 2018.; ITU and FAO, *Status of Digital Agriculture in 18 Countries of Europe and Central Asia*, 2020; FAO and ITU, *Status of Digital Agriculture in 47 Sub-Saharan African Countries*, 2022.

⁶⁹ ILO, *Safety and Health at the Heart of the Future of Work: Building on 100 Years of Experience*, 2019.

⁷⁰ ILO, *Ending Child Labour by 2025: A Review of Policies and Programmes*, 2018; ILO and UNICEF, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020: Trends and the Road Forward*, 2021.

⁷¹ OECD, *Rural Well-Being: Geography of Opportunities*, 2020.

⁷² See G. Reinecke, "Enfoques específicos para el trabajo rural y agrícola", in *Políticas de Formalización en América Latina: Avances y Desafíos*, ILO, 2018.

⁷³ ILO, *Responding to the Crisis and Fostering Inclusive and Sustainable Development with a New Generation of Comprehensive Employment Policies*, ILC.110/V, 2022; IFPRI, *2019 Global Food Policy Report*, 2019.

⁷⁴ ILO, *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work Eighth Edition – Updates Estimates and Analysis*, 2021. The estimate is based on 48 hours/week.

⁷⁵ ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021*, 2021.

⁷⁶ ILO, *COVID-19 and the impact on agriculture and food security*, 2020; OECD, *OECD Regional Outlook 2021: Addressing COVID-19 and Moving to Net Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, 2021; Jawoo J.

Rural economic activities related to food production and distribution were deemed essential for ensuring food security and population well-being. However, many agricultural workers and producers were increasingly exposed to additional OSH risks. Border closures, as well as restrictions on mobility and transport, caused concerns over labour shortages and unavailability of key agricultural inputs and access to markets⁷⁷. Widespread informality in rural economies implied that measures adopted to support income and sustain businesses were out of reach for many smallholders and those in the informal sector⁷⁸.

At the same time, rural workers and their families have less access to social protection, and provision of health care in rural areas is often limited and challenging⁷⁹. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the absence of health protection and income security compelled rural workers to work even when sick, putting their health at risk and undermining public efforts to curb the pandemic⁸⁰. Even though many governments extended social protection to previously uncovered workers, most of these measures were temporary and often insufficient to meet most urgent needs⁸¹. Some rural communities had to cope also with reduced inflows from remittances, or even massive inflows of returning migrants in a context of increasing constraints of food and supplies⁸². Indigenous peoples in remote areas faced additional challenges in view of their limited access to public health information and health care⁸³. Rural areas with sizeable ageing populations were more affected with greater risks of COVID-19 complications and mortality among the elderly⁸⁴.

Moreover, as the economic crisis unfolded, there were significant implications in terms of poverty and food security to consider, especially in rural areas of developing countries. The context of multiple crises has also shed light on the disproportionate risks faced by smallholders, who typically have limited assets and savings to cope with disruptions to incomes and tend to be net purchasers of food⁸⁵. Higher food prices affected them as purchasers but did not flow back to them to any significant degree as sellers. Informality in rural areas undermines their resilience to future shocks⁸⁶.

The global economic and labour outlook remains uncertain and fragile

Longstanding challenges such as climate change, demographic realities, and unequal technological progress have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, there are growing concerns over the impact of rising prices of food, fuel and fertilizers, as well as conflict, on the world of work, especially in rural areas (Fig. 2). The ILO WESO 2022 projections warned that the global labour force participation would remain below its 2019 level, while the total number of unemployed would remain at around 207 million. Concerns over underemployment remained high as well, particularly for youth in North Africa⁸⁷. Job recovery is being uneven, with much faster recovery in advanced economies than in developing countries, and uneven progress within countries and sectors, leaving

Koo, C. Ringler, A. Ghosh, and C. Azzarri, "Rural Populations Face Heightened COVID-19 Risks", *IFPRI Blog (Research Post)*, 12 May 2021.

⁷⁷ ILO, *COVID-19 and the impact on agriculture and food security*, 2.

⁷⁸ ILO, *Rapid Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on Enterprises and workers in the Informal Economy in Developing and Emerging Countries*, 2020.

⁷⁹ ILO and FAO, *Extending Social Protection to Rural Populations: Perspectives for a Common FAO and ILO Approach*, 2021; OECD, *OECD Regional Outlook 2021*, 19; P. Ranscombe, "Rural Areas at Risk During COVID-19 Pandemic", *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 20, No. 5, (2020): 545.

⁸⁰ ILO, *COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy: Immediate responses and policy challenges*, Social Protection Spotlight, 2020; ILO *World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social Protection at the Crossroads – in Pursuit of a Better Future*, 2021.

⁸¹ ILO, *COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy*; ILO, *Extending Social Protection to Informal Workers in the COVID-19 Crisis*;

Country Responses and Policy Considerations, Social Protection Spotlight, 2020.

⁸² C. Sanchez-Paramo, "The New Poor are Different: Who They are and Why it Matters", *World Bank Blogs*, 13 August 2020.

⁸³ R. Lane and J. Cerda, *Policy Brief No. 70: The Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples*, UNDESA, 2020.

⁸⁴ OECD, *Addressing COVID-19 and Moving to Net Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, 17.

⁸⁵ IFAD, *Rural Development Report 2021*, 122; C. Béné, D. Bakker, M.J. Chavarro, B. Even, J. Melo, and A. Sonneveld, *Impacts of COVID-19 on People's Food Security: Foundation for a More Resilient Food System – Executive Summary*, CGIAR Covid-19 Hub, February 2021.

⁸⁶ ILO, *Inequalities in the World of Work*, ILC.109/IV(Rev), 2021, para. 62.

⁸⁷ ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook Trends 2022*, 2022. ILO, *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work Ninth Edition – Updates Estimates and Analysis*, 2022.

disadvantaged and hard-hit groups further behind, and many enterprises struggling to survive⁸⁸.

Furthermore, impact will be uneven depending on whether countries are commodity exporters or importers in a context of prolonged upward pressure on food, fuel and fertilizers prices⁸⁹. FAO's simulations suggest that the global number of undernourished people could increase by

8 to 13 million people in 2022/23⁹⁰. Many rural communities are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of high and volatile prices of agricultural commodities, as they are often net buyers of food. Wherever there might be a fall in agricultural activity, this could result in lower agricultural labour demand, with detrimental implications for many rural workers whose income largely depends on agricultural wage income⁹¹.

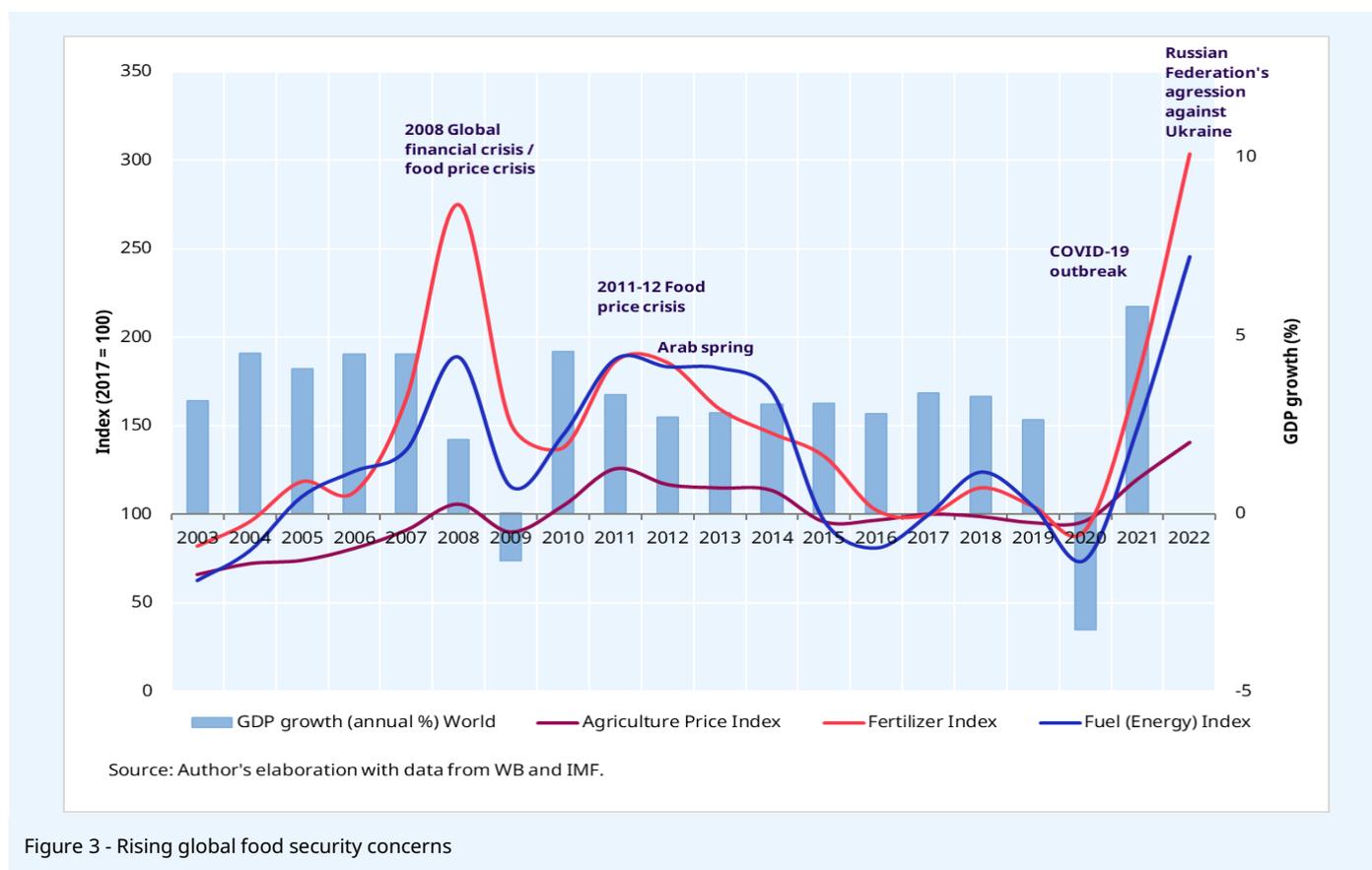


Figure 3 - Rising global food security concerns

⁸⁸ ILO, World Employment and Social Outlook Trends 2022, 2022. ILO, *Un crecimiento débil y crisis global frenan la recuperación del empleo en América Latina y el Caribe*, Nota técnica Serie Panorama Laboral en América Latina y el Caribe, 2022.

⁸⁹ ILO, *The Impact of the Ukraine Crisis on the World of Work: Initial Assessments*, 2022; UNCTAD, *Global Impact of War in Ukraine on Food, Energy and Finance Systems*, 2022.

⁹⁰ FAO, *Information Note: The Importance of Ukraine and The Russian Federation for Global Agricultural Markets and the Risks Associated with the War in Ukraine*, 2022.

⁹¹ T. Nkuzimana, E. Custodio, A.C. Thomas, N. Tefera, A. Perez Hoyos, and F. Kayitakire, *Global Analysis of Food and Nutrition Security Situation in Food Crisis Hotspots* EC, JRC, FAO and WFP, 2016; J. Compton, S. Wiggins, and S. Keats, *Impact of the Global Food Crisis on the Poor: What is the Evidence?* ODI, 2010.

► Towards inclusive, sustainable and resilient rural economies

Promoting inclusive, sustainable and resilient rural economies emerges as a priority, especially in a context of prolonged and recurrent crises. There is also an opportunity to harness the potential of rural economies for decent work, poverty reduction and food security, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

The way forward is guided by ILC 2008 Committee on Rural Employment for Poverty Reduction which provided ILO with the Plan of Action to promote decent work in rural areas. This has been the policy framework for ILO's action in the rural economy, and it includes priority areas spanning throughout all four pillars of decent work, while recognising the strong mandate and comparative advantage of the ILO and its normative framework⁹².

Advancing towards a human-centred transformation of rural economies

Moving ahead, policies for a human-centred transformation of rural economies will need to account for a more volatile, uncertain and complex world, with evolving social, economic, environmental and technological realities. Such policy frameworks have an important role to play in building resilience and improving preparedness against future crises. In this respect, in the event of a shock or crisis, there would be a need for *immediate policy action* to protect and bring rural women and men back to work and ensure business continuity in rural economies. Furthermore, policy responses that both *address inequalities* and support *transformational shifts* in rural

economies would also be necessary as we advance towards shaping the future of work that we want for rural areas.

All efforts towards the recovery and revitalization of rural economies are to be anchored in international legal instruments and be supported through social dialogue:

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018, constitutes an important international instrument addressing rural concerns. The UNDROP aims to better protect the rights of all rural populations including peasants, fisherfolk, nomads, agricultural workers and indigenous peoples, and to improve living conditions, as well as strengthen food sovereignty, the fight against climate change and the conservation of biodiversity. UNDROP is based on several binding international human rights instruments, including relevant ILO conventions⁹³.

International labour standards (ILS) are critical to ensure a rights-based approach to the transformation in the rural economy to be inclusive, sustainable, and resilient⁹⁴. The implementation of ILS is at the heart of the capacity of rural economies to recover from the impact of crises⁹⁵. This includes ensuring the respect of fundamental principles and rights at work, as well as the promotion of the ratification and application of international labour standards relevant to the promotion of decent work in the rural economy⁹⁶.

Social dialogue sets the foundations for rural areas to prosper⁹⁷. Through social dialogue, countries will determine the adequate policy mix and find solutions towards a human-centred recovery. Social dialogue is a key pillar in the coordination among institutions and social partners towards rural revitalization. Workers' and employers' organizations have a role to play in defending the right of all workers and employers to organize and to join organizations of their own choosing so that institutions of social dialogue can address decent work deficits in rural

⁹² ILO, [Resolutions Adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 97th Session](#), International Labour Conference, 97th Session, 2008.

⁹³ UN General Assembly, resolution 39/12, [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas](#), A/HRC/RES/39/12, 2018.

⁹⁴ ILO, [Rights at Work in the Rural Economy](#), 2019.

⁹⁵ UN, [Secretary-General's Policy Brief: Investing in Jobs and Social Protection for Poverty Eradication and a Sustainable Recovery](#), 2021.

⁹⁶ ILO, [Portfolio of Policy Guidance Notes on the Promotion of Decent Work in the Rural Economy: Annex 1: Instruments](#), 2019.

⁹⁷ ILO, [Promoting Social Dialogue in the Rural Economy](#), 2019; ILO, [Giving a voice to rural workers: General Survey concerning the right of association and rural workers' organizations instruments](#), Report III (Part 1B), International Labour Conference, 104th Session, Geneva, 2015.

areas. The context of the pandemic has shown that an effective collaboration between governments and social partners is the best way to implement policy in response to this and the next crisis. Institutions and social partners also play an active role in promoting a positive social and economic image of rural areas, and greater and shared awareness about their potential. Thus, the growth and development of rural employers' and workers' organizations is a key step, as well as encouraging linkages with national employers' and workers' organizations. Strengthening the capacity of national and local governments, and that of social partners is central to formulate and implement policies, strategies, and programmes towards the recovery⁹⁸.

Box 1

Labour statistics and decent work data for a human-centred recovery in rural economies

Rural labour statistics and decent work data on the rural economy contribute to a better understanding of changing dynamics in rural economies. Sound diagnostics inform policy formulation and social dialogue towards a human-centred recovery, including about the impact of the multiple crises and megatrends of the future of work in the rural economy. Sound diagnostics also help assessing the well-being of rural workers and their households over time, particularly the most vulnerable⁹⁹. For that, it is important to account for the diversity of rural contexts across the world (from the rural towns to the remote mountainous areas) and for the very diverse groups living and working in rural areas¹⁰⁰.

In turn, timely and reliable indicators disaggregated by rural/urban areas can be useful for planning and resource allocation, as well as monitoring and evaluation systems which enable learning from processes and optimizing resource

use. Sex- and age-disaggregated data would allow for a more inclusive lens in data analysis and evidence-based policy making. Other important analytical aspects to consider may be capturing socio-economic spatial interactions as well as changes over time including through digital data mapping¹⁰¹.

Promoting decent job creation and the economic revitalization in rural areas

The promotion of decent work in the rural economy touches upon a wide range of economic policies that affect both the supply and demand sides of the rural labour market, as well as the intermediation between them. This calls for comprehensive employment policy frameworks that encompass gender-sensitive, pro-employment macroeconomic policies, sectoral and investment policies as well as labour market policies¹⁰². **Pro-employment rural development policies** provide the framework within which rural economies can reach promote job creation, maximize their economic potential, and be part and parcel of a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable recovery. This would require integrated rural development strategies that put decent work at their heart and promote investments for more connected and dynamic rural areas.

Policy coherence and coordination is of paramount importance for the recovery and structural transformation to promote decent work in the rural economy. It often involves a whole-of-government approach, strengthening linkages and collaboration among state agencies across sectors and governance levels, and a broad national dialogue with social partners and other stakeholders. As much of the policy responses will be multi-sectoral, there are opportunities for capitalizing synergies among rural economy sectors and ensuring interventions are mutually

⁹⁸ ILO, Promoting Social Dialogue, 9.

⁹⁹ ILO, *Rural-Urban Labour Statistics*, 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, ICLS/20/2018/Room document 3/Rev.3, 2018.

¹⁰⁰ OECD, *OECD Regional Outlook 2016: Productive Regions for Inclusive Societies*, 2016; OECD, Rural Well-Being.

¹⁰¹ ILO, Rural-Urban Labour Statistics; ILO, *Enhancing the Knowledge Base to Support the Promotion of Decent Work in Rural Areas*, 2019.

¹⁰² W. Yadong, *From policy to results: Guidelines for implementation of national employment policies*, ILO, 2021, 5.

reinforcing. This can be done while mitigating eventual trade-offs with the underlying goal of promoting policies that build resilience in rural economies¹⁰³.

National recovery packages that include **investments** in strategic sectors and economic areas are key to boost the potential for inclusive decent job creation in rural economies. Such investments will have impacts in terms of direct, indirect and induced employment creation. It will also contribute to make rural areas more resilient and attractive to live and work. Investing in the productive transformation of agriculture would need to go hand in hand with investments along the agri-food systems, as well as the economic diversification to rural non-farm activities, such as commerce, construction, mining, forestry or tourism, among others. Moreover, rural economies increasingly call for investments to build and maintain the infrastructure to improve access to quality services, especially essential services.

Box 2

Enhancing access to rural areas through investments in key infrastructure

In Timor-Leste, 70 per cent of the population live and work in rural areas. The agro-forestry sector has significant economic potential. Addressing the limited access to rural roads was key to harness such potential. With support from the EU and in collaboration with GIZ, the ILO provides [market linkages to agro-forestry communities through improved rural road access](#) built by contractors who are trained in using local resource-based approaches, thereby creating decent work employment and income support for the communities. Fifteen rural roads have been prioritized and rehabilitated, and capacity building has been provided to local contractors. Thanks to such improved road accessibility, there is a renewed life to these rural communities through direct employment creation in infrastructure development, including for rural women, and increased market access for local farmers. There are also efforts towards implementing green and

resilient engineering approaches, such as bioengineering, to protect areas that have high risk of erosion and landslide.

Investing in rural mobility and connectivity, including electrification and telecommunications, is a strategic priority for an inclusive recovery process, as they contribute to employment and economic development¹⁰⁴. Ensuring rural digital connectivity is essential to correct the historical isolation of rural areas and reduce their dependence on physical infrastructure to access information and services. Improved digital connectivity also enables those living in rural areas to study and work remotely. It also facilitates e-commercialisation from and to rural areas. In that regard, rural-urban partnerships become increasingly relevant for promoting rural revitalization and job creation¹⁰⁵.

Promoting a just transition and greening the rural economy are vital for productivity, growth and decent work¹⁰⁶. Some rural economies have tapped into opportunities for green job creation in natural resource-based economic activities, including in ecosystem services to mitigate and adapt to climate change, such as purification of air and water, biodiversity, groundwater recharge, and greenhouse mitigation. Such investments are to be combined with skills development and support services to equip the rural communities to harness the potential of this transition to a greener economy. Expanding green infrastructure in rural economies would help small-scale farmers have access to renewable energies and enhance productivity and sustainability. Combined with better access to digital technology, these investments can also facilitate the transition to formal employment¹⁰⁷.

“Sustainable food systems and strong forest protection could generate over \$2 trillion per year of economic benefits, create millions of jobs and improve food

¹⁰³ UN, *Our Common Agenda*, 2021, 55.

¹⁰⁴ OECD, Rural Well-Being, 188; Consejo Económico y Social España, “Informe 02/2021 Un medio rural vivo y sostenible”.

¹⁰⁵ OECD, Rural Well-Being.

¹⁰⁶ ILO, *A Just Transition*; ILO, *Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for all*, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ UN, Investing in Jobs and Social Protection, 13.

security, while supporting solutions to climate change.”

► [UN Our Common Agenda, 2021](#)

The **blue economy** is attracting much attention to promote job creation and improve productivity in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors through climate-resilient systems, but also in view to address decent work deficits in these sectors. Opportunities for blue growth encompass improved marine and freshwater fisheries systems, aquaculture, aquaponics, and other forms of combined aquaculture/agriculture production. Aquaculture and related activities offer significant potential for job creation¹⁰⁸. Blue growth is particularly relevant for countries where climate change adaptation will focus on building resilience and improving disaster risk management in marine waters and coastal areas and addressing the multiple stresses of inland waters¹⁰⁹.

Accelerating the transition to formality in rural economies to build their resilience against potential future crises. This requires comprehensive, innovative and integrated approaches that include the creation, preservation and formalization of enterprises and decent jobs¹¹⁰. Targeted actions may be foreseen to counter the relative disadvantage of women and youth in rural areas. Representative employers' and workers' organizations and, where they exist, representative organizations of those in the informal economy can assist workers and economic units in the informal economy¹¹¹. Cooperatives and other farmers' organizations can also provide a step towards formalization, as they can offer an accessible means for a legal recognition while promoting rural entrepreneurship and business development, employment creation,

facilitating access to social protection as well as representation and voice to rural producers and workers¹¹². In rural areas, new technologies can be integrated into policy efforts to boost formality (i.e., e-formality)¹¹³. Digital solutions can facilitate access to social protection and key services, such as financial and business services, and social services, while contributing to making registration and compliance easier¹¹⁴. Since migration fulfils major labour needs in the rural economy, including agriculture, it would be important to design and effectively implement labour migration policies in destination countries, which address those needs. This will contribute to reducing informality and irregular migration.

Strengthening agricultural productivity to generate economic opportunities in rural areas. Global agricultural productivity would need to grow by 28 per cent over the next decade to meet SDG targets and stay within climate commitments¹¹⁵. Promoting more sustainable and productive farm practices will feed productivity gains throughout the agri-food system and contribute to the transition towards more environmentally friendly and inclusive agri-food systems¹¹⁶. Among other things, this comprises more support from agricultural extension services, especially among smallholders.

Promoting decent jobs creation through agri-related downstream businesses and strengthening market access of agricultural producers. Opportunities emerge in agro-food processing, agro-logistics, and the broad range of food distribution services. Many of these opportunities arise as agricultural producers, notably smallholders, youth and women, can rely on markets to access inputs and services essential to increase their productivity, and to market and process their farm production, especially at the local level¹¹⁷.

¹⁰⁸ ILO, [The Future of Work in Aquaculture in the Context of the Rural Economy](#), TMFWA/2021, 2021.-

¹⁰⁹ FAO, [The Future of Food and Agriculture](#).

¹¹⁰ ILO, [Inequalities and the World of Work](#); ILO, [Global Call to Action for a Human-centred Recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient](#), 2021.

¹¹¹ ILO, [Transitioning from the Informal to the Formal Economy](#), ILC.103/V/1, 2014.

¹¹² ILO, [Transitioning from the Informal to the Formal Economy](#), para. 148; ILO and FAO, [Extending Social Protection to Rural Populations](#).

¹¹³ J. Chacaltana and V. Leung, [Transitioning to the formal economy through technology: The trends towards e-formality](#),

ILO, 10 May 2019; S. Elder, [Is Asia ready for e-formalization?](#), ILO, 25 May 2021.

¹¹⁴ UN, [Investing in Jobs and Social Protection](#), 13; ILO, [Advancing Social Justice: Shaping the Future of work in Africa, 2019](#), para. 43.

¹¹⁵ OECD and FAO, [OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2022-2031](#), 2022.

¹¹⁶ UN, [Our Common Agenda](#), 59.

¹¹⁷ These services can include packaging material suppliers, product quality and plant and animal health inspection services, or input services including agro-dealers for agricultural machinery, equipment and tools, seeds and planting material, fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides, veterinary products and irrigation systems and related equipment; banks for financial intermediation provision; small machine shops for equipment repair; or extension services. See

Enabling Small and Medium Agro-Enterprises (SMAEs) to play a major role in agri-food systems of developing countries¹¹⁸. SMAEs, as well as cooperatives and the social and solidarity economy, can enhance value addition and market access at the local level and help leverage the assets and expertise within rural communities¹¹⁹. However, they often operate in the informal economy and may incur diseconomies of scale. In the aftermath of the crisis, ensuring the business continuity of SMAEs is vital, and over the recovery phase, targeted support may be needed to support their transition to formality and greener operations, and ensuring workers' rights and access to social protection¹²⁰.

At the same time, access to business services is critical for the participation of SMAEs in agri-food systems¹²¹. Integrated approaches for the provision of **agricultural and agri-business services** can be effective in this regard. In some contexts, agro-industrial parks or agricultural hubs are being developed to provide extension services to farmers, access to production equipment and processing facilities, as well as facilitating market access by linking local producers with rural, urban and international markets¹²².

Rejuvenating agriculture. Harnessing the potential of agri-food systems and rural economies for creating decent jobs for rural youth will be key in view of the growing demand for food, and the youth employment challenges ahead, but also to support the generational renewal in agriculture and rural areas.

Leveraging the potential of the rural economy for youth employment requires investments in promoting their

access to assets such as land, skills development, and social protection and ensuring their rights at work. It is about fostering an enabling environment for youth-led agri-enterprises and sponsoring a positive image of agricultural life. Youth that have the appropriate skills and access to modern technologies can become the forerunners in greening the agri-food sector by moving towards more profitable and sustainable farming practices, and by bringing the benefits of technology¹²³. Young farmers can benefit from greater access to cooperatives and other rural organizations in order to achieve economies of scale and commercially position their products. And, as agri-businesses expand, opportunities for wage employment for youth will also increase in marketing, small-scale food processing and food retailing.

With many rural youths at risk of becoming NEET, activation strategies to boost their employability can combine skills training with access to on-the-job learning and job-search, counselling services, as well as extension and business advisory services and access to finance. For instance, agri-coaching or mentoring for young agripreneurs is important for improving the survival rates of their economic activities. Young agriculture university graduates could find employment opportunities as certified agri-coaches¹²⁴.

An integral part of these efforts is to work for and with young people. Greater participation of rural youth in employers' and workers' organizations can enhance their involvement in rural communities and social dialogue processes. Special attention to young women's empowerment would contribute to address gender imbalances¹²⁵.

Felicity J. Proctor and Julio A. Berdegú, "[Food Systems at the Rural-Urban Interface](#)", RIMISP Working Papers No. 194, 2016.

¹¹⁸ WEF, *The Future of Jobs Report 2018*, 2018; FAO, *Decent Rural Employment for Food Security: A Case for Action*, 2012.

¹¹⁹ ILO, *Transitioning from the Informal to the Formal Economy*.

¹²⁰ ILO, *A Double Transition: Formalization and the Shift to Environmental Sustainability with Decent Work*, 2022; UN, *Investing in Jobs and Social Protection*, 18-19.

¹²¹ E. Galvez-Nogales, "[Agro-based Clusters in Developing Countries: Staying Competitive in a Globalized Economy](#)", FAO *Agricultural Management, Marketing and Finance Occasional Paper* 25, 2010.

¹²² Proctor and Berdegú, "Food systems at the rural-urban interface", 16; Gálvez-Nogales, "[Agro-based Clusters in Developing Countries](#)", 7.

¹²³ See also ILO, *Youth in the Rural Economy: Unleashing the Potential of Rural Economies through Investment in Young People*, 2017; IFAD, *Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth: 2019 Rural Development Report*, 2019.

¹²⁴ See African Youth Agripreneurs, "[Enabling Growth and Sustainability of Youth-led Agribusinesses across Africa](#)"; Clare Pedrick, "[Mentoring: a Helping Hand for Young Agripreneurs](#)", *CTA Blog (blog)*, 4 January 2018.

¹²⁵ ILO, *Decent Work for Rural Youth*, 2019.

Box 3**Promoting a brighter future of work for rural youth through investments and partnerships**

In Madagascar, with the support of the ILO, the government authorities, social partners, civil society, youth, and other stakeholders involved in the rural economy developed a National Action Plan (NAP) to promote decent work in the rural economy (2017-2019). The NAP placed strong focus on promoting opportunities for rural youth, acknowledging the significant gap between youth aspirations and existing employment opportunities in rural areas. The operationalization of NAP to promote decent work in the rural economy has advanced with support from the Government of Norway and IFAD. ILO has provided technical support for rural entrepreneurship promotion and infrastructure development through a whole-of-government approach involving different ministries (Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training). The collaboration with IFAD in Madagascar is also exemplary of the progress of the partnership for the promotion of decent work in the rural economy at the national level with particular attention to rural youth.

Pursuing a gender-transformative recovery in rural economies to foster women's economic empowerment.

The effects of the pandemic have reminded us that women play vital roles in agri-food systems and the rural economy. As rural women face multiple and often interrelated challenges, effort is needed on many fronts, and much will depend on the country's circumstances. The quest towards rural women's empowerment and a transformative agenda for gender equality includes priority areas such as creating decent jobs for rural women, facilitating their access to entrepreneurship training, productive resources, social protection benefits including maternity benefits, as well as to finance and business services. To reduce their time

constraints, it is important to continue improving access to rural infrastructure, including water and energy, but also new technologies. Thinking of the future generations of rural women, adequate access to care facilities and services, together with access to quality education, in rural areas is crucial to break the intergenerational cycle of gender inequality. By ensuring that the voices of rural women are heard, their needs can be better reflected in the policy responses towards the recovery.

Box 4**Empowering women to boost the inclusive transformation of rural economies**

In rural Moldova, [Viorica Anghel](#), a single mother who lives with a disability, was able to establish and manage her own beekeeping entrepreneurial activity. Viorica is one of the 882 beneficiaries of the [first Local Employment Partnership \(LEP\) in the Cahul district in rural Moldova](#), a pilot project funded by the ILO's Regular Budget Supplementary Account (RBSA). Launched in April 2019, Cahul LEP has brought together over 20 public and private partners at the national and local level, who, with the assistance of the ILO, are improving the rural labour market. The LEPs are an example of innovative, multi-sectoral social dialogue to promote a human-centred transformation of rural economies, by bringing forward gender-responsive and actionable initiatives to create and formalize jobs. The LEPs also help in identifying business development opportunities for women, youth and persons with disabilities in rural areas, as well as catalyzing investments and building capacity of local stakeholders, including social partners.

Tapping into opportunities for rural economic diversification. Economically diversified rural economies move beyond agriculture into other economic sectors such as forestry¹²⁶, fishing and aquaculture¹²⁷, mining, tourism¹²⁸, commerce, health, education, and services. Diversification patterns can contribute to generate rural prosperity and

¹²⁶ ILO, [Decent Work in Forestry](#), 2019.

¹²⁷ ILO, [The Future of Work in Aquaculture](#), para. 3.

¹²⁸ ILO, [Sustainable Tourism: A Catalyst for Inclusive Socio-economic development and Poverty Reduction in Rural Areas](#), 2019.

well-being¹²⁹. These patterns are largely determined by the agro-ecological environment and the local economy. Therefore, policies to support rural economic diversification draw on those context-specific assets that can bring competitive and absolute advantage. For example, investment in traditional rural crafts can be a means for the economic empowerment of women artisans¹³⁰. Both sustainable tourism and creative industries can unlock many opportunities for economic diversification and job creation in rural areas¹³¹. And, by developing food clusters, synergies between agriculture and tourism can foster a vibrant cultural and creative sector in rural areas. These sectors can re-invigorate rural economies in ways that respect the environment and cultural heritage, and that increase the attractiveness of rural areas for the younger generation¹³².

Advancing towards a digitalization in rural areas that is inclusive and contributes to build resilience. If promoted in an inclusive manner, technological developments can bring substantial opportunities to the rural economy. For instance, technological advances can help in increasing agricultural productivity and profitability, as well as mitigating and preventing occupational hazards and casualties in agriculture. Natural resource constraints and environmental limits can also be turned into an advantage by seizing the opportunities for technological leapfrogging, and basing rural development on the latest and most efficient technology. Technological innovations can also be seized to promote economic diversification in rural areas. At the same time, and as in other sectors, there can be challenges where automation and artificial intelligence have the capacity to replace or redefine jobs. In some cases, automation of some manual tasks at farm level could increase the need for high skilled manual workers. Irrigation through mechanized pumps often allows two or three more crops to be grown on the same plot of land per

year, thus increasing labour demand. Agricultural machinery rental and repair services provided by cooperatives and private companies have great potential for quality job creation and to attract young people¹³³.

However, the greater use of digital technologies in the world of work tends to reach rural areas more slowly, at the risk of leading to a deeper digital divide. In particular, it is important to ensure that indigenous and tribal peoples, women, youth, small-scale farmers, and migrant workers are not left behind. In that regard, the above-mentioned investments in rural connectivity need to go together with social dialogue on the use of technology, as well as investments in skills training for rural workers on new technology.

Turning rural areas into innovation hubs, attractive to the younger generations. Thanks to improved rural connectivity and technological advances, rural remoteness can be overcome, and rural economies can take on opportunities to not only access, but also provide distant services. For instance, rural smart villages base their development on their own resources and assets while also taking up opportunities through multi-service centres and information and communication technologies (ICTs)¹³⁴ to facilitate access to business services and digital solutions for rural enterprises, including Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), to market their products and services. Rural workers can also benefit from the improved outreach of employment and social services, as well as skills development opportunities. With increased ICT connectivity in rural areas, there is potential for work in online web-based platforms, whereby skilled workers would be able to access jobs in the global labour market¹³⁵. Ultimately, these efforts contribute to fostering a more dynamic and positive image of rural areas.

¹²⁹ OECD 2020, *Rural Well-being*, 78. See also ILO, [Economic Diversification of the Rural Economy](#), 2019.

¹³⁰ ILO, [Empowering Women in the Rural Economy](#), 2019.

¹³¹ ILO, Sustainable Tourism in Rural Areas, 3; ILO 2021, [COVID-19 and employment in the tourism sector in the Asia-Pacific region](#), UNDP and UNCTAD, [Creative Economy Report 2010: Creative Economy - A Feasible Development Option](#), 2010; N.J. Thomas, D.C. Harvey, and H. Hawkins, "Crafting the Region: Creative Industries and Practices of Regional Space", *Regional Studies* 47, No. 1 (2013): 75-88; E. Roberts and L. Townsend, "The Contribution of the Creative Economy to the Resilience of Rural Communities: Exploring Cultural and Digital Capital", *Sociologia Ruralis* 56, no. 2 (2016): 197-219..

¹³² N. Duxbury and H. Campbell, "Developing and Revitalizing Rural Communities through Arts and Culture", *Small Cities Imprint* 3, No. 1 (2011): 111-122.

¹³³ W. Cunningham and O. Pimhidzai, [Vietnam's Future Jobs: Leveraging Mega-Trends for Greater Prosperity](#), The World Bank, 2018.

¹³⁴ See ENRD, "Smart Villages Portal"; ITU, "Smart Village".

¹³⁵ ILO, [World Employment and Social Outlook 2021: The role of digital labour platforms in transforming the world of work](#), 2021.

Developing the care economy to make rural areas more attractive and dynamic. The pandemic has underscored the need for sustaining care systems. And, over the longer run, access to elderly care will be increasingly needed in many countries due to ageing populations. Many workers living in rural areas may need to commute elsewhere for care services, which can pose additional challenges to work-life balance. In turn, the increased demand for social and care services in rural areas could promote employment and entrepreneurship creation¹³⁶. This may require greater support to local institutions and incentives for private entrepreneurship and job creation in the provision of quality care services in many rural areas¹³⁷. Moreover, unpaid care work constitutes one of the main barriers to women's participation in the labour market. The care economy can thus foster the women's economic empowerment in rural areas by supporting their participation in labour markets and entrepreneurship development. Advancing the care economy in rural areas requires ensuring access to decent work conditions for care workers¹³⁸.

Boosting skills development and supporting decent transitions

Investing in a skilled rural workforce. Inclusive skills development programmes and measures to enhance the employability can support rural workers in view of the evolving challenges in the world of work¹³⁹. Many rural workers may need support in navigating labour market transitions, as shifts underway in the rural economies will displace some workers in some occupations and sectors, while creating new opportunities in others¹⁴⁰. In agriculture, moving from staple crops to high-value and processed products can radically change skills and job requirements, the level of returns, and the quality of employment. In more diversified rural economies, job

opportunities emerge in more diverse occupations and sectors. Such investments can be particularly relevant for the younger generations so that they can prosper and start productive working lives in rural areas. Continuous retraining and up-skilling of workers will gain relevance for rural enterprises, for them to be agile in taking up new opportunities in increasingly dynamic markets.

Promoting more equitable and effective access to skills and lifelong learning would be needed in many rural areas. In addition to community-based training¹⁴¹, opportunities for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) could be strengthened, building on the identification and anticipation of skills needs in rural labour markets. Active labour market policies and public employment services (PES) can support workers in up-skilling and re-skilling to keep or change jobs¹⁴².

As rural digital connectivity improves, digital technologies can open up access to more training opportunities, as well as the possibility of overcoming time and resource constraints through more flexible and tailored learning pathways. The COVID-19 crisis triggered the use of technology to strengthen the outreach and delivery of public employment services. Harnessing on these advances would be instrumental in boosting the capacity of PES in rural areas¹⁴³.

Addressing the barriers to extend social protection coverage in rural areas. The crisis generated momentum for governments to extend efforts and progressively overcome the financial, administrative and legal barriers (among others) that hinder people's access social protection, including in rural areas¹⁴⁴. Linking employment and rural development policies with social protection policies is critical to address economic insecurity, as well as pre-existing and systemic inequalities in access to social

¹³⁶ FAO, *The Future of Food and Agriculture*.

¹³⁷ ILO, *Women at Work Trends*, 2016; ILO, *Empowering Women in the Rural Economy*.

¹³⁸ ILO, *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*, 2018.

¹³⁹ ILO, *Resolution Concerning Skills and Lifelong Learning*, ILC, 109th Session, 2021.

¹⁴⁰ WEF, *The Future of Jobs 2018*; ILO, *Promoting Decent Work for Rural Workers at the Base of the Supply Chain*, 2019.

¹⁴¹ ILO, *Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE)*, Information Note, 2017.

¹⁴² UN, *Investing in Jobs and Social Protection*, 16-17.

¹⁴³ UN, *Investing in Jobs and Social Protection*, 13.

¹⁴⁴ ILO and FAO, *Extending Social Protection to Rural Population*; ILO, *Extending Social Security Coverage to Workers in the Informal Economy: Lessons from International Experience*, 2021.

protection among rural workers and their families¹⁴⁵. With the rapid changes in the world of work and the just transition process that may lead to increasingly diverse work arrangements in rural labour markets, ensuring adequate social protection for workers in all types of employment will be essential to help rural workers navigate work-to-work transitions between wage employment and self-employment, across different enterprises and sectors of the economy or between countries¹⁴⁶. To help increase the resilience of rural enterprises and workers to current and future crises, social protection systems, including a combination of non-contributory and contributory mechanisms, need to be provided for universal access to comprehensive and adequate protection, be sustainable, risk-informed and shock-responsive, and adopt a gender, disability, and lifecycle perspective¹⁴⁷.

Box 5

Innovative social insurance scheme to extend protection to rural workers

Achieving universal social protection coverage in Ecuador hinges upon the relative importance of the rural economy in the labour market. The Government of Ecuador extended social protection to own-account agricultural workers, artisanal fishing workers and their families through the Peasants' Social Insurance (Seguro Social Campesino, SSC). The SSC provides coverage to nearly 1.1 million people (6.13 per cent of the population), of whom 378,000 were the main contributors to the system and 644,000 were their dependants. Based on the principle of solidarity, the SSC is financed by contribution of employers and workers covered by the General Scheme, the mandatory contribution from public and private insurance companies embedded in the National

Social Security System, the insured member's contribution to the SSC and by a government subsidy. This financing structure reduces the barriers that hinder workers with low contributory capabilities to benefit from social insurance. The SSC is characterized by an integral service structure, through which it has a remarkable regional presence. Around the SSC, rural organizations and federations have been strengthened. The SSC in Ecuador demonstrates that, through innovations in the design, implementation and financing of schemes, it is possible to extend social protection to rural workers¹⁴⁸.

Stepping up the attention given to promoting and ensuring rights at work. Together with appropriate labour law coverage and enforcement mechanisms, strong labour administration and inspection contribute to implementing national legislation and ensuring workplace compliance in rural areas, particularly with regards to freedom of association and collective bargaining¹⁴⁹. There is a need for integrated national policies to promote active steps for the establishment, growth and functioning of rural workers' organizations, based on the set of guidelines contained in the Rural Workers' Organisations Recommendation, 1975 (No. 149)¹⁵⁰. Labour inspectors can play a role in raising awareness and educating rural workers, employers, and rural communities at large on their rights and obligations. In some contexts, it may be necessary to improve the outreach and capacity of labour administration in rural areas and improve access to services they provide, including by favouring coordination with agricultural extension services and harnessing advances in ICT¹⁵¹. Initiatives for fair recruitment as part of a broader strategy to tackle labour exploitation and forced

¹⁴⁵ UNDESA, World Social Report 2021.

¹⁴⁶ ILO, *Extending Social Protection to the Rural Economy*, 2019; ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social Protection at the Crossroads – in Pursuit of a Better Future*, 2021.

¹⁴⁷ UN, Investing in Jobs and Social Protection, 26.

¹⁴⁸ F. Durán Valverde and L. Cotinguiba, Ecuador: Farmers' social insurance in *100 Years of Social Protection: The road to universal social protection systems and floors – Volume 2*, ILO; 2022.

¹⁴⁹ ILO, *Rights at Work in the Rural Economy*, 2019.

¹⁵⁰ ILO, *Giving a voice to rural workers*, para. 328.

¹⁵¹ ILO, COVID-19 and the Impact on Agriculture and Food Security; ILO, *General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment and Definition of Recruitment Fees and Related Costs*, 2019.

labour in agriculture can help mobilizing the contributions of many actors¹⁵².

Ending child labour in agriculture. This is one of the five priorities of the Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour 2022¹⁵³. In a context of multiple crises, emergency responses can prevent acute livelihood losses and heavy economic burdens that may result in child labour. Such responses will need to be aligned with long-term strategies to eradicate child labour in agriculture. This involves integrated and rights-based policy responses that include moving towards universal access to social protection¹⁵⁴, health and education services, enforcement of OSH standards and labour rights, freedom of association and guaranteeing gender equality, among others¹⁵⁵.

Ensuring safety and health at work to workers in rural economies is key. OSH management systems encompassing relevant legislation for all rural economic sectors, including agriculture, together with the promotion of a national preventive OSH culture have a key role to play (see text box 6). Another necessary step would be to ensure agricultural workers have access to adequate personal protective equipment, training and information. In the event of any future outbreak, based on a risk assessment and according to the specificities of operations, premises and type of work, measures to mitigate the safety and health risks could include re-organizing to ensure safe physical distance while ensuring access to clean water and adequate sanitation facilities, among other control measures¹⁵⁶.

“Guaranteeing the safety and health of all agri-food workers – from primary producers to those involved in food processing, transport and retail, including

street food vendors – as well as better incomes and protection, will be critical to saving lives and protecting public health, people’s livelihoods and food security.”

► *ILO, FAO, IFAD, and WHO, [Impact of COVID-19 on People’s Livelihoods, their Health and our Food systems](#), 2020*

Box 6

International Labour Standards on OSH and the agriculture sector

Mindful of the vital importance of OSH, the 110th International Labour Conference added the principle of a safe and healthy working environment to the ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The new fundamental Conventions will be the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No.155), and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187). It means that all Member States commit to respect and promote the fundamental right to a safe and healthy working environment. In that regard, it is important to consider that the ILS on OSH provide a normative framework for the development of national legislation, policy and practice on OSH. National OSH management systems encompassing all sectors would need to be supplemented by a preventive OSH culture in the agriculture sector, in accordance with the Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184), and its accompanying Recommendation No. 192. Furthermore, the Code of practice on safety and health in agriculture (2011) provides guidance on the application of the relevant ILO Conventions,

¹⁵² ILO, *Promising Practices for Fair Recruitment: Italian National Action Plan to Tackle Labour Exploitation, Unlawful Recruitment and Forced Labour in Agriculture*, 2021.

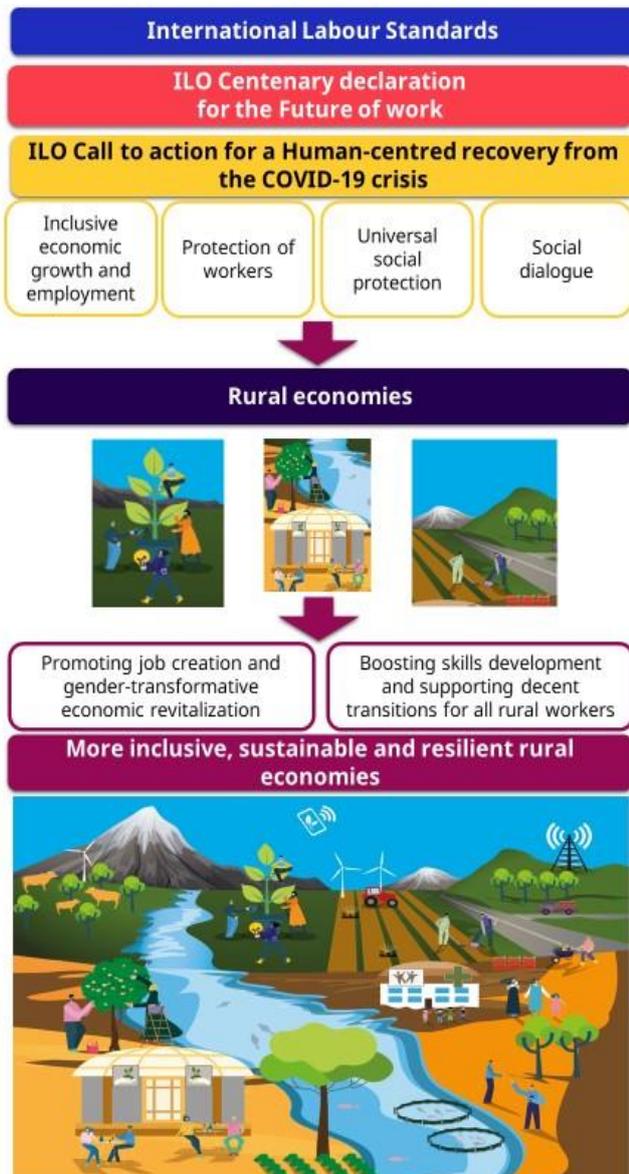
¹⁵³ *Durban Call to Action on the Elimination of Child Labour*, 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, 2022.

¹⁵⁴ ILO and UNICEF, *The Role of Social Protection in the Elimination of Child Labour: Evidence Review and Policy Implications*, 2022.

¹⁵⁵ ILO, *Ending Child Labour by 2025*, 13.

¹⁵⁶ ILO, *COVID-19 and the Impact on Agriculture and Food Security*, 4; ILO, *Practical guide for the Prevention and Mitigation of COVID-19 in Agriculture*, 2020.

including appropriate strategies to address the range of OSH risks encountered in agriculture.



► ILO's support for a human-centred recovery in rural economies

A major renewed effort to create decent work opportunities in rural economies is imperative and must be part and parcel of strategies to build resilience against future crises and to help get on course for sustainable development.

The ILO has longstanding experience with many tools and work in the area of promoting decent work in the rural economy. More recently, the [ILO Centenary Declaration](#), and the [ILO Call to action for a human-centred recovery](#), underscore the importance of strengthening constituents' capacity to address decent work deficits through policies and investments, including in strategic sectors, as well as promoting ratification and implementation of relevant international labour standards.

Building on that, ILO can assist governments, and employers' and workers' organizations to advance in many of the actions described in this brief to respond to the immediate consequences from the crisis as well as to build a more resilient, sustainable and inclusive transformation of rural economies. Furthermore, drawing lessons from earlier crises, opportunities are to be seized to build resilience and better anticipate and respond to the potential impacts of large-scale global crises on rural economies, and thus ensuring that no one is left behind.

Through its work at the country level, ILO provides technical support for developing policy measures that

promote decent work in the rural economy in line with relevant international labour standards, as well as strengthening implementation capacity of constituents. ILO works with constituents to improve relevant legal and institutional frameworks, including strengthening OSH measures and labour inspection in key sectors of the rural economy. Another work area focuses on expanding access to social protection among rural workers and promoting skills development in rural areas, including through digital tools and especially aiming at youth and women. ILO supports the design and implementation of programmes to enhance productivity and sustainability in agriculture as well as entrepreneurship development and enterprise formalization in rural economy sectors. Other key work areas are greening the rural economy and employment-intensive investment programme, which are both crucial for inclusive and sustainable rural development.

At the global level, the ILO undertakes policy-oriented research on socio-economic issues in the future of work in rural economy sectors. This research provides effective and relevant guidance to constituents for processes of policy-making. ILO's work to promote decent work in the rural economy devotes particular attention to strengthening social dialogue and implementing capacity development, including through capacity development of government agencies as well as sectoral and rural workers' and employers' organizations. Moreover, in view of the challenges facing many rural economies around the world in building resilience, ILO is strengthening synergies with key development partners to advance policy coherence and programme delivery, building on comparative advantage.

For more information please visit: [ILO rural economy website](#)

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