



Coalition of Action on Decent Work and Living Incomes and Wages for All Food Systems Workers

The Opportunity

The Coalition of Action on Decent Work and Living Incomes and Wages for All Food Systems Workers advances equitable livelihoods by promoting labour and human rights and increasing opportunities for decent and productive employment within the agri-food sector, including achieving 100% living incomes and wages, thereby ensuring economic and social justice and the right to adequate and nutritious food for all food systems workers.

This involves guaranteeing the effective implementation of international labour and human rights standards; improving the functioning and governance of labour markets; promoting compliance with labour legislation; empowering workers and their organisations; strengthening social dialogue and delivering decent working and living conditions, including the right to social protection for all and especially those most likely be left behind, workplace safety and health and living incomes and wages for all food systems workers. This also involves creating equitable opportunities to earn decent incomes through productive farming, fishing and pastoralism and by improving decent employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in on- and off-farm enterprises, and other related sectors of the food system; and, ensuring sustainability and resilience of incomes and jobs to adverse shocks, crisis and climate change.

Particular attention is paid to eliminating exploitation and discrimination in the workplace. In ensuring equal rights for all agri-food workers and equitable access to social rights, productive assets and decent employment opportunities in food systems, a focus is on groups of workers particularly exposed to socio-economic vulnerability such as youth, women, Indigenous peoples, migrant workers, informal economy workers, and those marginalized on grounds of ethnicity, race, religion, and disability.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of our food systems and exacerbated the decent work deficits endured by agri-food workers in many countries. We now have the chance to rethink our traditional approaches and develop effective strategies to build back better. In this context, the Food Systems Summit presents a unique opportunity to initiate new bold commitments and action to transform the way we produce and consume food. To achieve its long-term objective, which is to ensure that food systems play a central role in building a fairer, more sustainable world and “leave no one behind”,

effective action and measurable progress need to be generated towards decent work and social justice for all food system workers.

Why a Coalition of Action?

A Coalition of Action is urgently needed to guarantee the human and labour rights, dignity, and livelihoods of all food system workers and their families. To end the historical situation where food system workers - who are increasingly recognised by governments and consumers worldwide as essential workers who help feed the world - are not guaranteed the right to adequate food and nutrition. Food system workers are often part of the world's poor, have high levels of working poverty and hunger, work in high-risk health and safety conditions, and are not guaranteed the protection afforded by labour rights and laws which protect other groups of workers.

Effectively addressing the decent work deficits in food systems is key to ensuring that they provide decent livelihood opportunities, are sustainable and resilient, have the capacity to produce enough healthy and nutritious food to feed the growing world population, and "leave no one behind". Achieving sustainable and human-centred transformation of food systems, with decent work at its core, requires shared purpose and aligned efforts across public, private, and civil society actors in countries and globally.

With less than ten years to 2030, the UN Food System Summit's overall objective and many SDG targets will not be met unless there are collective commitments and mutual accountability by all stakeholders to unleash the potential of decent and productive employment of food systems through a human-centred approach.

What are the Coalition's Actions?

To help end poverty and hunger globally and achieve the SDGs and economic and social justice, the Coalition will advance equitable livelihoods in food systems by promoting labour and human rights and decent working and living conditions for all workers involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products.

Essential food systems workers whose livelihoods need to be improved and made equitable include:

- Farmers - smallholders, family farmers, sharecroppers (tenant farmers)
- Waged agricultural workers, including those in aquaculture and on plantations
- Wage and self-employed workers in forestry, nursery, drinking water, irrigation, as well as barefoot technicians, hunter-gatherers and landless laborers
- Fishers and pastoralists
- Food processing, manufacturing, and packaging workers
- Transport, distribution, and delivery workers including food delivery riders
- Food retail workers in supermarkets and shops/groceries, market workers, street vendors
- Food preparers, cooks, and servers

The occupational categories listed above may include youth, women, Indigenous peoples, migrant workers, informal economy workers, and those marginalized on grounds of ethnicity, race, religion, and ability. Their occupational status may be permanent, casual, informal, temporary, seasonal, daily, or based on piece-rate work.

The notion of *decent work*, as conceptualized by the International Labour Organization (ILO) some two decades ago, and now embedded in the SDGs, rests on four pillars: (1) rights at work, (2) full and productive employment, (3) social protection, and (4) social dialogue. The Coalition will promote action in all four pillars, and thus has the following seven priority areas for action:

Priority 1: Improving data collection on livelihoods to ensure a strong, coherent, and implementable M&E framework to report on the main indicators and targets linked to the SDGs. To improve targeting and allocation of adequate resources for food systems workers, increase their visibility, and determine how many livelihoods of food systems workers need to be made equitable, the UNFSS needs to adopt a common metric across different stakeholder groups based on collection, analysis, and publication of statistics on food systems workers - disaggregated by food system segment/sector, occupational status, gender, and age - at both national and international levels. At the national level, data collection will be conducted with a newly developed data collection package (and support materials). At the international level, coalition members commit to collect macro level indicators related but not limited to the SDG 8. Available macroeconomic indicators and available country-level reports will be consolidated into global reports in 2023 and 2025 to summarize the contribution of the Coalition to the Food System transformation and the SDGs.

Priority 2: Institutionalising and strengthening labour and human rights legislation by placing people's dignity and rights at the centre focuses on institutionalising rights at the transnational and international level, including the adoption of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UN human rights conventions by States; inter-state and inter-organisational coordination; effective implementation of ILO and other instruments (such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food and the Responsible Agricultural Investments Principles, and other CFS policy products¹) at the national and local levels to ensure that there is no labour protection gap for food system workers with special attention to fundamental human rights and fundamental principles and rights at work, namely (a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, (b) the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, (c) the effective abolition of child labour, and (d) the elimination of discrimination in respect to employment and occupation. This also emphasizes other important rights which are of relevance to the agri-food sector such as the right to occupational safety and health. Particular attention is paid to marginalised categories of workers, such as informal, migrant (foreign),

¹ FAO. 2005. *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security*. Rome. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/y7937e/Y7937E00.htm#TOC>) and CFS. 2014. *Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems*. Committee on World Food Security. (also available at www.fao.org/3/a-au866e.pdf). All CFS policy products are available at <http://www.fao.org/cfs/policy-products/en/>

and seasonal workers and certain sectors of the food system, such as family farming, fisheries and food processing, which are often not covered in food systems policies, regulations, and social protection.

Priority 3: Improving governance of labour markets encompasses multi-factorial and integrated actions to address the problem of poor governance in rural and urban markets that leads to exploitative employment conditions. Traditional labour market governance and institutional frameworks need to be updated and adapted to address labour market failures and address issues such as property inequality among rural households; shocks and seasonality; non-secure forms of employment (informal, casual, temporary, etc.); compliance mechanisms; poor working conditions; and the geographical and political isolation of workers. Addressing age, gender and racial, ethnic, indigenous, caste and other biases is also a key component of these strategies.

Priority 4: Empowering food system workers through strengthening workplace organisation and effective social dialogue focuses on ensuring the agency of food system workers by addressing their inclusion in social dialogue, workplace organisation and collective bargaining. It focuses on the establishment of new social dialogue mechanisms, improvement in the functioning and representation of existing ones, and enhancing collective bargaining and negotiation, as platforms for giving plantation workers, women, youth, and small-scale producers a voice in social and economic development. To ensure development is inclusive, capacity building and awareness efforts must emphasize the need for small and marginalized women farmers to play an active role in decision making processes.

Priority 5: Ensuring the right to social protection and income security promotes the expansion of social protection, both contributory and non-contributory schemes, as a fundamental right and focuses on accelerating the progressive realisation of nationally defined social protection floors that guarantee at least essential health care, safe and nutritious foods, and basic income security to all, including the poor, food-insecure, and workers in the agri-food systems, including informal, migrant, and seasonal workers and especially those most likely be left behind. These parties must be included in the design and implementation of social protection schemes to ensure they result in inclusive benefits for all food systems workers.

Priority 6: Promoting decent employment in food systems, with a focus on more and better jobs for youth, aims to strengthen partnerships for accelerated action towards more and better jobs for youth in agri-food systems. Key constraints that need to be addressed to engage youth in the agri-food sector are the lack of (a) knowledge, (b) youth-inclusive policy dialogue, (c) capacity, (d) access to productive resources including land and finance, and (e) opportunities for meaningful youth engagement. Future actions will therefore focus on consolidating existing knowledge and generating new knowledge, as well as supporting the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes that generate decent jobs for youth, reduce existing decent work deficits, and support youth entrepreneurship in the agri-food sector. It will promote inclusive and transformative investments in the agri-food sector.

Priority 7: Creating 100% living incomes and wages in food systems to bring substantial improvements in livelihoods and resilience, starting with the small-scale farmers and agricultural wage workers who are essential actors in achieving future food and nutrition security and rural prosperity across the world.

Science Based Evidence to Prioritize this Coalition (scientific references)

Note: There is very little research on any emerging topic precisely because it is emerging and most of the food and agriculture research in recent years has ignored social dimensions of food systems.

While feeding the world daily, food system workers regularly face high levels of working poverty and hunger, chronic food insecurity, poor health and safety conditions, and lack of labour rights and labour protection.² In many countries, they experience the highest incidence of poverty. Two-thirds of the extremely poor are engaged in agriculture³ where more than 90 percent of employment is informal⁴. In terms of poverty rates, a quarter of those employed in this sector live in extreme poverty. They are often from indigenous, caste-oppressed, racialised, and socially marginalised communities. Youth in food systems face multiple vulnerabilities and require specific and targeted policies⁵. These workers do not earn enough income or wages to adequately feed themselves and their families, properly house and clothe themselves, and send their children to school, commonly. Small and marginal family farmers are

² [“Impact of COVID-19 on people’s livelihoods, their health and our food systems”](#), Joint statement by ILO, FAO, IFAD and WHO, 13 October 2020.

³ ILO: *World Economic and Social Outlook 2016: Transforming jobs to end poverty*, (Geneva 2016), p. 9. Extreme poverty rates are defined as people living on less than \$1.90 PPP per day.

⁴ ILO: *Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture (third edition)*, (Geneva, 2018).

⁵ CFS/HLPE: *Promoting youth engagement and employment in food systems* (HLPE, 2021)

also often vulnerable to increasingly frequent climate and market risks, and without diversified sources of income, this pushes them further into poverty. Additionally, the wider agricultural sector accounts for the largest share of child labour worldwide. Seventy percent of all children in child labour are engaged in agriculture.⁶

Paradoxically, most agricultural workers do not enjoy the right to adequate and nutritious food which they help guarantee for others.

Agriculture is one of the most hazardous sectors. For example, capture fishing is one of the four most dangerous occupations to work. Millions of agricultural workers suffer workplace injuries, poisoning by pesticides, and occupational disease. Improving Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in agriculture is thus crucial.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, public perception of food systems workers, and especially agricultural workers, has changed. Characteristically regarded as low-paid, unskilled workers, they are now increasingly recognised by the public for the sacrifices they have made, and continue to make, as front-line workers in guaranteeing resilient food supply chains at great personal risk. To ensure that food systems workers can play full and effective roles in sustainably transforming food systems, the UNFSS must engage and empower workers and their organisations/collectives. Governments, the private sector, and civil society organisations, and other constituents must bring about key basic changes to improve the livelihoods of food systems workers.

Mechanisms of Implementation (global to national levels)

As this Coalition recognizes the utmost urgency of sustained and meaningful action at all levels to reach the respective 2030 SDGs, the coalition has identified the following mechanisms of implementation: United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and One UN country programmes; national policies and strategies on agriculture, food security and nutrition, employment, rural development, social protection, youth and other relevant areas; development cooperation programmes; employment intensive investment programmes; private sector initiatives and programmes. At global level, these may include initiatives, processes and programmes implemented under the auspices of the UN, civil society, private sector and relevant development cooperation platforms.

With regard to the living incomes and wages priority, Coalition members aim to accelerate the adoption of relevant benchmarks by governments alongside private and civil society actors including farmer and worker representation. The coalition will foster learning loops and game-changing action partnerships and initiatives to strengthen pathways for smallholder farmers and wage workers to improve their incomes and resilience.

Several cross-sector groups of businesses, civil society organisations, academic institutions, and farmer organizations have committed support to this coalition, including WBCSD and several individual

⁶ ILO and UNICEF: [Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward](#), (2021).

company members, the CFS Private Sector Mechanism, and the Global Farmer Network. A number of Member States are also coming on board including Antigua and Barbuda, a co-sponsor of a dedicated plenary event on the coalition at the Pre-summit, as well as several European states and international organizations such as FAO.

Following two multi-stakeholder consultations and the panel launch at the Pre-Food System Summit discussions, the next step is to form 'working groups' around each lever to flesh out activities in the short and medium-term, related to SDG targets and KPIs. These working groups will be populated and led by self-nominated groups/platforms/companies, many of whom have already helped shape the Coalition conversation to date.

Several communities of practice have been established to promote living incomes and wages (and made good progress in developing tools, frameworks, and approaches. Some progress has been made in advancing incomes in some value chains, especially for export cash crops. And, yet such examples are few and largely unrecognized.

Strategic Partners (members, private sector, civil society, academic)

- ILO
- IFAD
- FAO
- CFS
- UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS)
- World Bank
- Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY)
- WBCSD
- Global Farmer Network
- Antigua and Barbuda
- A few European States

Monitoring and Evaluation (clear quantifiable indicators and targets linked to SDGs)

Most relevant SDG targets:

Target 1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable

Target 2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food all year round

Target 2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists, and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment

Target 3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all

Target 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

Target 8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

Target 8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training

Target 8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

Target 8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

Target 10.4 Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

What Do Commitments Look Like and Who Will Track Them?

Coalition Commitments

1. **Improving data collection on food system livelihoods** by promoting mechanisms to ensure the regular collection, analysis, and publication of data and statistics on food systems workers - disaggregated by food system segment, gender, and age - at both national and international levels focused on improving policy and action that address decent work and living income deficits in the agri-food sector.
2. **Institutionalising labour and other human rights in food systems at the transnational and international level**, including ensuring ratification and effective implementation of ILO standards and other instruments (such as CFS voluntary guidelines and recommendations) at the national and local levels.

3. **Improving labour market governance and institutional frameworks** for both urban and rural food systems workers.
4. **Strengthening workplace organisation and social dialogue** by establishing new social dialogue mechanisms or improving the functioning of existing ones, and enhancing collective bargaining and negotiation, thereby promoting consensus-based solutions to issues relating to working conditions, boosting productivity and ensuring stable labour relations.
5. **Ensuring access to social protection**, by strengthening systems of provisioning, including the establishment of nationally defined social protection floors, that provide basic income security and adequate and comprehensive protection against all risks faced by food systems workers.
6. **Promoting decent employment in food systems, with a focus on more and better jobs for youth** (15/16-24 years of age).
7. **Champions commit to accelerating action to create 100% living incomes and wages in food systems by 2030** by:
 - a. Establishing and sharing data on living incomes and wages, and identifying living income gaps, and using this information to inform and shape strategies and actions
 - b. Aligning with Governments on the most effective enablers to living income/wages, including access to and use of public social protection measures, providing essential services and infrastructure, strengthening the institutional, policy and enabling environment for responsible investments.
 - c. Working with Worker Representative Groups/Trade Unions, Industry and Producer Associations to drive alignment on most effective interventions in national and local contexts
 - d. Improving corporate performance on areas that impact farmer incomes e.g., remuneration/compensation schemes, strong land tenure, opportunities for women and youth, securing rights to collective bargaining, best practice in procurement.
 - e. Improving a fair repartition of the value added along the value chains to promote fair prices for small-scale producers, traders and processors, and fair wages for all workers through institutional arrangements, enabling policies and regulations by promoting tiny and micro-enterprises of the poor, small, and marginal farmers, linking them directly to market and facilitating scaling of their tiny micro-Agri SMEs
 - f. Improving tax recovery by governments to allow countries to develop social protection and public services needed for living incomes and fair wages
 - g. Providing technical services and upskilling throughout agricultural value chains (including through input provision, mechanization, irrigation, technical and entrepreneurial advice including business development support, agri-extensions services, training, crop, and livelihoods diversification)
 - h. Increasing access to markets (including rural infrastructure, access to finance and technology, including digital technology, innovative on/off-farm business models, insurance, fintech, DAS, financial and business/commercial training, record keeping (moving out of informal))

Conclusion

In conclusion, this Coalition provides transformative cross-cutting solutions which are important across all current action areas, coalitions, and listed priorities of the UNFSS. The call to “leave no one behind” in achieving both the SDG goals and the UNFSS shared priorities, be it addressing poverty, climate change, and consumption, resilience, and food access, needs effective action and measurable progress towards decent work and social justice for all food systems workers.