



Meeting of the OECD Committee for Agriculture at Ministerial Level

Trade Union Statement

7-8 April 2016, Paris

The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations (IUF¹) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the OECD welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the 2016 OECD Committee for Agriculture at Ministerial Level.

We acknowledge the recognition in the *Draft Background notes and Factsheets* that agriculture and food sector has a significant role to play in ensuring global food security and contributing to climate change mitigation; that this needs an integrated policy approach with special efforts being required for less developed economies.

However, we are concerned that the *Background Paper and (Draft) Communiqué* fail completely to acknowledge the contribution of agricultural and food workers to achieving global food security. 1 billion people work in the agricultural sector and in most low-income countries it remains the largest source of employment, accounting for 60 per cent in LDCs as a whole. The International Labour organisation estimates that around 40 per cent of the workforce is employed workers with women making up an increasing percentage of the hired agricultural workforce. They do not own or hire the land they work on or the tools they work with and as such are a distinct group from small farmers.

The OECD *Background Paper* recognises the contribution of small farmers to ensuring global food security and the need of supporting policies. The agricultural workforce also need specific policy tools to be able to contribute to food security of themselves and their families and to achieve sustainable agriculture and rural development.

Application of the fundamental and sector specific ILO conventions will help to achieve a fairer distribution of value in the food chain and by this way reduce poverty in rural areas. Agricultural workers need to be able to organize in independent, democratic trade unions that represent their views and to be able bargain collectively to improve their working conditions. Public support for social dialogue is necessary to create the conditions for decent work and sustainable development.

¹ The IUF is the global trade union federation representing workers throughout the food chain. It is composed of 446 affiliated trade unions in 126 countries.

The following reports and figures illustrate the need to act:

A 2008 International Labour Organisation (ILO) report, “Promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction”² stated:

“Globally, rural workers still form the largest workforce. While improvements have been made in the protection of agricultural workers in some countries, in many others, they are not covered by labour legislation and other regulations protecting workers. Furthermore, where laws do exist, lack of resources and political will to enforce the provisions as well as isolation, poor literacy, poverty and lack of organization, often prevent workers from fully asserting their rights. The labour protection gap for these workers remains huge”

In 2015, a report³ by the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations examining ILO Conventions 11 (1921) and 141 (1975) found:

“The dismal living and working conditions in the rural sector often appear to be largely the same as they were in 1975 – and, in fact, in some places are not dissimilar from the conditions that existed in 1921. A number of the same problems that existed previously have been reported to the Committee as current obstacles to the establishment, growth and functioning of rural workers’ organizations: the informality of the sector and heterogeneity of existing labour relations; severe socio-economic and cultural disadvantage; inequitable labour relationships and distribution of benefits; lack of education and awareness; prevalence of child labour, forced labour and discrimination; the particular disadvantage experienced by women; large numbers of particularly vulnerable or marginalized workers; and often insanitary, unstable and isolated living conditions”.

Agriculture is also the biggest user of child labour with 60% (i.e. 98, 000, 000 children) working in agriculture alone, many of them in hazardous conditions.

Agriculture is also one of the three most dangerous industries to work in alongside mining and construction and the industry with the highest rate of fatal accidents.

Agriculture is the biggest user of water but agricultural workers frequently do not have access to potable water in their workplaces.

² Promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction; Chapter 6 - Closing the gap for rural workers (para 273); http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/97thSession/reports/WCMS_091721/lang--en/index.htm

³ Giving a voice to rural workers; http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/104/reports/reports-to-the-conference/WCMS_343023/lang--en/index.htm

The IUF and the TUAC therefore urge OECD member states to:

- In line with SDG 8 of decent work and economic growth and SDG 2 on zero hunger, develop integrated policy approaches to sustainable agriculture that put decent work in agriculture at their heart, in particular adopt strategies to ensure living wages for agricultural workers and decent livelihoods for small farmers thus allowing them to ensure the food and nutrition security for themselves and their families;
- In line with SDG 3 on good health and well-being and SDG 15 on life on the land, adopt policies which encourage agro-ecology. This will contribute enormously to reduce GHG emissions and strengthen climate change mitigation mechanisms as well as improving occupational health and safety. Agro-ecology is a key tool for reducing the use of Highly Hazardous Pesticides and moving agriculture off the treadmill of ever-increasing agro-chemical dependency;
- In line with SDG 1, promote measures to extend social protection to small farmers and agricultural workers in order to increase resilience to natural disasters, food price hikes etc.
- In line with SDG 4, and recognizing that the agricultural workforce in many countries is an aged workforce, adopt policies which attract young people to the sector, principally through ensuring decent work in agriculture and access to training and skills development for workers;
- In line with SDG 8 increase global efforts to eliminate child labour in agriculture;
- In line with SDG 5, promote gender sensitive agricultural employment policies.

Complementary measures include:

- Promoting policies which ensure that national labour law protections extend to agricultural rural workers. National legislation should take into consideration the specificities of rural work and spell out the rights and responsibilities of all concerned, governments, employers and workers;
- Strengthening rural labour inspection.

For further information contact:

- Head of the joint TUAC / IUF Delegation at the OECD Ministerial:
Barbara Bindner bbindner@fga.cfdt.fr
- IUF: Sue Longley, sue.longley@iuf.org
- TUAC: Matt Simonds simonds@tuac.org