

New guide to help ensure health and safety of workers in banana sector

Bananas are the most exported fresh fruit in the world - both in terms of volume and economic value - and serves as an essential source of employment and income for thousands of rural households in developing countries.



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At the Third Conference of the World Banana Forum in Geneva, FAO and the Government of Ecuador have presented a practical guide aimed at making conditions healthier and safer for workers in the banana sector. While initially aimed at workers in Ecuador, the manual can be adapted for use around the world.

A great step forward in defence of workers' rights, safety

The [publication](#) contains a series of recommendations addressed to trainers and workers in the sector on how to manage risks on banana farms and how to carry out work more safely.

It includes a wide range of guidelines covering topics including the proper handling, storage and use of agrochemicals/pesticides, measures for adequate personal protection - including first aid in emergency situations - hygiene standards, information on ergonomic risks, ways to stop gender-related violence and other human rights abuses.

"This handbook is a great step forward in defence of workers' rights. This pioneering initiative should be replicated in other banana-producing countries," said Ecuador's Minister of Labour, Raúl Clemente Ledesma Huerta, speaking at the conference in Geneva, which brought together over 300 representatives from the banana sector and other stakeholders, including retailers, importers, producers, exporters, consumer associations, governments, academic institutions, United Nations agencies, trade unions and civil society organisations.

Social, environmental and health risks in banana production

Bananas, after cereals, sugar, coffee and cocoa, is the most traded agricultural product in the world, and attempts to lower production costs often leads to disastrous consequences on the rights of workers and on the environment.

For example, banana plantations use 10 times more pesticides than conventional plantations in developed countries. Elevated exposure to these agrochemicals can cause serious health problems for workers and neighbouring communities - one of the topics addressed in the manual.

The manual also serves as a guide to identify risks and also as a source of information regarding current legislation to report on work-related accidents.

Fruit of a cross-sectoral partnership

Of the almost 100 million tonnes of bananas consumed each year in the world, around 20 million are exported. Of these, almost six million come from Ecuador, the world's largest exporter and the country chosen by the Banana Initiative for Occupational Health and Safety (BOHESI) - coordinated by the FAO-led World Banana Forum and the non-governmental organisations Solidaridad and Bananalink - as a priority country for the development of the manual.

The guide, aimed at both trainers and workers, is the result of an unprecedented consensus between the public and private sectors and civil society and includes all current legislation applicable to the sector in Ecuador. It is expected to be useful for some 250,000 direct workers and from 2 to 2.5 million workers related to banana exports in the country.

Given that banana farming is carried out in a similar way throughout the world - from Latin America to Asia and the Pacific - the initiative can be adapted and replicated in banana producing countries around the world, incorporating their own legislation.

The FAO World Banana Forum Secretariat is the neutral facilitator responsible for coordination among the members of this huge industry and aims to actively promote the adoption of the handbook globally.

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