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Methodological note for the project 'Expanding social insurance for agricultural workers in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries: identifying key constraints and discussing policy options'

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1 Introduction

This note provides details on the methodological approach of the series of Research Reports developed under the project '**Expanding social insurance for agricultural workers in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries: identifying key constraints and discussing policy options**'. This is a joint project between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (NENA) Region (FAO RNE), the International Labour Organization Regional Office for Arab States (ILO ROAS) and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG).

The project builds on the common approach developed by FAO and ILO to extend social protection to rural populations (ILO and FAO 2021), as well as a Working Paper produced by the IPC-IG and FAO on the state of social insurance for agricultural workers in the NENA region (Sato 2021). Considering the main barriers to including agricultural workers in contributory schemes, FAO, ILO and the IPC-IG joined efforts to further promote debate and engage stakeholders to discuss policy options to increase social insurance for agricultural workers in the MENA region. As a result of this project, a series of three Research Reports were developed:

- **Research Report 1:** The role of social insurance schemes in addressing the risks faced by agricultural workers in the Middle East and North Africa region <<https://t.ly/uEjz>>.
- **Research Report 2:** Financing social insurance schemes for agricultural workers in the Middle East and North Africa region <<https://t.ly/S36O>>.
- **Research Report 3:** Administrative barriers and capacity constraints hindering the inclusion of agricultural workers in social insurance schemes in the Middle East and North Africa region <<https://t.ly/AlyL>>.

They are based on information collected through a desk review, workshops, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and a webinar, all of which are described in more detail below. The following section contains a glossary of key concepts and definitions adopted for the Research Report series.

TABLE 1

Glossary of key concepts and definitions

Concept	Definition
Middle East and North Africa (MENA)	The Research Report series considers the following countries as the MENA region: Algeria; Bahrain; Egypt; Iran; Iraq; Jordan; Kuwait; Lebanon; Libya; Mauritania; Morocco; Oman; Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT); Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Sudan; Syria; Tunisia; United Arab Emirates; and Yemen.
Social protection	Different definitions of social protection co-exist and usually include social assistance and social insurance, and in some instances labour market policies and programmes. According to the ILO (2021), "social protection, or social security, is a human right and is defined as the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion throughout the life cycle". For FAO (2017), social protection "comprises a set of policies and programmes that addresses economic, environmental and social vulnerabilities to food insecurity and poverty by protecting and promoting livelihoods."

Concept	Definition
Social insurance (or contributory social protection)	Schemes that guarantee protection through an insurance mechanism, based on: (1) the prior payment of contributions—i.e. before the occurrence of the insured contingency; (2) risk-sharing or ‘pooling’; and (3) the notion of a guarantee (ILO 2017, 194). Examples of benefits provided under social insurance schemes include long-term benefits such as old-age and disability pensions, as well as short-term benefits such as maternity/paternity/parental leaves, unemployment benefits, and work injury compensation.
Informal employment	“All remunerative work (i.e., both self-employment and wage employment) that is not registered, regulated or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks, as well as non-remunerative work undertaken in an income-producing enterprise. Informal workers do not have secure employment contracts, workers’ benefits, social protection or workers’ representation” (ILO n.d.).
Agricultural workers	All persons working in economic activities across all sectors of agriculture, including farming, forestry and fisheries, as defined by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA 2008). Therefore, all activities involving the exploitation of vegetable and animal natural resources (including growing and harvesting crops, raising and breeding animals, harvesting timber and other plants, animals or animal products from a farm or their natural habitats).
Employers	“Persons who operate their own business either on their own or in partnership with others in which they employ one or more persons on a regular basis (except themselves, their partner or a contributing family worker)” (ILO 2018, 10-11).
Employees	“Workers who do not hold controlling ownership over the economic unit in which they are employed. They are typically paid for time worked but can also be paid for each task or piece of work done or for services provided including sales (by the piece or commission). They are not paid according to the terms of a commercial contract for the provision of goods or services.” (ILO 2018, 11).
Waged agricultural workers	“The women and men who labour in the crop fields, orchards, glasshouses, livestock units, and primary processing facilities to produce the world’s food and fibres. They are employed on small- and medium-sized farms as well as large industrialised farms and plantations. They are waged workers because they do not own or rent the land on which they work nor the tools and equipment they use and so are a group distinct from farmers” (ILO, FAO, and IUF 2007, 23).
Seasonal workers	Those that occupy “(...) jobs whose timing and duration are significantly influenced by seasonal factors such as climatic seasons, holidays and agricultural preparations or harvests” (ILO 2020, 51).
Short-term employees	“Those who are guaranteed a minimum number of hours of work and are employed on a time-limited basis with an expected duration of less than three months” (ILO 2020, 41).
Casual and intermittent employees	“Those who have no guarantee of employment for a certain number of hours during a specified period but may have arrangements of an ongoing or recurring nature. Depending on national circumstances and specific contractual arrangements pertaining to the job, this group includes employees engaged on a casual or intermittent basis, workers on zero-hours contracts, employees who are only paid when called in to work, and workers hired on a day-to-day basis” (ILO 2020, 41).
Contributing family workers	“Workers who assist a family member or a household member in the enterprise operated by the family or household member, or in a job in which the assisted family or household member is an employee or dependent contractor. Contributing family workers do not have the responsibility for the enterprise and do not make the most important decisions about it. They do not receive regular payments such as wage or salary but can benefit from intra-household transfers” (ILO 2018, 12).

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

2 Desk review

A desk review of relevant literature was conducted by the IPC-IG research team. Official documents, academic articles, reports, and online newspaper articles in English, Arabic and French were reviewed to gather information on the state of social insurance schemes in the MENA region and on best practices being developed in low- and middle-income countries from other regions to expand contributory schemes for agricultural workers. To identify these sources, a key term search was conducted alongside a snowballing approach (scanning bibliographies of relevant reports to identify further literature). Most of the reviewed sources were found online and are available to the general public. A few sources were obtained through direct contact with key informants. In general, public and updated data on social protection and rural populations in the MENA region are scarce, which remains a key limitation.

3 Workshops

The workshops aimed at creating a space for open dialogue between different categories of stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the topic. Two online workshops were conducted. The first took place in August 2021 and discussed the role of social insurance schemes in addressing the risks faced by agricultural workers in the MENA region. The second occurred in December 2021 and discussed how to address the financial and administrative barriers of social insurance schemes for

agricultural workers. A total of 43 stakeholders participated in the discussions, including representatives from relevant ministries (Social Solidarity/Development and Agriculture); authorities from national social security institutions; researchers and members of academia; as well as experts from UN agencies (FAO, ILO, and the United Nations Development Programme—UNDP).

4 Qualitative interviews

The key informant interviews aimed at providing a dedicated space for representatives of agricultural workers from the MENA region to be heard. Fifteen semi-structured key informant interviews with representatives from Iraq (4), Algeria (3), Egypt (2), Lebanon (2), Sudan (2), OPT (1) and Morocco (1) took place between September and November 2021 (online and via phone). In total, 10 men and 5 women were interviewed. Table 1 shows more details about each interviewee. Those who preferred to keep their identities anonymous are represented by “Anonymous participant” in the table.

All interviewees were asked the same set of questions, which included themes such as the risks faced by agricultural workers in their countries, financial and administrative barriers and incentives, the role of agricultural workers’ unions, awareness barriers, and specific barriers faced by women and migrants in the agricultural sector. Table 2 lists the questions asked during the key informant interviews.

TABLE 2

Interviewed representatives of agricultural workers

Interviewee name	Association	Country
Halkawt Mohammad	Union for Agricultural Engineers in Kurdistan	Iraq
Anonymous participant	Union of Trade Councils and Associations for Workers (Kirkuk branch)	Iraq
Zainab Sameer	General Federation of Iraqi Trade Unions	Iraq
Atheer al Dbas	Syndicate of Engineering Professions	Iraq
Safia Ouicher	<i>Union Nationale des Agronomes</i>	Algeria
Malik Harami	<i>Union Nationale des Agronomes</i>	Algeria
Farida Fizmeen	<i>Union Nationale des Agronomes</i>	Algeria
Amarat Gamal	<i>Edi fi Edk</i>	Egypt
Mohamed Medany	Fayoum Agro Organic Development Association (FAODA)	Egypt
Anonymous participant	Agricultural Workers' Union	Lebanon
Asma Mustapha	Committee of Employee Women Union — North of Lebanon	Lebanon
Omer Yousif Mohamed Elamin	Tayba Association for Agricultural Production	Sudan
Ali Hilal	Small-scale farmer	Sudan
Mouyad Bsharat	Union of Agricultural Work Committees	OPT
Badr Eddine	Agricultural Workers Union	Morocco

Source: Authors' elaboration.

TABLE 3

Semi-structured questionnaire used for the interview with representatives of agricultural workers

I. Identifying risks and adequate social insurance schemes
1. Considering the last 5 years, what are the main risks faced by agricultural workers in your country? Are these risks different from the risks faced by informal workers in other sectors in your country? Could you identify specific risks faced by subsectors (fisheries, pastoralists, forest-dependent people)?
2. Do women and migrants in the agricultural sector face additional risks? Can you name some?
3. In your opinion, which social insurance benefits are needed the most to address the risks faced by agricultural workers?
II. Barriers to contributing and financing issues
4. What are the main barriers that hinder the inclusion of agricultural workers in social insurance schemes? Do you think this is different for other agricultural subsectors in your country?
5. What could encourage these workers to choose to be covered by social insurance schemes?
6. In your opinion, which instrument should be used to calculate the contributions of agricultural workers in your country?
7. Could digital tools be used to collect contributions in your country? If not, what would be needed to use them for collection?
III. Administration, compliance and incentives
8. How do you think agricultural workers' cooperatives can facilitate the inclusion of their members in social insurance schemes?
9. What services do the cooperatives provide to agricultural workers in your country?
10. To what extent is compliance a problem among employers in providing social insurance? Do you think mandating social insurance will create an incentive for more informal work?
IV. Information and participation in the policymaking process
11. How do you perceive the awareness of agricultural workers in your country about their rights, especially those related to social protection? Which steps have been taken to ensure that agricultural workers have adequate and accessible information on available social insurance schemes and how to claim their benefits for various categories (old age; disability; health; etc.)?
12. Can you think of positive examples where small producers/agricultural workers have access to decision-making processes related to labour and social protection?
V. Specific questions
13. Are you aware of any social insurance schemes that target or include agricultural workers in your country? Are you enrolled? (If not, why?)
14. How would you evaluate the adequacy of the scheme in terms of accessibility, types of insurance included and responsiveness to your needs as a farmer/agricultural worker?
15. Has the situation regarding social insurance for agricultural workers changed in the last five years?

Source: Authors' elaboration.

5 Analytical approach

The responses provided in key informant interviews and workshops were summarised, coded and classified. Thematic codes and (when applicable) subcodes were developed to group patterns and repeated ideas perceived across the interviews and workshops. Data were then analysed using a thematic approach. The responses provided by representatives of agricultural workers were usually based on their personal experience in the agricultural sector and generally in a specific region of each country. Interviewees were mostly from the farming sector and thus particularities from other agricultural subsectors (e.g., pastoralists, fishers, forest-dependents) may not be fully included. The responses provided by interviewees cannot be generalised, as the research did feature random probability sampling, but only a small sample of contacts.

6 Webinar¹

The webinar was held on **28 July 2022**. It had two main objectives:

- Present the main results of the research and the best practices for expanding social insurance for agricultural workers in the MENA region and other low- and middle-income countries.
- Engage government representatives with the main results and possibilities for extending social insurance schemes in the region.

It included participants representing the ministries of Labour and Agriculture, authorities from national social security institutions, researchers and members of academia, and representatives of agricultural workers from the MENA region. Prior to the webinar, the three Research Reports were shared with representatives from the Union of Agricultural Work Committees of the **State of Palestine**, the Ministry of Social Solidarity of the Arab Republic of **Egypt**, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries of the Republic of **Tunisia** for feedback and so they could reflect on the experiences of their respective countries. The reports were also shared in advance with official representatives from various relevant entities (including Labour, Social Protection and Agriculture Ministries, and the Arab Trade Union Confederation) in the MENA region. The webinar included a presentation of a summary featuring the feedback received from the representatives, reflecting their countries' challenges and current efforts to expand social insurance schemes to include agricultural workers.

1. See: <<https://socialprotection.org/learn/webinars/expanding-social-insurance-agricultural-workers-middle-east-and-north-africa>>.

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