

GOOD PRACTICE

# Promoting Living Wages for Banana Plantation Workers in Côte d'Ivoire

March 2025



GLOBAL DEAL



## WORKING CONDITIONS ON BANANA PLANTATIONS

Work on banana plantations provides an important source of income in the rural areas of Côte d'Ivoire where production for export is located. However, workers often face difficult working conditions. In banana production, non-standard forms of employment, including temporary contracts and daily contracts, are on the rise. This is especially affecting women, who are often denied maternity benefits and are more vulnerable to sexual harassment. Plantation workers work up to 14 hours a day in some countries, often six days a week, without overtime being paid, in intense heat. Banana Link estimates that unionisation of banana workers stands at less than 20% across the main 15 exporting countries globally (while union membership has grown slightly in the last five years, except in Ecuador and Belize). In some contexts, fragmentation is an issue, as several trade unions represent workers on the same plantation. This diminishes the potential to speak with one voice, to have negotiating power and to consistently educate all workers about their rights and occupational safety and health standards.<sup>1</sup>

## CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND GLOBAL BANANA PRODUCTION

At the global scale, ananas for export, grown in monoculture and 99% being the same variety – the Cavendish – are highly dependent on agrochemicals. The lack of genetic variety makes them vulnerable to pests, fungi and diseases. Therefore, a large quantity of pesticides is applied, exacerbated by increasing resistance to the same chemicals.

Agrochemicals pollute water, soils and pose risks for occupational safety and health, especially when safety standards during spraying are not respected and personal protective equipment not provided. Around 15% of all global banana production is traded in international markets, which Banana Link estimates generated some USD 11 billion in export revenues for the 15 countries involved.

► **Banana Link** works for fair and equitable production and trade in bananas and pineapples based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. The objectives of Banana Link are to promote;

- Fair and ethical trade practices which are based on a fair living wage, equitable distribution of value along the chain, and competitive market access for small producers.
- Dignity for workers and respect for labour and trade union rights.
- Sustainable production systems which reduce dependence on hazardous substances and minimise adverse health and environmental impacts on natural resources, workers and communities.
- Constructive dialogue between all economic and non-economic stakeholders that accelerates a transition to fair, equitable and sustainable banana and pineapple chains worldwide.



<sup>1</sup> - See: Global Deal, [Ripening workers' rights in the banana sector through social dialogue](#), which shows how the creation of a trade union platform avoided fragmentation and improved plantation workers' living and working conditions in Cameroon.

Exports from Africa, led by Côte d'Ivoire, are projected to increase by 0.3% per year between 2024 and 2033.<sup>2</sup> Côte d'Ivoire is the African leader in banana exports to the EU with 300 934 tonnes exported to the EU in 2023.<sup>3</sup> Banana Link estimates that this could have increased to 340 000 tonnes in 2024. An estimated 13 500 workers are employed to produce and export bananas in Côte d'Ivoire. The large and medium-scale plantations that make up the export sector are almost entirely owned by French and Belgian multinational companies.<sup>4</sup>

## STRENGTHENING SOCIAL DIALOGUE ON THE GROUND

Starting in 2020, Banana Link has been implementing a programme on “decent remuneration” for banana plantation workers in Côte d'Ivoire. Banana Link, with support from the International Union of Food, Agricultural,

Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), held training workshops for trade unionists to raise awareness on the roles of stakeholders across the value chain, and enabling them to collaborate on wage data validation with the Ivorian research institute Centre Ivoirien de Recherches Économiques et Sociales (CIRES)<sup>5</sup>. The key role of social dialogue was recognised since the start of this process (see Box 1).

Following initial discussions in Côte d'Ivoire with businesses and trade unions, six European retailers committed to support a collaborative process to pave the way for collective bargaining aimed at achieving living wages for all workers, in alignment with the recent ILO guidance on living wages. This involved gathering and validating wage data, with retailers agreeing to support wage improvements through decent price commitments (see Box 2) recognising their shared responsibility.

### Box 1: ILO guidance on living wages

In March 2024, the ILO Governing Body endorsed the conclusions reached during a Meeting of Experts on wage policies held in February of the same year. According to the conclusions, the concept of a living wage should be:

- the wage level that is necessary to afford a decent standard of living for workers and their families, taking into account the country circumstances and calculated for the work performed during the normal hours of work;
- calculated in accordance with the ILO's principles of estimating living wages;
- achieved through the wage-setting process in line with ILO principles on wage setting.

Social dialogue lies at the heart of this process. As such 'Collective bargaining and/or statutory minimum wage fixing through tripartite social dialogue should be the proper modality for setting and adjusting wages. In most countries, statutory minimum wages and collective wage bargaining coexist.' Additional principles to follow when setting living wages include the use of evidence-based methodologies and robust data, transparency, public availability, and the consideration of regional and local contexts, as well as socio-economic and cultural realities.

Source: [Report of the Meeting of Experts on wage policies, including living wages | International Labour Organization \(ilo.org\)](#)

2- See: [OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2024-2033](#)

3- See: European Commission, Banana Supply in the EU (27), available at: [https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/document/download/eec7ef5e-db01-41d0-bde2-c77a9b5e1a15\\_en?filename=bananas-supply-eu.pdf](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/document/download/eec7ef5e-db01-41d0-bde2-c77a9b5e1a15_en?filename=bananas-supply-eu.pdf)

4- See Banana Link website: [All About Bananas | Producers, Where They're Grown & Why They Matter \(bananalink.org.uk\)](#)

5- See webpage of the Centre Ivoirien de Recherches Économiques et Sociales (CIRES): <http://cires-ci.com/contexte>

## Box 2: Three decencies formula

Banana Link and AFRUIBANA developed the “three decencies” formula:

Living/decent wages + Decent working conditions + Decent living conditions = Decent price

The aim is to provide decent prices for bananas, which is a precondition for all three other decencies, with the first-ever national collective agreement for the banana industry by 2026.

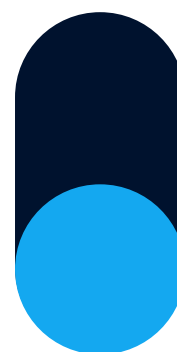
Back in 2021, producing companies were represented by two trade associations, l’Organisation des Producteurs-Exportateurs de bananes, d’ananas, de mangues et d’autres fruits de Côte d’Ivoire (OBAM-CI) and l’Organisation Centrale des producteurs, exportateurs, transformateurs d’Ananas, de Bananes et de tous autres produits horticoles (OCAB), while workers were represented by close to 20 organisations. The objective was to agree on a process towards living wages whilst improving working and living conditions of banana plantation workers. The social partners were supported by CIRES-CI, Banana Link and the Association des Producteurs Africains de Bananes et Autres Fruits (AFRUIBANA) – of which OBAM-CI and OCAB are both members – uniting the voices of the Ivorian, Ghanaian and Cameroonian sectors. Funding was provided by the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH) and some of Europe’s biggest retailers (Tesco, Lidl France, Carrefour, Aldi Nord, Morrisons and Marks & Spencer).<sup>6</sup>

Other factors came into play and paved the way on an agreement on living wages:

- The Ivorian government reviewed the national minimum wage in January 2023

for non-agricultural sectors (SMIG), although the minimum wage in the agricultural sector remained unchanged.<sup>7</sup>

- Then, in February 2023, ten trade unions from four companies formed a national sector-wide federation, the Fédération des syndicats de toutes les entreprises productrices de bananes en Côte d’Ivoire (FETBACI), uniting the majority of workers in the sector for the first time and creating a legitimate body to negotiate with companies at the national level to increase the agricultural minimum wage.
- The collective public commitments by groups of retailers in four European countries to ensuring living wages in banana supply chains and their endorsement for collective bargaining as the most sustainable solution.<sup>8</sup>



6- For example, see the dedicated webpages below:

- Tesco: <https://www.tescopl.com/sustainability/bananas#:~:text=100%25,of%20working%20conditions%20when%20required>

- Lidl France: <https://corporate.lidl.fr/espace-presse/communiqués-de-presse/cp-banane>

7- See: [Setting Adequate Wages - Côte d’Ivoire | International Labour Organization](#)

8- See: [Côte d’Ivoire : joint strategy to negotiate living wages agreed by producers and trade unions | Banana Link](#)

## TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT ON LIVING WAGES BY 2026

After three years of collaborative efforts coordinated by Banana Link, a historic agreement was reached between major banana exporting companies and trade unions, including four major companies that produce more than 98% of exports<sup>9</sup> and twelve workers' unions forming part of FETBACI<sup>10</sup>. With a final workshop held in Abidjan on 26 and 27 February 2024, social partners agreed to form a joint working group and negotiate a first sectoral agreement by 2026, supported by the African trade association AFRUIBANA, IUF and Banana Link. The collective agreement will focus on decent working and living conditions and lead to a living wage for all banana workers.

In September 2024, representatives of the entire value chain participated in a three-day meeting in Abidjan, including major European retailers (Lidl France and Tesco), workers and trade unions (FETBACI and IUF), as well as most of the African banana sector associated stakeholders. The relevant bodies of the Ivorian government (Ministries of Employment and Social Protection, Agriculture, and Trade) and members of the National Assembly also attended and publicly expressed their full support. As an outcome of this meeting, the four major exporting companies as well as FETBACI signed a Charter for the Operation of the Joint Working Group on September 26, 2024<sup>11</sup> and agreed on a roadmap to negotiate living wages in the banana industry to ultimately promote decent work and recognise a shared responsibility.

### Box 3: Social dialogue and living wages

To facilitate exchange of good practices, stimulate peer learning and explore joint action, the Global Deal established a focus group on Social Dialogue and Living Wages in 2022. Throughout five sessions, the focus group explored the contribution of social dialogue to achieving a living wage in companies' own operations and, more broadly, throughout their supply chains. Findings of the focus group were published in 2023 as a thematic brief: [The Role of Social Dialogue in Promoting Living Wages](#). This final note highlights successful approaches and practical and effective ways of using social dialogue to narrow the gap between current wages and living wages.

Additionally, the Global Deal held a webinar in early 2025 reflecting on the new ILO guidance on living wages and inviting Global Deal partners to discuss new good practices, including Banana Link's efforts in Côte d'Ivoire.



9- SCB (filiale de la Compagnie Fruitière), Plantations Jean Eglin (filiale de SIPEF), BACIBAM et BANACI (filiales du Groupe Bernard Hayot) et SIAPA (société ivoiro-antillaise)

10- See: [Côte d'Ivoire : Des travailleurs de la banane créent une Fédération et appellent à la revalorisation du Salaire minimum agricole - KOACI](#)

11- See: [Côte d'Ivoire : Roadmap to Negotiate Living Wages Approved | Banana Link](#)

## THE ROLE OF RETAILERS

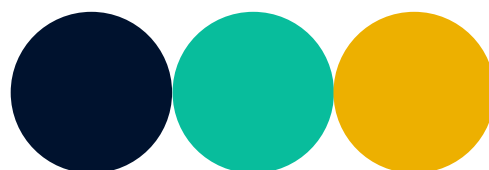
According to Banana Link's estimates, African workers typically receive between 5 to 9% of the final retail value of bananas, while retailers (taken as an average across the EU<sup>12</sup>) keep between 36 to 43% of the price to consumers.<sup>13</sup> While prices for bananas have been decreasing over time, costs of production increased, further affecting wages and pushing workers to work longer hours to make a living. For example, the average consumer price of bananas is 25% lower than that of apples, despite the costs associated with being imported over thousands of kilometres.<sup>14</sup>

Against this background, retailers were invited to Côte d'Ivoire to visit plantations in September 2024, engage in discussions with companies and trade unions and share tangible commitments to help bridge the gap between actual wages and living wages for the lowest-paid workers so that workers can receive a larger share of the total value of bananas. In the presence of the sector's social partners, leading retailers committed to support the negotiation of a sectoral agreement and to respect the concept of shared responsibility as developed at the World Banana Forum,<sup>15</sup> a multi-stakeholder initiative established in December 2009 and hosted by FAO.

### Box 4: Statement of Retailer Working Groups in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and UK on Living Wage Commitments (6 February 2024)

- **Joint commitment:** Retailers from Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK reaffirm their commitment to achieving living wages in banana supply chains. They pledge to collaborate with producers, trade unions, and other stakeholders to close the living wage gap for workers in their banana supply chains by 2030 at the latest.
- **Importance of social dialogue and collective bargaining:** Retailers emphasise the crucial role of social dialogue and collective bargaining in achieving living wages. They commit to supporting and promoting these processes in their banana supply chains, recognising them as essential for sustainable wage improvements. They also commit to encouraging and facilitating collective bargaining processes in their supply chains, recognising its importance in achieving and maintaining living wages over time.
- **Adaptation to local contexts:** Retailers acknowledge the need to adapt approaches to local contexts, considering factors such as national legislation, existing wage-setting mechanisms, and local stakeholder dynamics. They stress the importance of understanding and respecting local conditions in their efforts to promote living wages.

Source: [https://www.bananalink.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/240206b\\_FLY\\_Statement\\_Retailers\\_GB-1.pdf](https://www.bananalink.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/240206b_FLY_Statement_Retailers_GB-1.pdf)



12- See: [https://lebasic.com/v2/content/uploads/2015/10/Concurrence-deloyale-banane\\_Rapport-UK.pdf](https://lebasic.com/v2/content/uploads/2015/10/Concurrence-deloyale-banane_Rapport-UK.pdf)

13- See: [Banana-value-breakdown-between-main-supplying-countries-and-the-EU.png \(2048x1148\)](#), looking at the value of bananas in Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic and Ecuador.

14- See: [The Problem With Bananas | Environmental & Social Issues in the Trade \(bananalink.org.uk\)](#)

15- See: [Déclaration du Forum Mondial de la Banane en faveur d'un salaire décent pour les travailleurs et travailleuses dans l'industrie bananière | Forum Mondial de la Banane | Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture](#)



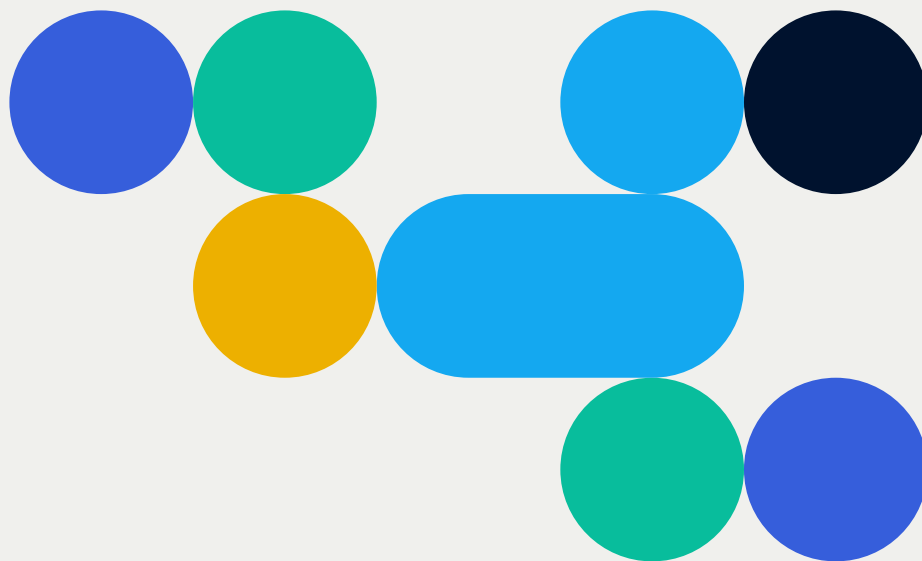
### Box 5: The EU Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence

On 25 July 2024, the EU Directive came into force establishing a corporate due diligence duty. The core elements of this duty are identifying and addressing potential and actual adverse human rights and environmental impacts in the company's own operations, their subsidiaries and, where related to their value chain(s), those of their business partners.

The Directive applies to limited liability EU companies with more than 1 000 employees and net turnover of EUR 450 million as well as to non-EU companies with a net turnover of EUR 450 million. Companies have an obligation to identify and assess actual and potential human rights adverse impacts, which includes freedom of association and the right to enjoy just and favourable conditions of work, including a fair wage and an adequate living wage for employed workers.

Source: [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1760 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on corporate sustainability due diligence and amending Directive \(EU\) 2019/1937 and Regulation \(EU\) 2023/2859](#)Text with EEA relevance. ([europa.eu](#))






## THE GLOBAL DEAL FOR DECENT WORK AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

The Global Deal is a multi-stakeholder partnership of governments, businesses and employers' organisations, trade unions, civil society and other organisations for the promotion of social dialogue and sound industrial relations as effective means for achieving decent work and inclusive growth. The Global Deal enables knowledge sharing, facilitates policy discussions, strengthens the capacity of partners to engage in dialogue, and produces evidence-based research. As a unique action-oriented platform, the Global Deal accelerates positive change by encouraging partners to make voluntary commitments to advance social dialogue.

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