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Organization of the
United Nations



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Rejuvenating agriculture: the importance of engaging youth in the sector

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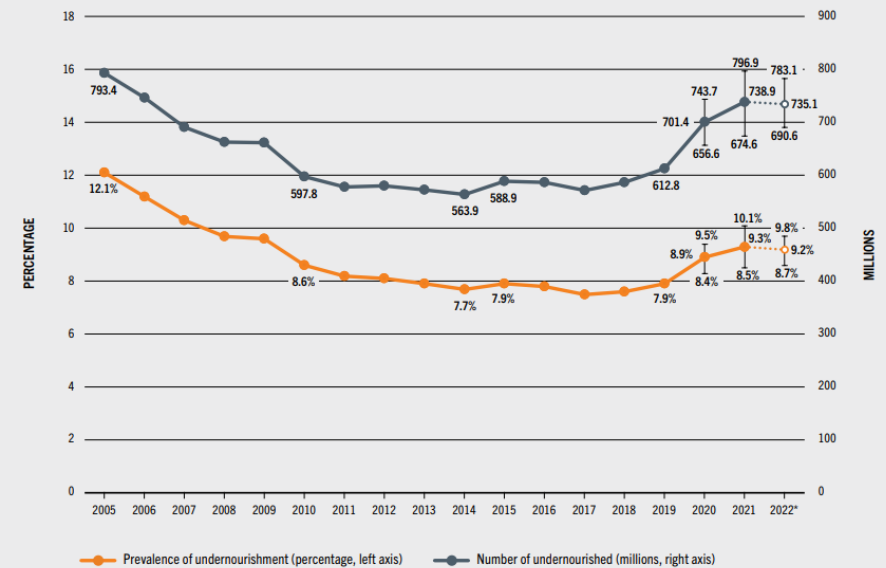
Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP)

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Agriculture at a crossroads of transformation

- **Agenda 2030, including agrifood-related targets, tremendously off-track.**
- Agrifood systems suffer vast inequalities, starting from extreme poverty and hunger - **between 690 and 783 million people in the world facing hunger in 2022.**
- Current trends of drivers affecting agrifood systems (from public underinvestment in agriculture to poverty & inequalities, prevailing agricultural practices, which rely on the intensive use of agrochemical inputs and energy, climate change and geopolitical tensions) **threaten their sustainability and resilience.** Food crises are likely to increase in the future.
- **Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems at risk of disappearing** due to lack of dedicated policies and programmes supporting them.

FIGURE 1 GLOBAL HUNGER REMAINED VIRTUALLY UNCHANGED FROM 2021 TO 2022 BUT IS STILL FAR ABOVE PRE-COVID-19-PANDEMIC LEVELS



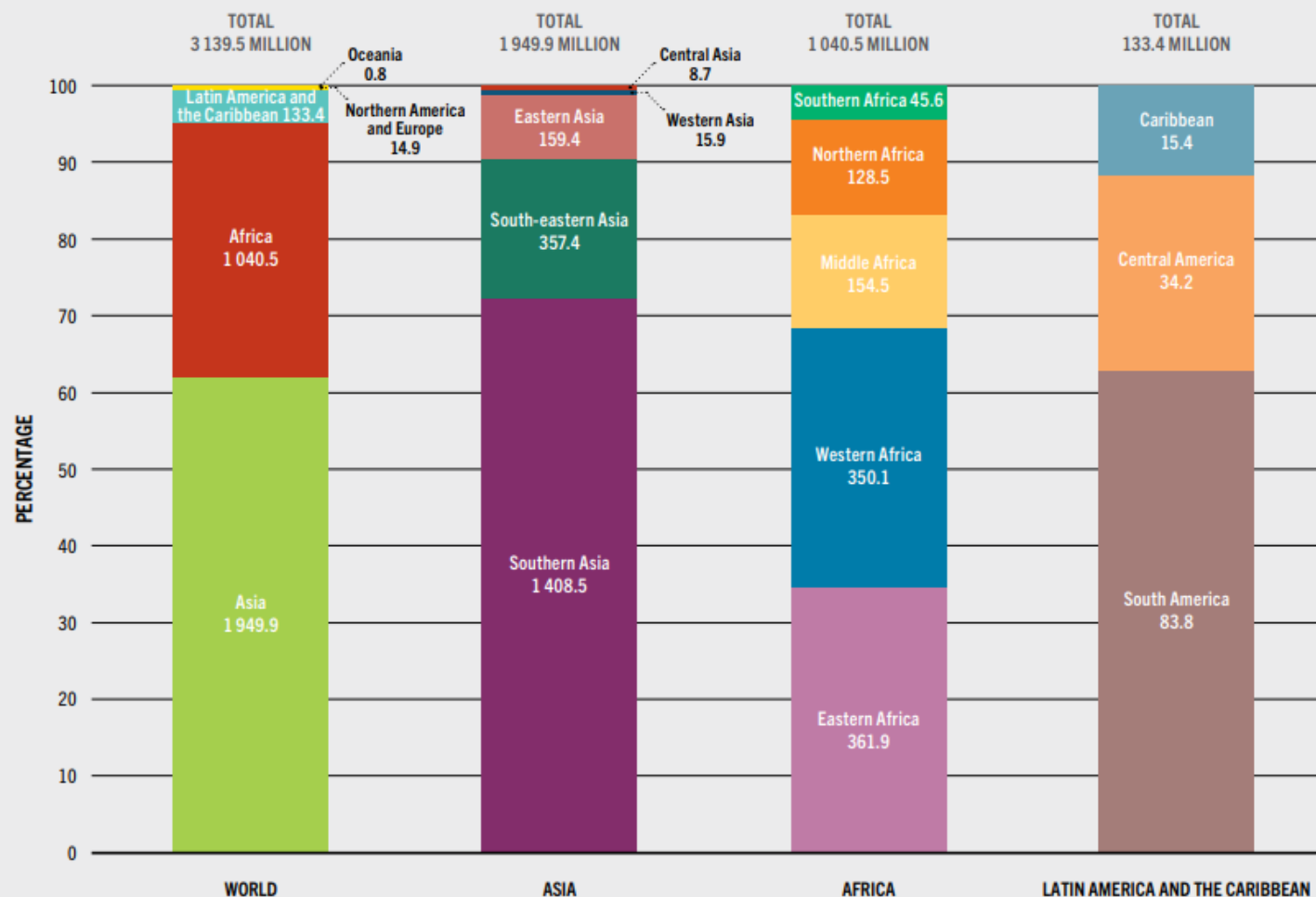
NOTES: * Projections based on nowcasts for 2022 are illustrated by dotted lines. Bars show lower and upper bounds of the estimated range.
SOURCE: FAO. 2023. FAOSTAT: Suite of Food Security Indicators. In: FAO. (Cited 12 July 2023). www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/FS

Source: The State of Food Security and Nutrition
in the World 2023 (fao.org)



Source: The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023 (fao.org)

FIGURE 11 MOST OF THE PEOPLE UNABLE TO AFFORD A HEALTHY DIET IN 2021 LIVED IN SOUTHERN ASIA, AND IN EASTERN AND WESTERN AFRICA

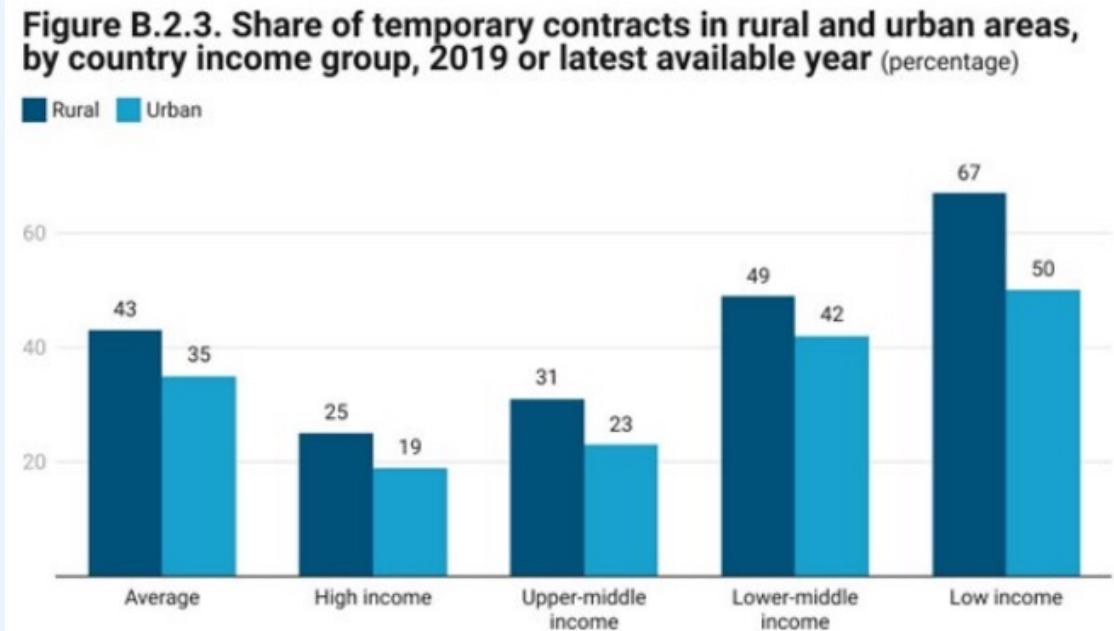


SOURCE: FAO. 2023. FAOSTAT: Cost and Affordability of a Healthy Diet (CoAHD). In: FAO. [Cited 12 July 2023]. www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/CAHD

Agricultural workers among the most vulnerable

- **Rural workers are paid 24% less** than urban ones.
- 94% of the agricultural workers in informal employment; many people in rural areas **dependent on subsistence agriculture**.
- In 2023, a third of the employed population in sub-Saharan Africa **living in extreme poverty**, and 37% in South Asia and 8% in Latin America and Caribbean living below the moderate poverty threshold.
- **70% of children in child labour** in agriculture.
- **Time-related underemployment, informality/vulnerable employment and missing jobs** affect disproportionately rural youth.

► Figure B.2.3. Share of temporary contracts in rural and urban areas, by country income group, 2019 or latest available year (percentage)

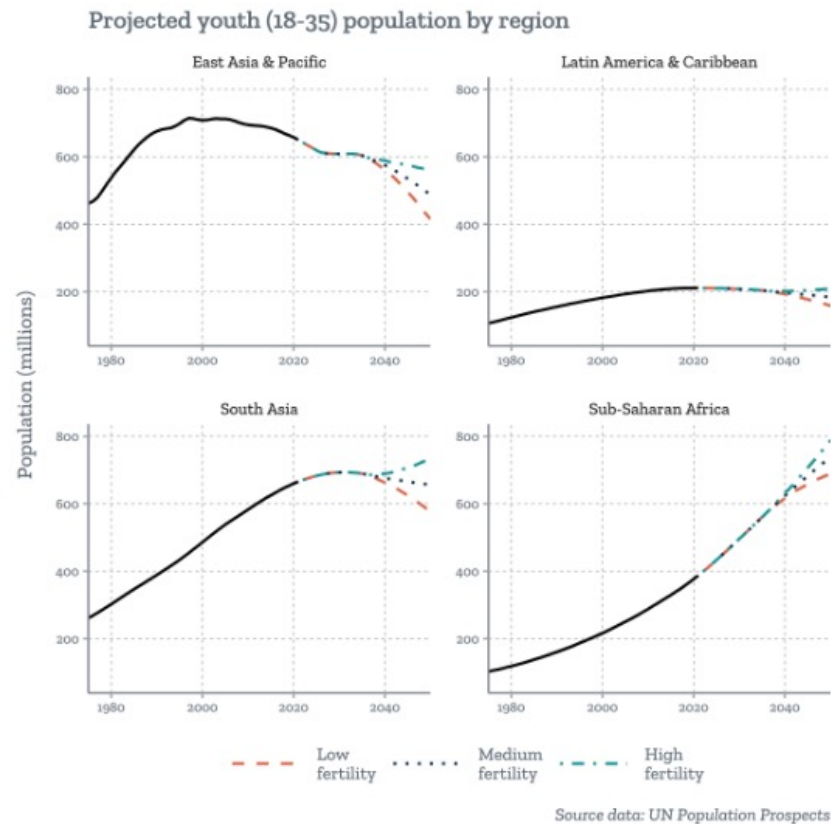


Source: Analysis based on ILO Harmonized Microdata collection (ILOSTAT), 2019 or latest available year, and drawing on a subsample of 34 countries with information on temporary contracts. See table A1 in the appendix for more details.

Source: <https://www.ilo.org/publications/employment-and-wage-disparities-between-rural-and-urban-areas>

Can the youth *transform* agrifood systems? (1/2)

- They certainly have a huge role to play.... **Why?**



Source: [Foresight4food](#)

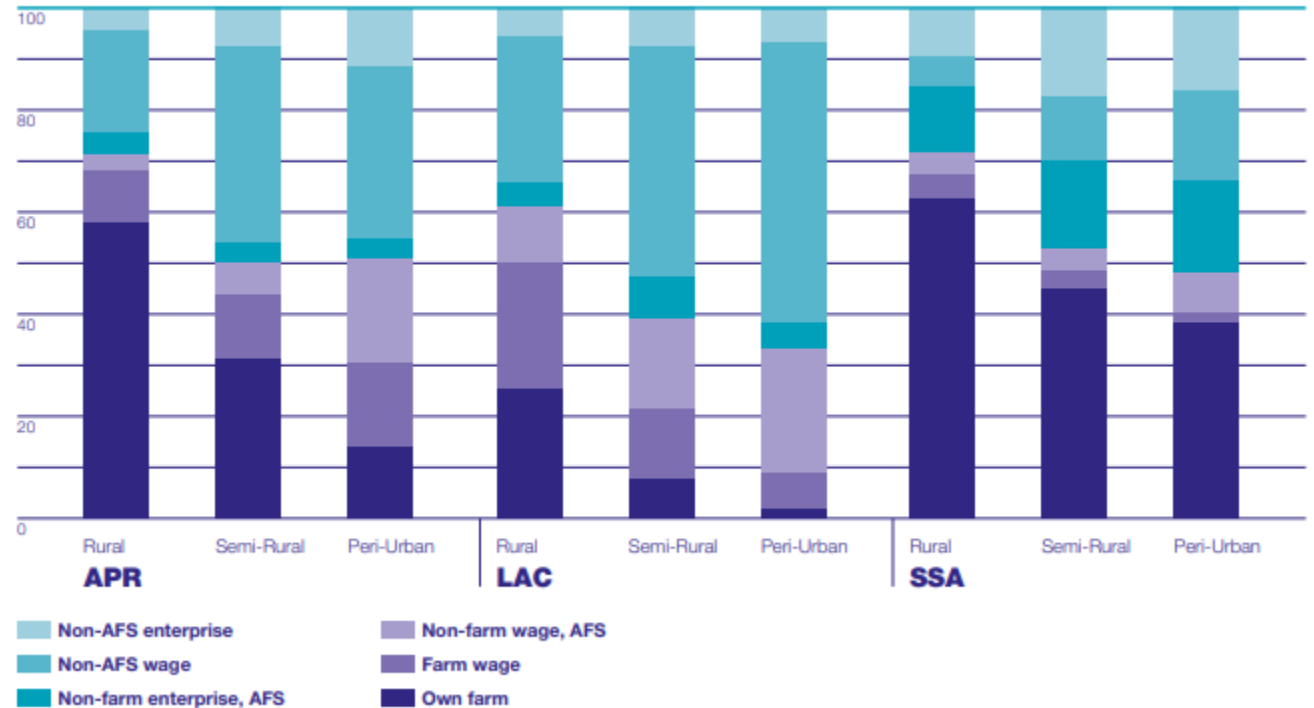
- **Given their sheer numbers....** Globally, youth (15-24) have reached 1.2 billion; 15% of population and 47% of the working age population (UNDESA, 2022)
- Approximately 85 % live in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, primarily in rural areas.
- **Because the agricultural population is ageing, so for the own sustainability of agricultural systems...**
- In the EU, the proportion of farm managers <40 is low across countries (11% in 2016 in the EU) and declining; 1/3 of farm managers are 65+.
- Globally the data is more nuanced, not “60” but 50 for household heads, and 41 for all individuals when considering only those spending >50% of their time (IFAD, 2019).

Can the youth *transform* agrifood systems? (2/2)

- **Because they are already at the forefront!** Agriculture is an important income source for rural youth.
- **Because of their energy, openness to change and innovation potential....**
- While evidence is limited on the often-assumed role of youth as innovators and entrepreneurs (HLPE, 2021), they are **digital natives** and in multiple contexts demonstrating their capacity to think differently – see the Youth Climate Movement. **Youth, as adults, *can* spur innovation if supported accordingly.**

FIGURE 9.6 Rural youth spend 50 per cent or more of all their working time on farming

Share of total rural youth FTE in each activity along the rural-urban gradient, by region



Source: Authors' calculations based on 12 socio-economic household surveys in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa.

Source: IFAD. 2019. [Creating opportunities for rural youth. 2019 Rural Development Report.](#)



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The unjust climate

Measuring the impacts of climate change
on rural poor, women and youth



Source: FAO. 2024. [The unjust climate – Measuring the impacts of climate change on rural poor, women and youth.](#)

Findings

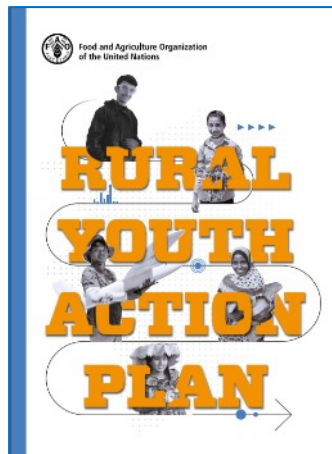
- Young rural households are generally better able to adapt to climate stressors than older households.
- Due to extreme weather events, young households lose on-farm income relative to older households (generally lower climate-adaptive capacity) but **compensate through off-farm income sources = climate resilience.**
- Young households are able take advantage of distress livestock sales following extreme weather events and increase their livestock holdings.

Policy priorities

- **Leveraging the contributions of youth to rural off-farm economies** should be a priority in climate actions.
- **Agrifood enterprises** enable rural youth and other people to diversify their income sources and reduce their dependency on climate-sensitive primary agricultural production.

The role of youth is increasingly recognized (1/3)

- Since 2021, **FAO's Rural Youth Action Plan (RYAP)** guides the implementation, monitoring and reporting of youth-specific and youth-sensitive activities
- In 2023, FAO Council approved plan to establish **Office of Youth and Women**



The RYAP is available online in English, French and Spanish at:

<https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc0583en/>



Pillar 1

Support youth participation in rural development, within the context of integrated Landscape and Territorial Approaches

Pillar2

Foster youth employment in an inclusive green economy within the 3 pillars of sustainability: social, environmental and economic

Pillar 3

Strengthen rural youth capacities for the use of innovative approaches and technologies in food and agriculture

Pillar 4

Promote rural services for youth and agripreneurs

Pillar 5

Building FAO institutional capacity to address rural youth areas of work

The role of youth is increasingly recognized (2/3)

Pillar 2

Support youth and ensure the generational sustainability of family farming

Ensure the generational sustainability of family farming through enabling youth accessing land, other natural resources, information, education, infrastructure and financial services, markets and policymaking processes related to farming. Benefiting from the intergenerational transfer of tangible and non-tangible farming assets, stimulate young farmers to interconnect traditional, local knowledge with innovative ideas to become agent of inclusive rural development.

Global Action Plan of the UNDAFF (FAO, IFAD)



United Nations
Decade of
**FAMILY
FARMING**
2019-2028

- Youth-related issues in food systems are **transversal**
- Acknowledging youth as **heterogenous group**
- Understanding youth in **relational terms**
- Considering **intersectionality**

The role of youth is increasingly recognized (3/3)



Young people are key to promoting sustainable food systems, ensuring renewal in the agricultural sector, and contributing to the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, particularly in developing countries, where a large proportion of the population are youth, including in rural areas. There is potential to improve livelihoods and expand equal opportunities of employment and entrepreneurship in agriculture¹ and food systems, which are a significant source of socio-economic advancement for youth in rural and urban areas. Yet agriculture and food systems often do not provide decent work and dignified livelihoods, nor promote a balance between the needs of different generations. Additionally, many

young women and men have limited access to, and control over land, natural resources, infrastructure, markets, insurance, finance, technology, knowledge and skills.

These challenges, along with limited participation in decision-making processes, poor remuneration, income uncertainty, conflicts, protracted crises, climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation, exposure to risks, difficult manual labour and low social recognition for agricultural and food workers, turn many youth away from agriculture and rural areas. As a result, many are forced or feel that they have no alternative than to migrate, either to urban areas or abroad. Actions are needed to make agriculture and food systems more attractive, profitable and rewarding for young people, and to increase

their capacity to generate decent work and dignified livelihoods, especially in the current and post COVID-19 context.

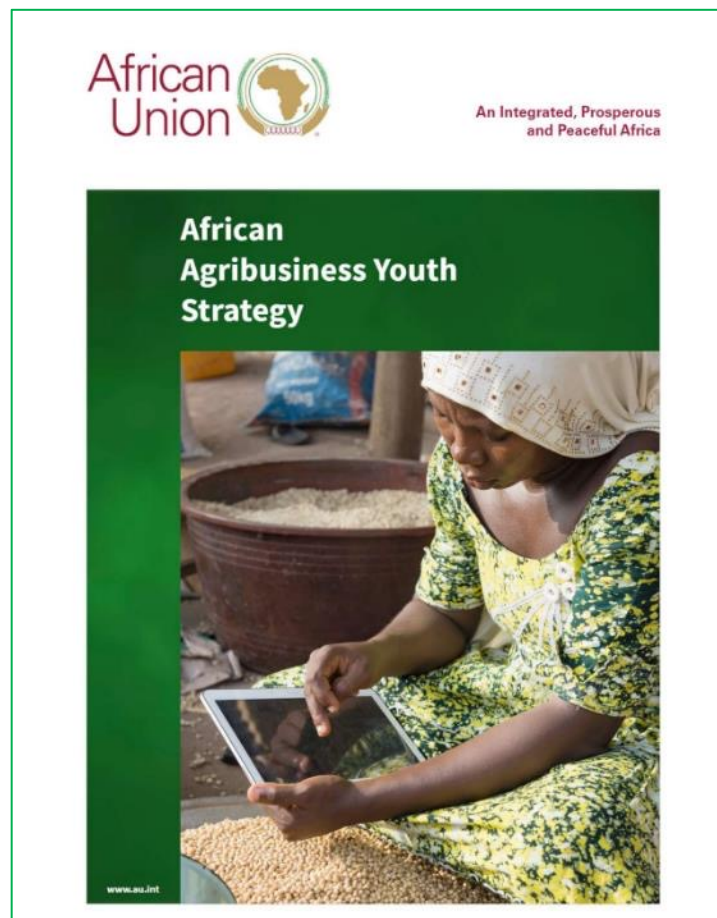
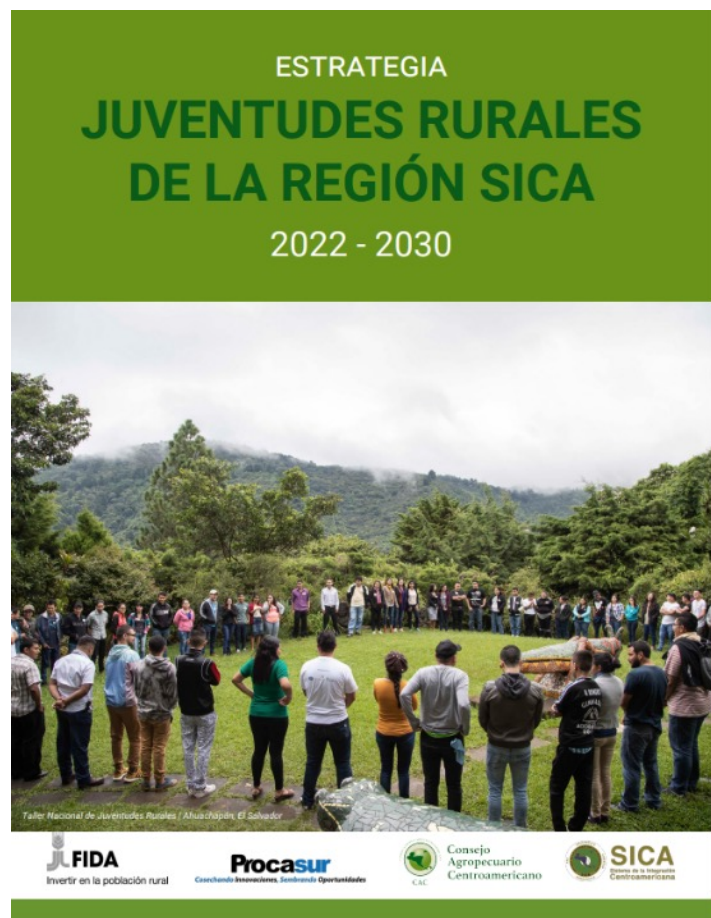
Investing in young people and strengthening their participation in decision-making processes, is key to contributing to food security and nutrition, poverty eradication, employment generation, sustainability and resilience of agriculture and food systems, including through their diversification, as needed, management of natural resources, preservation of Indigenous Peoples' and local knowledge systems, as well as peace and socio-political stability. Further, multiple interlinkages exist with gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, including through efforts to eliminate child labour in agriculture, harnessing rural-

Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition (CFS 50, 2022)

1. Provide an **enabling environment** for youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems
2. Secure **dignified, attractive and rewarding livelihoods** for youth
3. Increase equitable access of youth to **resources, infrastructure and markets**
4. Enhance equitable access to **knowledge, education and skills** of youth
5. Foster sustainable and inclusive **innovations** for youth

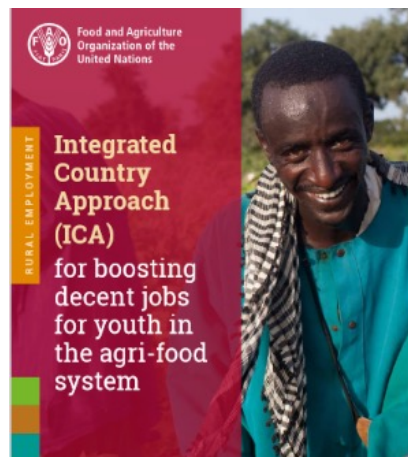
Source: CFS.2022. [Youth policy recommendations](#)

Similar regional commitments (some examples)



Multiple initiatives are in place

Phase IV (2024-June 2027) in Ecuador, Zambia, Viet Nam



Overview of ICA results

- At least 5 countries adopted **national strategies or programmes** for engaging youth in agrifood systems and corresponding youth-inclusive coordination mechanisms.
- At least **8 national or regional youth networks or organizations** established or strengthened and maintain an active agency after the end of the programme.
- Multiple **youth-centered approaches tested** for training, incubation, and access to finance, including in partnership with cooperatives and youth-led cooperatives or organizations (Guatemala).
- About **4000 young agripreneurs or cooperative members (41% women) supported** in accessing training, finance, markets, and mentorship. Additionally, 14000 beneficiaries reached through awareness raising activities or digital inclusion.
- **Package of resources developed**, like the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Guidelines, the Guidelines to conduct youth-sensitive value chain analyses, Methodological notes to assess youth financial and digital inclusion, Youth Agripreneurship online courses, Youth-targeted trainings on Understanding the Policy Cycle.

Conclusions

- **Yes, agrifood systems need the youth!**
- **But overall employment and livelihoods opportunities need to improve**
 - The opportunity landscape is severely depleted / structural inequalities (Sumberg J. et al. 2024)
 - Creating their own jobs, saving agriculture and guaranteeing food security for all cannot be ONLY on the youth shoulders
- **Amazing initiatives emerging, but more targeted youth support is needed**
 - Young people are three times as likely as adults to be unemployed and overrepresented among the most vulnerable categories of workers.
 - Across regions, young rural women are doubly vulnerable due to often intersecting discriminatory norms and challenges based on gender and age.
 - Rural youth face more severe challenges in accessing productive resources, advisory and financial services, markets and information; more systemic solutions needed.
 - Public participation is challenging for rural youth - **agricultural cooperatives** can play an instrumental role, still youth face more challenges than adult to effectively join them
- If we are serious about youth engagement, we need to **give youth a seat at the table**, and cooperatives can play a big role



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Thank you!

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