Most multinational banana plantations in Costa Rica are certified as compliant with social and environmental standards by private bodies. Yet, workers do not feel empowered to report violations and evidence of remediation is lacking. Violations to certain standards are widespread, and workers reported deterioration of working conditions and wages overtime, despite certification. The industry should seek alternative forms of social governance in supply chains that centre workers' experiences and entail robust, legally binding enforcement mechanisms.

E thical certification and product labelling schemes are commonplace in the banana industry. These schemes require multinational plantations and suppliers to comply with a range of labour and environmental standards to minimise harm to workers, compliance with which is monitored via workplace audits. However, the e ectiveness of these schemes been called into question for many years by workers, their representatives, activists and This brief draws on research conducted in 2022 in Costa Rica as part of a wider project exploring the role and experience of workers in agricultural private supply chain governance initiatives. In Limón and Sarapiquí regions of Costa Rica, 73 workers participated through interviews and focus groups, and 13 stakeholders representing trade unions, certifiers and state organisations. All workers worked on plantations either wholly owned by or the sole supplier to major multinational fruit companies, and all held at

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## ËÔËÔËË





- No workers reported positive experiences or knowledge of successful remediation following a reported abuse during an audit.
- Enforcement via decertification is rare, and isn't in the interests of certifiers, plantations, multinationals and supermarkets.
- Workers seek alternative channels to seek remediation, such as through trade unions, the courts and everyday acts of 'getting by' that would not be necessary if certification was delivering its stated aims.

- Due to supermarket price pressure, labour and workplace costs are squeezed.
- Standard violations were reportedly widespread, commonly including: Insu cient and damaged personal protective equipment, poor sanitation, agrochemical exposure, unsafe infrastructure and housing.
  - Sacking, blacklisting and discrimination towards trade union members.
  - Forced and unpaid overtime (on some plantations).
  - Sexual harassment and sacking of pregnant and older women; verbal abuse and intimidation.
- Workers unanimously reported deterioration in their wages and working conditions over the past 5-10 years, particularly:

Wage stagnation, coupled with a rising cost of living. Gross wages on average hover around minimum wage but net wages can fall below when accounting for deductions, and are around only half the <u>Global Living Wage Coalition</u>'s calculated living wage for the region. Workers reported struggling to make ends meet, no savings and indebtedness. Work intensification and rising productivity targets that create unsafe working environments. Growing precarity and use of short-term contracts.

Multinationals and supermarkets should exercise 'Shared Responsibility' to collectively engage in dialogue with workers and promote fair purchasing practices. Combining this with centralising workers' experience and participation will move towards more sustainable and e ective protection of banana workers through governance e orts.

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