

UK aid to protect high street supply chains

The UK Government will launch a new programme today (14 August) to help high street businesses, including Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Morrisons, Co-op and Waitrose, to strengthen their global supply chains by supporting workers in developing countries during the coronavirus pandemic.

The new funding announced by International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan includes investment from UK businesses to keep vulnerable workers in their supply chains in safe and secure employment.

The UK imports 20% of its food and drink from developing countries. The coronavirus pandemic has put many of these supply chains at risk as factories and farms worldwide have been forced to close temporarily. The new Vulnerable Supply Chains Facility will help to ensure the steady supply of products like vegetables, coffee and clothes to the UK high street.

The UK aid fund will partner up UK businesses including Morrisons, Tesco, Marks & Spencer and Primark with expert organisations such as CARE UK, the Fairtrade Foundation and the Ethical Trading Initiative to improve working conditions and support greater access to healthcare and health information for workers in some of the world's poorest countries. This will help make workplaces safer, meaning employees can return to work and supply chains can keep moving and become more resilient.

The facility, made up of £4.85 million UK aid and £2 million from businesses, will focus primarily on supply chains and workers in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda and Ghana. These countries provide huge proportions of the world's food, flowers and clothes. Ghana alone produces a quarter of the world's cocoa and Bangladesh is the world's second largest garment exporter.

Marks & Spencer and CARE will work together to improve health services for 80,000 factory workers in Bangladesh who keep M&S stores stocked with clothes. The programme will strengthen community health care systems and deliver targeted health messaging in factories to help employees keep themselves and their families safe. This is expected to have knock-on benefits for a further 300,000 people in Bangladesh's poorest communities.

Disruptions to flights during the pandemic have affected UK imports of flowers from Kenya. The new scheme will help suppliers to ship flowers to the UK instead, protecting the livelihoods of farmers in Kenya and helping keep British florists stocked.

International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

We want to ensure people in Britain can continue to buy affordable, high quality goods from around the world.

This new fund will strengthen vital supply chains for UK consumers, while supporting some of the most vulnerable workers in developing countries. It will make a real difference to people in the UK and abroad.

The new facility will fund programmes to improve coronavirus preparedness in workplaces, help farmers diversify the crops they produce to meet demand, and provide support so farms and factories can put processes in place to keep production going and make sure help is getting to the most vulnerable workers.

As part of the scheme, the Ethical Trading Initiative will improve workplace health and safety for vegetable, coffee and flower suppliers to UK brands such as Sainsbury's, Co-op, Waitrose and Tesco. It is estimated that 10,000 workers in African countries, mainly women, will benefit from safer working environments.

One company affected by the pandemic is Kakuzi, a Kenyan company which sells avocados to several UK supermarkets. With the help of the Ethical Trading Initiative, it has already implemented handwashing stations at packing plant entrances as well as introducing regular temperature checks for its staff – helping to keep workers healthy and maintain this supply chain. The Vulnerable Supply Chains Facility will support other businesses to implement similar measures.

Overall, more than 200,000 workers in agriculture and nearly 120,000 garment workers are expected to benefit from the facility. The improvements to these people's working lives will indirectly benefit a further 650,000 people, including workers' families and children, taking the total number of people in developing countries helped by the scheme to nearly 1 million (970,000).

Peter McAllister, Executive Director at Ethical Trading Initiative:

ETI welcomes the active role DFID is playing in supporting vulnerable workers in global supply chains. The East African agricultural workers who supply so much of our food and flowers have been hit hard by COVID-19, and DFID's support for this intervention will help protect thousands of jobs, and protect workers from infection as the regional economy begins to recover.

Judith Batchelar, Director of Sainsbury's Brand, said:

We are proud to support DFID's Vulnerable Supply Chains Facility along with the Ethical Trading Initiative, dedicated to improving occupational safety and health standards for many of our suppliers in East Africa. As a responsible retailer, this work further demonstrates our commitment to trading ethically and making a positive difference to the communities we source from.

Fiona Sadler, Head of Ethical Trading for M&S said:

At M&S we have a robust approach to ethical fashion – we know we're only as strong as the communities where we operate and we're committed to helping improve the lives of workers in our supply chain through collaborative initiatives.

We're proud to be partnering again with DFID and CARE to strengthen healthcare systems and services in our factories in Bangladesh and the wider community.

Laura Hawkesford, Head of Private Sector for CARE UK said:

Businesses have an important role to play to ensure people within their operations and value chains are safe, treated with dignity and can prosper. Coronavirus poses a critical threat to Bangladesh garment workers, with hundreds of thousands of people in dense areas at risk.

We are excited to continue to work with Marks and Spencer in partnership with DFID to ensure workers and communities have access to relevant information, facilities and services to reduce the spread of coronavirus.

Other partners working with the fund include: Arco, Dimensions, Primark, Impactt, Monsoon and VF Corporation, GoodWeave International, Awaj Foundation, FNET, MM Flowers, Women Working Worldwide, Coventry University, Flamingo, Minor, Weir & Willis, Union Roasted and Mondelez International.

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