

STUDY ON THE EVOLUTION OF FAIR TRADE AND ITS ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

One of the great current challenges at the global level is represented by finding sustainable production systems that ensure both social, economic and environmental sustainability, while at the same time pursuing the optimal provision of production, trade or consumption indicators. Globalization is the one that affected those producers who, not having access to alternative markets, had to sell their goods at much lower prices, thus making the very principles of equity and efficiency affected. The solution was represented by the practice of fair trade and the application of sustainable supply systems, which represent ways to solve these shortcomings. This paper analyzes the situation of fair trade worldwide and its evolution for the period 2012-2020. The research methodology assumed the collection of data, their processing and analysis with the help of some statistical indicators such as: the number of Fairtrade organizations, the number of Fairtrade farmers, the number of workers in Fairtrade organizations, the proportion of women involved in Fairtrade activities, the areas intended for obtaining Fairtrade productions, Fairtrade productions, premiums granted in Fairtrade. The data highlighted the fact that worldwide, during the analyzed period, there was a continuous increase in fair trade, the increase being over 65% in terms of the number of producer organizations. The number of farmers reached over 1.77 million in 2020, this being the result of understanding the role of affiliation to this form of trade. The largest number of producers participating in fair trade are producers of coffee, tea or cocoa, their share being, in the analyzed period, between 86-92%. The paper highlights the fact that the emergence and development of fair trade represented a way of supporting farmers and agricultural workers in developing countries, this can be done both by the political environment, but also by society. Although the application of these measures has contributed to the increase in the standard of living, to the respect of the rights of farmers and workers, equally with the principles of sustainable development, the weight of fair trade in all trade, proves the fact that it is still carried out on a small scale, as there is a need for the development yes, with the aim of reducing global poverty..

Key words: fair trade, sustainability, profitability, globalization

INTRODUCTION

The concept of fair trade, although it started to be used at the end of the 50s, has its origin in a novel belonging to Max Havelaar, which is the pseudonym under which Eduard Douwes Dekker publishes, and which had as its subject the fight over a government system from Java, a Dutch colony, which exploited the work of the natives [1]. More than a hundred years ago, a priest from Mexico, who belonged to the Dutch church, was the one who laid the foundations for labeling the coffee obtained by small farmers, with the aim

of being differentiated from the rest of the coffee varieties, thus supporting their work. In Great Britain, in 1881, through various economic-financial mechanisms, an attempt was made to limit the import of products that were unfairly competing with domestic products, thus creating a fair trade movement. As an official form of organization and recognition, fair trade appeared at the end of the 1940s in America, where an organization called "Ten Thousand Villages" hired labor from Puerto Rico, with the aim of protecting the disadvantaged population [2]. It was also then that the movement to encourage trade in

goods produced by poor communities began, and the first fair trade store thus appeared in 1958.

In Europe, there were different initiatives: in the 50s, in Great Britain, the Oxfam store started selling handicrafts that were created by Chinese refugees, and in 1964 the first organization dealing with fair trade was founded [17].

In 1988, in the Netherlands, the "fair trade Max Havelaar" label was created for products that are sold only in the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Switzerland.

In 1997, an international labeling association called Fairtrade Labeling International was founded, which still deals with establishing international standards for fair trade. The association certifies production processes and audits commercial agreements [22]. Also, the International Fair Trade Organization monitors this form of trade in order to strengthen its credibility, but also to ensure quality management, developing a new label, a WFTO Logo, which is used by those organizations that have a commitment of 100% compared to fair trade in their business activities.

The purpose of creating the fair trade movement was to reduce poverty in countries from Africa, Latin America and Asia for farmers disadvantaged by globalization, for whom it thus created access to developed markets and the opportunity to receive fair prices, such as those existing on the world market, which would allow them to cover production costs, obtain profit and ensure decent working and living conditions [8, 9, 11, 15]. By means of "fair trade" both food products (which are produced only in poor areas of the world) and non-food products (from cotton to clothes and gold) are sold and represent the source of real industries in developed countries.

Therefore, the "fair trade" movement appeared as an alternative to transnational corporations that exploited certain countries or certain producers or excluded them from commercial organizations [10, 12]. In this way, the movement allowed farmers to associate, to improve their way of acting and ethical behavior, to respect the rights of the

community, but at the same time to ensure a partnership with consumers, who thus have the opportunity to pay the right price and to participate in ensuring a decent life for producers and workers, under the conditions that they, together, receive approximately 20% of the profit obtained, the rest going to the intermediary (transporters, importers, traders) [13, 18, 21].

Fair trade is thus a solution to eliminate barriers and deficiencies related to the way goods and services are sold, human rights, ethical conduct, fair wages, etc. aspects that are established through the principles of fair trade, number 10 [20].

These principles refer to: offering opportunities for these disadvantaged producers both from the point of view of production, as well as marketing and association; to ensure transparency, but also responsibility; to ensure fair trade systems; to ensure fair wages; to combat the involvement of children in forced labor; to non-discrimination, to gender equality; to ensure decent working conditions; to the promotion of fair trade; to ensure the sustainability of the environment [2].

The European Union, the World Trade Organization, various non-profit organizations support the "fair trade" policy, encouraging their integration into the world economy. Over time, there have been various actions aimed at raising awareness of public opinion regarding the purchase of products bearing the "fair trade" label, as a form of supporting farmers and eliminating intermediaries. At the same time, the development of rural areas, interconnected with the agricultural and commercial sector, was desired. The trade movement concerned and continues to concern both political and social actors, but also researchers, who want to find the best solutions to support and promote fair trade [16].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the present work, we analyzed the evolution of fair trade in the period 2015-2020. For the characterization of fair trade, the indicators collected, analyzed and

interpreted were: the number of Fairtrade organizations, in total and by region; the number of Fairtrade farmers, in total and by region; the number of workers in Fairtrade organizations, in total and by region; the share of women involved in Fairtrade activities; surfaces intended for obtaining Fairtrade productions; Fairtrade products obtained; premiums granted in Fairtrade, in total and product categories. In the realization of this work, statistical data were used regarding fair trade carried out worldwide, which were processed, analyzed and interpreted, thus resulting in conclusions regarding the fair trade situation from 2015-2020.

The statistical information was analyzed dynamically, using indicators with a fixed base and with a chain base:

$$I_{t/t'}^y = \frac{y_t}{y_{t'}} \times 100 \quad \dots\dots\dots(1) [19]$$

$$I_{t/t'}^y = \frac{y_t}{y_{t-1}} \times 100 \dots\dots\dots(2)$$

where:

y - the level of the analyzed phenomenon

t, t', t-1 - the moments of time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data published in the period 2014-2022 highlight the fact that the number of producer organizations belonging to fair trade increased continuously in the period 2012-2020.

The annual growth rates vary from 1.14% in 2015 compared to 2014, to 13.79% in 2016 compared to 2015.

However, in the analyzed period, the increase from 2020 compared to 2012 was 65.05%, which highlights the increased interest of producers in entering the fair trade system, due to the increase in consumer interest in the origin of the products and their production method [14], the involvement of non-profit organizations in supporting the "fair trade" movement, but also the policies to support this form of trade.

The dynamics of fair trade producer organizations is shown in Figure 1.

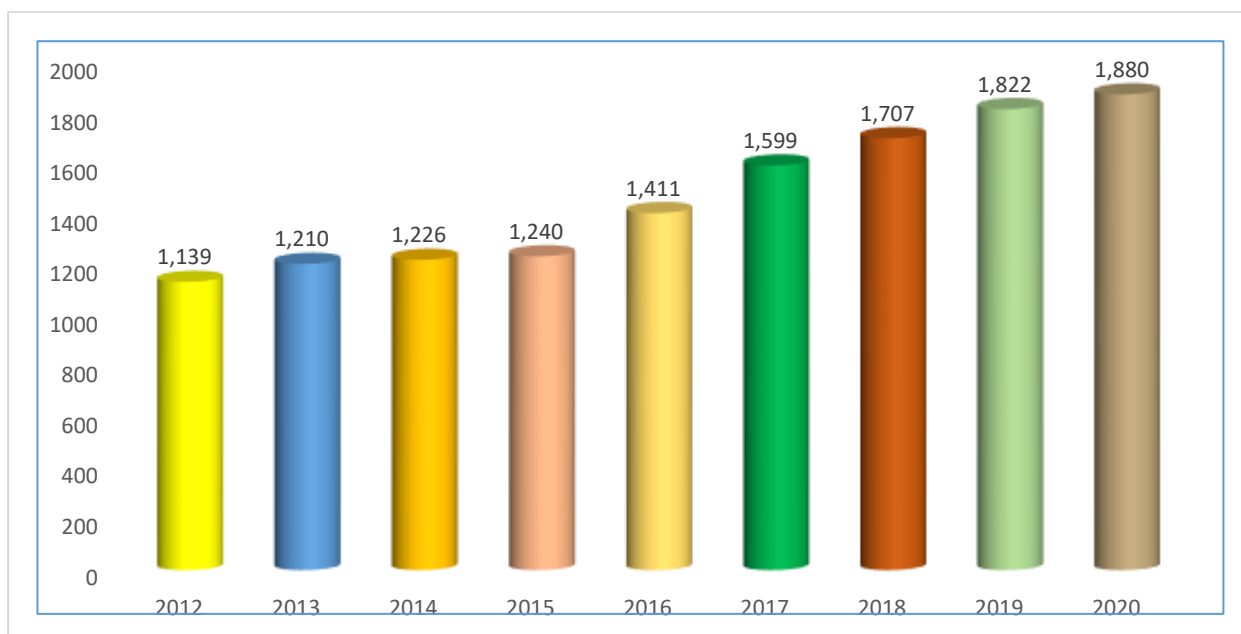


Fig. 1. The evolution of fair trade producer organizations
 Source: own processing based on the data from [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

Between 2012 and 2020, the number of organizations involved in fair trade in the Latin American and Caribbean region represented almost half of their total, in terms of the evolution of the number of

organizations on the first 2nd place is Asia and the Pacific, with an increase of almost 90%. The other 2 regions recorded increases of approximately 60%.

The number of countries where these organizations are located reached 75 in 2020, fluctuating from 71 to 75 in the analyzed period.

As for geographical distribution, the largest share of them is in Africa and the Middle

East, followed by those in Asia and the Pacific and then by those in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Figure 2 presents the dynamics of fair trade producer organizations by region.

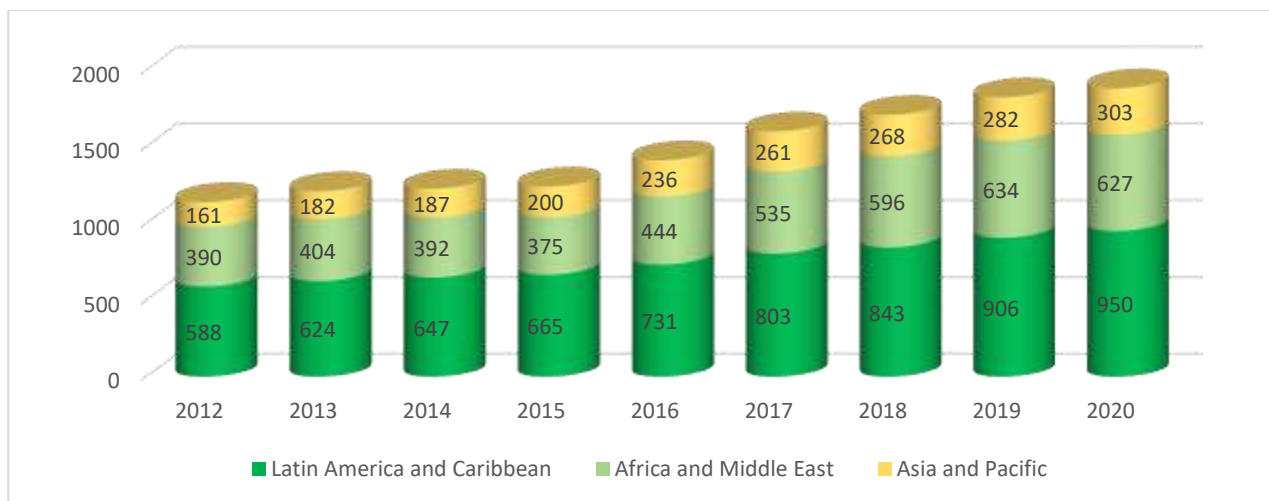


Fig. 2. The evolution of fair trade producer organizations, depending on the region

Source: own processing based on the data from [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

In the period 2012-2020, the number of farmers in the analyzed areas increased constantly from 1.22 million in 2012, to 1.77 million in 2020, while in 2013 approximately 211,000 workers were involved in these activities, the increase compared to the previous year being approximately 26%.

Starting with 2017, the number of workers started to decrease (from 193,000 workers in 2017 to almost 179,000 workers in 2020).

An analysis of producers by region highlights the fact that almost two-thirds of them come from Africa and the Middle East.

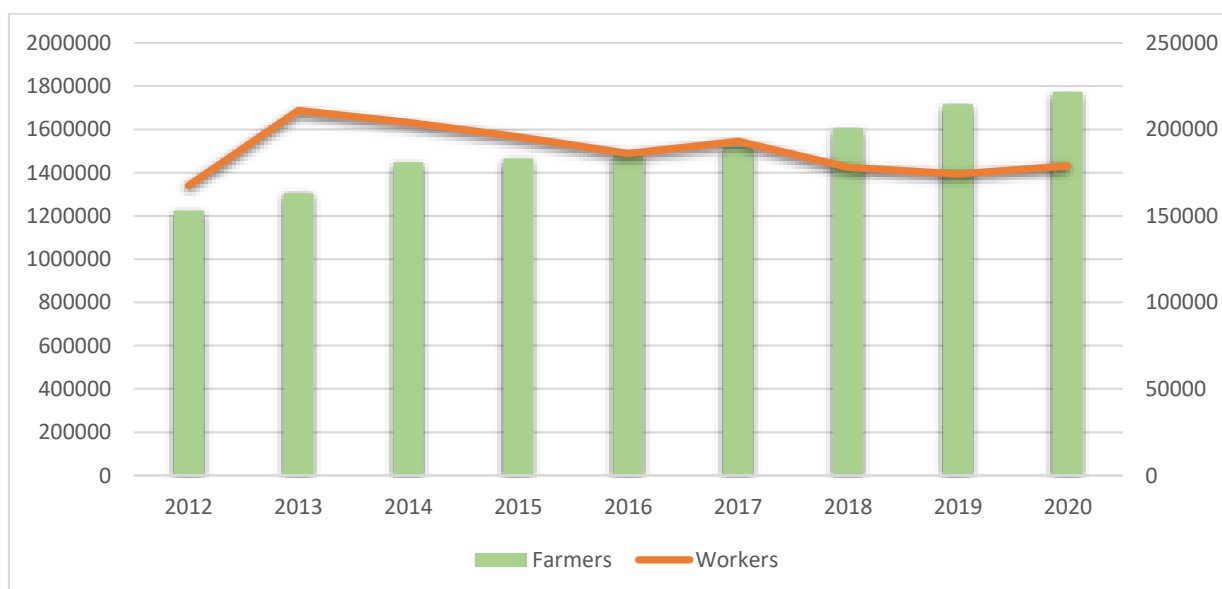


Fig. 3. The evolution of the number of farmers and workers involved in fair trade

Source: own processing based on the data from [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

Another peculiarity is the fact that the highest growth rate of the number of producers was recorded in this region.

Increases were also recorded at the level of other regions. It was found that the need for labor and workers differs from one region to another, being correlated with the level of development of fair trade and the specialization of farms.

The most important increase was recorded in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the number of workers almost doubled.

In the Asia and Pacific region, the number of workers decreased by a third.

The dynamics of the number of farmers and workers involved in fair trade is shown in Figure 3.

It is found that there is an inversely proportional relationship between the large number of accredited farms and the number of fairtrade workers who, although they are increasing, continue to produce without being properly remunerated due to the fact that they come from low and medium income countries, where both the remuneration of the workforce and the profit obtained by the farmer continues to represent a small share of the final price of the traded goods.

Table 1. The evolution of the number of farmers, depending on the specialization of production

Culture	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Coffee	795,457	762,392	758,474	795,023	838,116
Tea	259,000	305,469	328,273	319,558	335,274
Cocoa	223,579	263,825	322,363	415,971	440,226
Bananas	10,707	10,385	11,463	11,465	10,376
Cane Sugar	54,063	54,960	55,227	37,075	36,731
Seed Cotton	46,305	45,153	45,576	43,282	44,480
Other Products	86,957	77,926	83,634	93,871	67,165

Source: own processing based on the data from [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

Worldwide, there are farms specialized in the production of three categories of products that sum up the largest share of workers, these being coffee, tea and cocoa (approximately 90%).

It is obvious that there is a direct relationship between the number of producers involved in

fair trade and the market demand for these product categories.

Table 2. The evolution of the number of workers, depending on the specialization of production

Culture	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Flowers and Plants	54,160	57,863	69,369	67,199	73,220
Tea	93,157	87,230	61,975	59,195	55,148
Bananas	11,337	14,639	16,705	23,508	26,106
Other Products	27,332	33,275	30,002	24,234	24,321
Coffee	0	0	0	0	0
Cocoa	0	0	0	0	0
Cane Sugar	0	0	0	0	0
Seed Cotton	0	0	0	0	0

Source: own processing based on the data from [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

There is also a direct correlation between the category of consumers and the price they are willing to pay for these products. This makes the representation of farmers stronger among the organizations, and the support given to them is significant in relation to that given to other categories of crops and products.

It is thus established that in relation to the country of origin, in relation to the categories of crops belonging to the respective countries, those changes take place in terms of both the number of workers and farmers involved in forms of fair trade.

Regarding the number of workers on Fairtrade farms, it is noted that there are categories such as farms producing coffee, cocoa, cane sugar, seed cotton, where the activities are performed only by farmers, without workers.

The majority of workers carry out activities in farms producing tea (50% in 2016 and 31% in 2020), flowers and plants (30% in 2016 and 41% in 2020) and banana (6% in 2016 and 15% in 2020).

One of the objectives of Fairtrade is to grant a fair salary for women who work in these fields.

Statistics show that the share of women who are members of producer organizations has doubled in Africa and the Middle East.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, during the analyzed period, there were decreases of 27%, and in Asia and the Pacific of 40%.

The number of women working in fair trade farms is inversely proportional to the number of women involved in trade organizations. As their degree of involvement in organizations increases, their rights begin to be recognized. In the period 2012-2020, the situation of the number of women who worked in farms practicing fair trade was as follows: an increase in their number for the Latin American and Caribbean regions and a

reduction close to half for the women employed in the Latin American and Caribbean region (Figure 4).

On the other hand, the principles of fair trade aim precisely to respect gender equality (ability to hire and pay, methods of dismissal, retirement, but also aspects related to age, race, ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation, but also right of association , organization or membership).

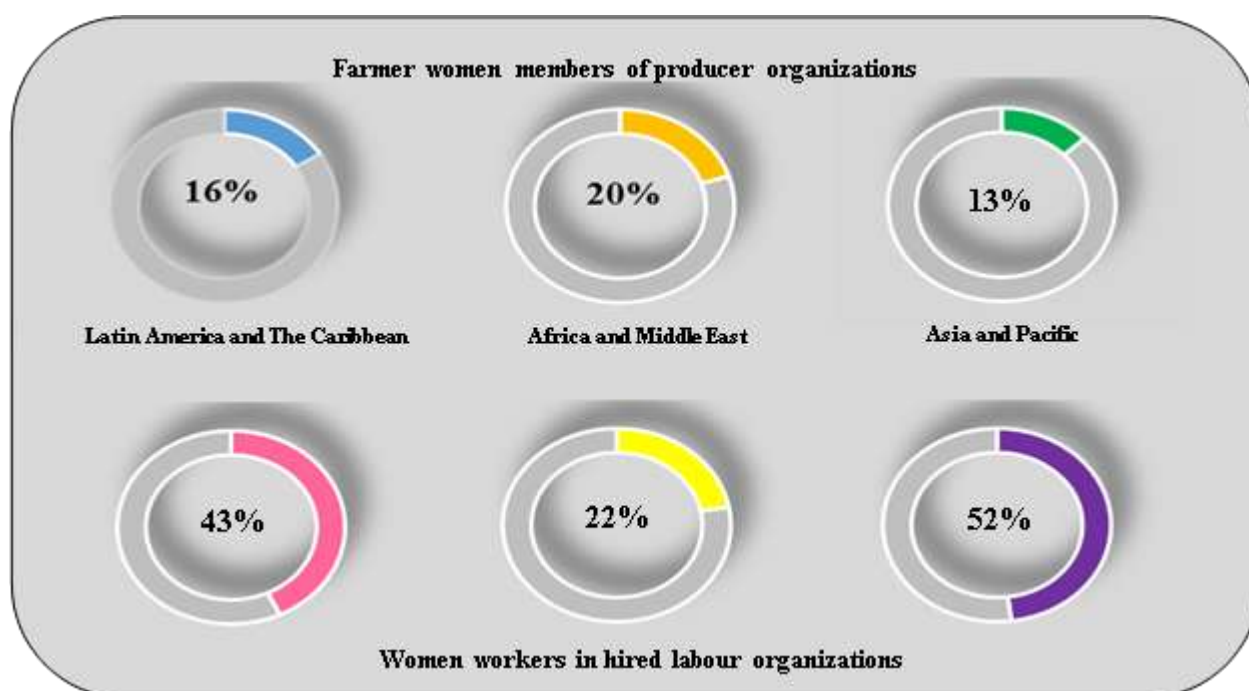


Fig. 4. Share of women involved in Fairtrade in 2020 (%)
 Source: own processing based on the data from [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

Table3. The evolution of surfaces in the period 2015-2020 (hectares)

Culture	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Coffee	1,046,813	938,158	961,774	1,372,820	1,127,766
Cocoa	722,060	1,170,612	1,178,644	1,001,002	1,416,653
Cane Sugar	152,991	146,388	149,738	124,030	104,868
Tea	126,259	135,155	136,453	113,382	124,954
Fresh fruit	62,609	33,614	30,997	30,812	30,931
Seed Cotton	49,985	62,899	55,516	48,763	62,041
Bananas	36,487	38,316	41,143	46,887	48,583
Rice	28,518	33,133	24,102	21,947	20,982
Wine grapes	12,435	12,954	12,302	14,054	12,865
Flowers and Plants	2,540	2,698	2,824	2,808	3,355
Dried fruit	2,354	3,244	2,689	630	224

Source: own processing based on the data from [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

Regarding the areas occupied by the cultures integrated in the Fairtrade system, the

statistical data highlight the fact that the coffee, cocoa, cane sugar and tea cultures are

on the first 4 places. The areas occupied by coffee crops were always in the first place, but the years 2019 and 2020 had the maximum of the analyzed period. This was due to the method of certification of the producers, but also to the changes in the structure in terms of production. The mentioned measures also influenced the cocoa crop, which occupied the largest area in 2020, growing from one year to the next, during the analyzed period. The crops where the cultivated areas decreased, in the period 2012-2020, were cane sugar, rice, dried fruit. The areas occupied by tea and wine grapes were relatively constant, while the crops for which the cultivated areas increased were bananas and flowers and plants (Table 3).

The productions obtained from the main Fairtrade crops were in turn influenced by the cultivated areas, thus showing an increase in the total production for coffee (by 48% in 2020 compared to 2015), cocoa (116%), banana (49%), flowers and plants (31%), fresh fruit (254%), wine grapes (29%), nuts (124%) and honey (33%). The crops for which the production in the period 2014-2020 decreased, as a result of the correlation with the occupied surfaces, were tea (25%), sugar cane (47%), seed cotton (39%, after a decrease of 57% in

2017), rice (20%). The most important decreases were recorded for dried fruit (92%) and fruit juice (78%). What influences the volume of production, in addition to climatic and pedological conditions, are the policies to support these cultures (Table 4).

The revenues obtained by the producers who are part of the fair trade system are supplemented by applying a fair trade premium, the condition being compliance with the rules for the development of this form of trade, according to which the cultivated areas are sized. In 2020, the first generated by the productions obtained in the Fairtrade system reached up to 150 million Euros, being distributed as follows: 54% coffee, 19% bananas and cocoa, 4% sugar cane and flowers and plants, 2% tea and 1% seed cotton, their weights being close to those of the premiums granted in 2015 (47% for coffee, 18% for banana, 16% for cocoa, 6% for flowers and plants, 4% for tea and 1% for cotton). The use of these funds is decided by farmers and workers, they are intended both for the development of their own farms by making investments, obtaining certifications, but also to support the community through infrastructure or various social services.

Table 4. Evolution of Fairtrade production (thousands of tons)

Culture	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Coffee	153.31	179.72	185.78	214.43	260.97	233.50	226.34
Tea	11.05	11.53	12.12	10.73	9.84	8.04	8.34
Cocoa	81.19	102.18	136.54	214.43	207.65	218.16	175.41
Bananas	495.12	552.84	579.08	641.92	686.93	747.43	738.87
Cane Sugar	227.56	155.33	166.56	207.44	199.21	175.86	120.23
Seed Cotton	19.35	18.41	10.38	8.31	10.19	10.27	11.76
Flowers and Plants	720,657.58	786,704.90	829,101.64	834,750.34	825,359.87	933,782.93	943,858.88
Dried fruit	2.21	1.88	0.83	1.19	0.51	0.33	0.17
Fresh fruit	32.06	33.95	53.53	50.99	53.58	117.74	113.55
Fruit juice	6.83	7.01	21.31	20.37	19.732	3.38	1.53
Wine grapes	35.04	29.41	37.16	46.70	49.60	56.89	45.27
Rice	12.02	9.94	10.38	11.04	11.94	9.66	9.56
Nuts	6.28	3.17	3.84	9.87	12.46	13.14	14.08
Honey	3.03	3.25	3.26	3.13	3.57	4.58	4.02

Source: own processing based on the data from [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

From the point of view of the amounts granted as premiums in 2020 compared to 2015, from the analysis of the statistical data it appears that the biggest increases were recorded for nuts (+331), fresh fruits (+158%), seed cotton (+ 101%), cocoa (+51%), bananas (26%), wine grapes (+35%), coffee (+16%) or flowers and plants (+6%). These increases are correlated both with the cultivated areas, but also with the productions obtained.

The crops where there were decreases in premiums are those where there were also decreases in production: fruit juice (-88%); dried fruit (-83%); cane jucar (-30%); rice (-69%); tea (-67%).

However, it should be emphasized that although in 2020, more than 5.8 billion fair trade products were sold worldwide, Fairtrade trade held a market share of only 1.8% of the global market.

This proves that this area of fair trade can still be improved. As the principles of fair trade have been improved and supplemented over time, support decisions consisting in the application of economic or social measures can be reconsidered. Likewise, the promotion of fair trade among consumers can be expanded. Numerous non-profit organizations do this, but the examples of good practices can be multiplied and applied not only to products originating from the countries of the three established regions, but also to other products from countries that face a reduced support for traditional products that often represent a source of considerable income for producers.

CONCLUSIONS

Fair trade appeared as a way of supporting farmers, farmers and workers in developing countries, who without real access to a fair market could not and still cannot secure the resources necessary for a decent living.

In this way, the necessary conditions for obtaining fair prices, income and economic self-sufficiency were created, they were allowed to participate in the decision-making processes, a fair remuneration was ensured, and an equal remuneration for women and

men for the same work performed, ensuring the well-being, security, right to education and play of children, ensuring adequate working conditions for all persons involved in production activities, the cultural identity of the respective areas was promoted, but also the use of sustainable production technologies.

In 2020, the number of farmers involved in fair trade approached 1.8 million, which proves its importance.

At the same time, the number of farmers who joined and signed up in different forms of organization increased, this being also encouraged by the granting of premiums for the crops obtained, the level of the premiums which influenced the analyzed period and the structure of the crops.

As a result of the fact that participating in fair trade involves the payment of taxes which for many of the farmers are not small, they cannot certify, which makes fair trade seem prohibitive, violating the very principles that make this trade "fair".

Critics of fair trade draw attention to the fact that sometimes, the wages obtained by workers from fair trade can be lower than those from workers from classic trade, due to the attempt to increase profit or cover additional costs, which again contravenes the principles of trade fair. They claim that this form of trade largely supports only the producers, and less so the workers, being sometimes just a marketing action, to increase the visibility of certain categories of producers, who do not always respect the ethical principles.

On the other hand, the products with the fair trade logo are addressed to that category of buyers who can purchase them.

The same critics consider, when it comes to consumers, that fair trade is nothing but a form of flattery to them, by the fact that it offers its help in supporting producers from poor countries.

The analyzed data showed that although the issue of fair trade is an important one, which was intended to ensure "equity", although it has registered more and more participants and applies to different categories of food and non-food goods, it still has a small market

share, which proves the necessity of its support, both at the political level, as well as at the economic and social level.

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