

# The COFFEE Project

Cooperation On Fair, Free,  
Equitable Employment



## BACKGROUND

The COFFEE Project is a four-year initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (USDOL-ILAB). The project aims to reduce the risk of labor issues in coffee supply chains by working with the private sector and other relevant actors. Activities include the development of a toolkit to improve labor conditions, capacity building, and pilot projects in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. Pilot projects were developed through research and stakeholder consultation and involve the piloting of tools and cost-effective, sustainable, scalable approaches to reducing labor risks.

Extensive Verité research has found that widespread use of labor brokers in the Brazilian coffee sector increases the risk of labor exploitation. Producers often turn to recruiters when there is an urgent need for workers, especially during the labor-intensive harvest season. While brokers can play an important role by ensuring a constant supply of labor, that dynamic can put workers at risk and create legal and reputational issues for the private sector. Financial incentivizes to recruit as much as possible can lead to unethical recruitment practices, such as deception about working conditions, retention of identity documents, harassment, charging of workers for recruitment fees, and illegal deductions from workers' pay. This pilot project has been created to respond to these challenges. Scan the QR code to learn more about the COFFEE Project.



## Our Partnership Model

*With support from prominent coffee companies that collectively purchase over 60 percent of the world's coffee, including four of the top five roasters, the COFFEE Project serves as a hub for innovation, dialogue, and raising the bar on labor conditions.*

As part of the COFFEE Project, Verité is piloting a project in Brazil to better understand and respond to the issues identified in recruitment and labor sourcing practices in the Brazilian coffee sector.

One of the objectives of this pilot project is to increase understanding of recruitment dynamics and related risks in the Brazilian coffee sector. Verité carried out research on this issue to strengthen stakeholders' ability to uncover and target root causes. This included research on labor migration and recruitment networks, particularly through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as surveying of producers to better understand recruitment practices and existing measures to screen and monitor labor brokers.

In conjunction with research efforts, Verité is providing producers, traders, and roasters with tools and trainings to help identify and reduce recruitment-related risks. Training curriculum covers laws, international standards, and trends related to forced labor, human trafficking, child labor, and recruitment, along with good practices in the identification, remediation, and prevention of labor risks, including management systems and due diligence approaches.

Project activities also includes the development and piloting of recruitment-related tools and innovative responsible recruitment approaches. Verité will provide participating coffee farms that demonstrate the desire and capacity to be leaders in this realm with free training and hands-on guidance and consulting. These will include online and in-person trainings, field testing recruitment-related tools on the farm level, and co-designing and piloting ethical recruitment approaches that are mutually beneficial for workers and coffee farmers alike.

## PILOT PROJECT

**The COFFEE Project is based on a collaborative, multistakeholder approach.  
For more information or to learn how to become a project partner, contact:**

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