

# COFFEE Project

Cooperation On Fair, Free, Equitable Employment

## Worker Interview Questions

TOOL 26 of 28

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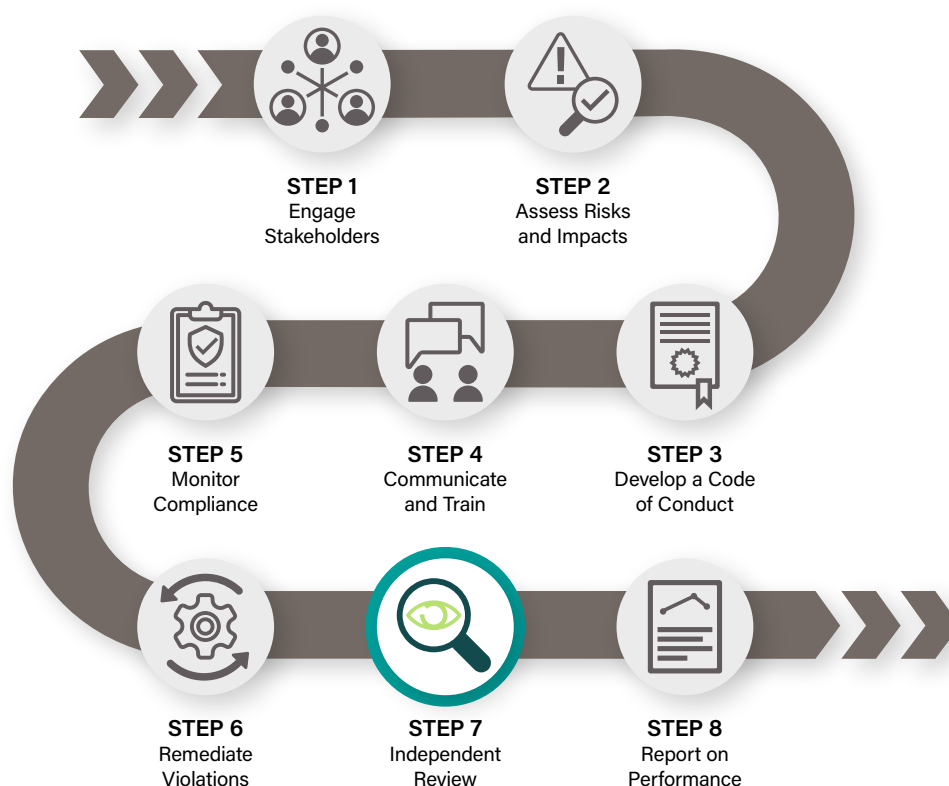
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# About the COFFEE Toolkit

This tool is one of 28 tools and 14 online training modules comprising the [COFFEE Toolkit](#), which was developed as part of Verité’s Cooperation on Fair, Free, Equitable Employment (COFFEE) Project through generous funding from the US Department of Labor’s Bureau of International Labor Affairs (USDOL-ILAB). The purpose of the COFFEE Toolkit is to promote coffee retailer, roaster, trader, cooperative, and farm adoption of socially sustainable sourcing and farming practices in order to promote improved working conditions for farmworkers in the coffee sector.

The COFFEE Toolkit was developed in alignment with USDOL’s [Comply Chain](#) model, with at least one tool created for each of the eight steps of Comply Chain (see graphic below). Many of the tools are derived from tools created for the [Responsible Sourcing Tool](#), developed by Verité with funding from the U.S. Department of State’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP). The tools can be used á la carte, but it is important that companies have systems and tools in place for each step of Comply Chain.



# Why Worker Interview Questions?

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As discussed in [Tool 25: Guidance on Independent Auditing of Coffee Farms](#), no step in the auditing process is more important than talking to workers. Workers know the most about working conditions on coffee farms and can provide essential information on their own experiences and challenges. Auditors must come into audits prepared to discuss sensitive issues with workers, in order to detect risks and potential cases of human rights harms. It is important that auditors ask the right questions, in the right way.

## About This Tool

The **purpose** of this tool is to provide auditors and others conducting farm monitoring with a comprehensive and adaptable list of questions to draw from when doing worker interviews. The questions focus on the most common labor rights risks in the coffee sector. Auditors should use this tool in conjunction with [Tool 25: Guidance on Independent Auditing of Coffee Farms](#), which discusses techniques for planning audits and conducting interviews.

The main **audience** for this guide is auditors, as well as others who regularly visit farms for technical assistance or monitoring purposes. Auditors can include internal company personnel and representatives of certification organizations or independent third-party auditing firms. This guide can also be useful for companies seeking to design or improve the assurance aspects of their sustainable sourcing programs.

# Worker Questionnaires

The questionnaires below should be used as guides rather than rigid scripts. They should be used to help to structure natural conversations with workers after trust and rapport are built.



## Introductory Points

The following points should be discussed with workers at the outset of all interviews, to promote informed consent and protection from reprisals:

1. Inform workers of the purpose of the interview, including how the information they provide will be used.
2. Explain to workers that it is entirely at their discretion to participate in the interview and that they can withdraw their consent to participate freely at any time.
3. Assure workers that any information they provide will be kept confidential and that they should not suffer any retaliation for participating in the interview, and should report any type of reprisal.
4. Also assure workers that they should be paid in full for the time they spend in interview during working hours, and ensure that this happens in practice.
5. Explain to workers that the interview is not necessarily a means to resolve all individual grievances, but rather to improve conditions on the farm more generally. The grievance process should be used for that purpose.
6. At the close of the interview, provide workers with contact information should they wish to follow up or suffer any form of reprisal.



## Forced Labor

### Debt Bondage

Did you have to pay any fees or costs to get your job or get to the farm? If so, do you still owe money?

Have you purchased anything from your employer or labor broker on credit? Do you still owe money? If so, how do you pay that back?

Have you ever received an advance on your wages or a loan from the employer or labor recruiter?

- ☐ If yes, how much?
- ☐ What were the terms of this loan, including the interest rate and financing period?
- ☐ Have the terms of the loan ever been changed without your consent?
- ☐ Were you required to pay it back or work a certain amount of time if you took an advance or loan?

Is money deducted from your wages to repay a debt? How much?

What would happen if you left the farm before paying back your debt? What would happen if you did not pay that debt?

Do workers receive an advance on wages or a loan from the employer or labor broker?

- ☐ If yes, what are the terms of this loan, including the interest rate and financing period?
- ☐ Have the terms of the loan ever been changed without the worker's consent?

### Deposits and Deductions

Does your employer or broker require you to make monetary deposits or payments to keep your job?

Are any deductions taken from your pay?

- ☐ If so, are they for benefits that you did not receive?

Are you given all of the benefits promised to you and/or that you have paid for?

Have you ever been charged fines?

### Confiscation of Personal Identity Documents and/or Property

Did you turn over any original copies of your government-issued identification documents (i.e. work permits, passports, residency permits, etc.) or ATM cards or bank documents to your employer or labor broker?

- ☐ If yes, what document did you turn it over?
- ☐ Did you request them to hold your document or were you required to turn it over?
- ☐ What was the reason?
- ☐ How long was it retained for?
- ☐ Were you able to gain access to it at any time?
- ☐ What is the procedure for getting your documents back?

If your document was retained, did this prevent you from moving around or freely traveling off of the farm?

Do you have free access to a locked, secure storage space for your personal documents and valuables?

- ☐ Can you access it at any time?

### Freedom of Movement and Personal Freedom

Are there any restrictions on your freedom of movement in the farm during working hours?

- ☐ If yes, what are these restrictions?

Do security personnel ever restrict your freedom of movement in the farm for reasons other than farm security?

Are you ever restricted from or monitored when using the bathroom facilities?

Are you free to get drinking water whenever you wish?

Are you free to perform religious practices without restriction?

Are you free to leave the farm immediately after your shift?

Are you able to get permission to leave the farm during work hours under reasonable circumstances?

What is the procedure for requesting permission to leave the farm (e.g., do you need a labor broker signature or a gate pass)?

If you live in housing operated by the employer or labor recruiter, are you required to live there as a condition of recruitment or continued employment?

Are you free to leave the worker housing and reside elsewhere?

Are you free to come and go as you please during non-working hours?

☐ If not, what are the restrictions on freedom of movement?

Does the worker housing have a curfew?

Are there any housing rules and regulations that you believe unreasonably restrict your personal freedom?





## Responsible Recruitment

### Recruitment Process, Fees & Costs

Where and how were you recruited for your current job?

What is the name of each labor broker involved in your recruitment and hiring?

At the time of recruitment, were you given information about the following in a language you understood?:

- ☐ the job location
- ☐ the name of your employer
- ☐ the sector in which you would be working
- ☐ the tasks that you would be carrying out
- ☐ the contract duration
- ☐ hours of work
- ☐ rate of pay
- ☐ working conditions
- ☐ living conditions

Was this information accurate?

Upon arrival at the farm, did you receive orientation on following?:

- ☐ regular wages and hours
- ☐ benefits and deductions
- ☐ overtime hours and rates
- ☐ vacations, sick and personal leave
- ☐ health and safety policies
- ☐ discipline and termination
- ☐ harassment and abuse
- ☐ grievance procedures

Did you pay a service, placement, or recruitment fee?

- ☐ Who did you pay the fee to?
- ☐ What did the fees and expenses cover?
- ☐ How much was each fee or expense?
  - ☐ How much did you pay for travel costs (airfare or another mode of travel)?
  - ☐ Will return travel be paid by the employer or by you?

Did the labor recruiter provide you with a written itemized breakdown of the fees and expenses paid?

Did you have to pay any fees, expenses, or deposits up-front and/or are these deducted from your pay?

Did you have to borrow any money to pay for recruitment fees and expenses?

- ☐ If yes, how much was borrowed?
- ☐ From whom did the money come?
- ☐ Is there an associated interest rate and, if yes, how much is it?
- ☐ How do you repay the loan?
- ☐ What is the repayment schedule?

Have you been repaid for any fees or expenses you paid to the recruiter or others to get your job?

- ☐ If yes, who reimbursed you and when did that happen?

Were you required to take any training before starting the job? If so, did you have to pay for it?

## Contracts

Did you sign an employment contract for the job?

- ☐ If yes, with whom was the contract signed (the farm, a labor broker, or another type of agent or intermediary)?
- ☐ Do you fully understand the terms and conditions of the contract?
- ☐ In what language is the contract written and do you understand that language?
- ☐ Were the terms of the employment contract explained to you in a language that you are fluent in?
- ☐ When and where was the contract signed (e.g., prior to departure or upon arrival at the farm)?
- ☐ Were you given a copy of the contract to review prior to signing?

- ☐ Once signed, were you given a copy of the signed contract?
- ☐ Did you have to sign two sets of employment contracts with different terms?
- ☐ Was your original contract amended in any way following signature?

Did you have a verbal contract?

Are the details contained in your written or verbal contract consistent with the details that were provided at the time of recruitment?

- ☐ If not, what was changed?

Are the actual terms and conditions of employment consistent with those that described in the verbal or written contract?

Were you pressured or threatened in any way into accepting the job or any of the terms included in the contract?

Does the contract clearly describe the process for early contract termination, including the minimum notice period and any financial penalties involved?

Are you required to work a certain period of time (i.e. 90 days or until the end of the harvest) before you can leave the farm?

Are you and other workers free to resign from your position without penalty prior to the end of your contract?

- ☐ If not, why?

Are you free to remove yourself from working situations that pose an imminent threat to your safety and/or health?

- ☐ If not, why?

What is the required notice period and process for terminating a contract early?

Do you know what would happen if you left in an emergency situation and you couldn't give the required notice?



## Wages and Working Hours

### Wages

Who pays you (employer, labor broker, other)?

How are you paid (i.e. cash, check, direct deposit, credit)?

How is your payment calculated (e.g., hourly, daily, piece rate, by task, percentage of harvest, etc.)?

Do you feel you are paid the correct amount?

Are you paid at least the minimum wage?

Are you paid a piece rate or by task?

- ☐ If so, are you guaranteed to earn the minimum wage independent of production?

Do you have to meet any production quotas?

- ☐ If so, are there reductions in earnings or financial penalties for failing to meet quotas?

If children or family members work with you, do they receive their own wages or piece-rate wages for their individual work?

How often are you paid?

Do you receive your pay on time?

Have wage payments, or any portion of wages, ever been withheld?

- ☐ If yes, what were the circumstances?

Do you receive a pay slip or wage statement on payday?

- ☐ If yes, is this pay slip in a language you understand?
- ☐ Does it clearly indicate wage calculations and any deductions that are made from your salary?

Are any deductions made from your wages?

- ☐ If yes, how much is deducted and what for (e.g., meals, transportation, lodging, uniform, tools, other)?
- ☐ Were you made aware of these deductions when you signed your contract, and did you approve of them?

Do you ever receive wages in the form of non-cash or “in-kind” payments?

- ☐ If yes, what types of in-kind payments (i.e. food, supplies, housing, etc.)?
- ☐ What percentage of the wage has been paid in this way?

## Hours of Work

What are the typical daily working hours?

Do workers have accurate information about the hours required before they start work?

- ☐ How is this communicated?

Are you allowed to take meal breaks and rest breaks?

Do you receive at least one 24-hour period of consecutive rest each week?

How do you record your hours worked?

Do you experience fatigue that prevents you from doing your job safely?

Are you compensated for the time it takes you to commute or be transported to your work site?

What is the frequency and amount of overtime?

- ☐ If paid a piece rate, are you able to earn the minimum wage without working overtime?
- ☐ What would happen if you refused to work overtime or failed to meet a quota?
- ☐ Are you required to be on-call outside of work hours?
- ☐ Are there seasonal spikes in hours worked?
- ☐ Do long hours represent a risk to health and safety of workers?
- ☐ Are workers free to turn down overtime?
  - ☐ What happens if you refuse to work overtime?
  - ☐ Are there financial penalties if workers do not work overtime?
- ☐ Does the farm have production quotas? Can workers meet production quotas during regular working hours?
- ☐ What happens if workers fail to meet quotas?





## Child Labor

Have you seen children working on the farm?

- ☐ If so, how old are they?
- ☐ What kinds of work are they doing?

Does the farm tell workers what types of work young people are allowed to do and not allowed to do?

Did someone check your age documentation when you were recruited or hired?

Do children live on the farm?

- ☐ If so, how old are these children?
- ☐ Are these children attending school?
- ☐ What do the children do during the day if they are not in school?
- ☐ Do parents have options for care that do not involve taking their children to work with them?



## Discrimination

Are different groups of workers (women, migrants, etc.) paid different rates or treated differently?

Did your employer explain what discrimination is and how to handle it if it happens to you or another worker?

Have you or another worker been required to have a medical exam? If so, why?



## Harassment and Abuse

Have you heard of any of the following things happening to any of workers on the farm?

- ☐ Physical or sexual violence
- ☐ Harassment or abuse
- ☐ Punishing workers by giving them worse working or living conditions
- ☐ Threats of firing and/or blacklisting
- ☐ Threats of reporting workers to authorities

Did your employer explain what harassment is and how to handle it if it happens to you or another worker?

Are you aware of employer policies and procedures for dealing with harassment and abuse complaints (e.g., reporting, investigation, follow-up, and sanctions)?

What steps does the farm take to discipline a worker?

- ☐ What types of misconduct carry the penalty of dismissal?
- ☐ Is there a clear process that includes investigation before workers are terminated?
- ☐ Do disciplinary measures ever involve forced or compulsory work as punishment for an infraction?

Have you ever been disciplined at work?

- ☐ If not, do you know of others that have?

Have you even been given a fine or wage deduction as a disciplinary measure?

- ☐ If yes, could you describe the circumstances?

Do deductions for tardiness or time missed ever exceed the wage equivalent of the time missed?

Do you know if workers are ever forced to sign a letter of resignation?



## Freedom of Association

If you wish to, are you permitted to form or join a union or other workers' organization?

Have workers ever faced reprisals for trying to form or join a union or for participating in union activities?

If there is a union or workers' organization on the farm?

- ☐ If so, does it work well? Why or why not?
- ☐ If you are part of the union or workers' organization, what issues or complaints have you brought to management for collective bargaining, and how has that gone?
- ☐ Are members of the workers' organization/union treated the same as other workers?



## Grievance Mechanisms

Did your employer or labor broker tell you what to do if you have a complaint?

Do you know workers who have submitted complaints to the grievance mechanism?

- ☐ If so, was the complaint resolved?
- ☐ Did the person who submitted the complaint receive any punishment afterwards?

Can all people use the mechanism, including women and migrant workers?

- ☐ If not, why not?

Is there a way to submit complaints anonymously?



## Health and Safety

Have any workers had injuries or illnesses on the job?

Were you trained about potential hazards before starting your job on the farm?

- ☐ If yes, how is this information communicated?
- ☐ If yes, have you received information on how to stay safe?

Do workers have access to relevant personal protective equipment?

- ☐ If yes, who pays for this equipment?
- ☐ If workers must pay for their own equipment, do workers know this before they begin working?

If the employer provides protective equipment for a fee to workers, are the prices reasonable?

Are workers free to remove themselves from working situations if their safety and/or health is in danger?



## Housing and Living Conditions

Does the farm or your labor broker or crew leader provide you with housing/sleeping quarters?

- ☐ If so, are you charged for your housing?
  - ☐ How much?

Does your worker housing have the following:

- ☐ Sufficient space?
- ☐ Sufficient privacy?
- ☐ Adequate safety?
- ☐ A place to store your valuables?
- ☐ A kitchen?
- ☐ A bathroom?
- ☐ Showers?
- ☐ Electricity?
- ☐ Clean drinking water? Describe where you sleep.
- ☐ Are you able to get good rest?
  - ☐ If not, why not?

Are you charged for utilities (electricity, water, gas, etc.)?

- ☐ If so, how much?

Are you charged for transportation to the farm?

- ☐ If so, how much?

Are you ever exposed to pesticides or in your housing?

Are there food preparation and dining facilities?

- ☐ Describe where you prepare food and eat.



Does the farm or your labor broker or crew leader provide you with food?

- ☐ If so, are you charged for the food, and how much?
- ☐ Are you provided with adequate food?
- ☐ Is the food of adequate quality?

Do you believe the conditions of your housing or food have caused any injuries or illnesses?

Did you understand what your living conditions would be like before you accepted this job?

What would happen if you complained about your living conditions?

## Next Steps

This tool should be used in tandem with [Tool 25: Guidance on Independent Auditing Coffee Farms](#).

