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Improving safety and health in the Colombian coffee supply chain: Results of the AJCA - ICO - ILO collaboration

June 2024



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Project partners:





Background

Colombia is the **world’s third-largest coffee producer and exporter**, creating about 2.5 million jobs for nearly 550,000 families, mostly on farms under 5 hectares. Women, who comprise 36% of coffee producers, play a crucial role in the supply chain, with their role being increasingly recognized.

The concept of “**decent work**” sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

The coffee supply chain faces significant challenges to achieving decent work, including high levels of informality, poor and unsafe working conditions, and low levels of education and knowledge among growers. Working hours are extremely long varying from 10 to 18 hours a day, during peak harvest periods.

A safe and healthy working environment is fundamental to decent work. Despite this, every day, coffee growers and workers suffer from work-related injuries and diseases.

The **most recurrent risks are falls and fractures**, primarily due to the sloping and uneven terrain on which most farms are situated. Hernias have also been identified as a significant health risk, often resulting from **lifting heavy bundles** of harvested

coffee for weighing. Workers may lift **loads close to 100 kg**, moving them across sloping and slippery terrain exacerbated by rainfall.

In addition to these workplace hazards, growers often **underestimate the severity of accidents**, frequently avoiding professional medical attention. This negligence is directly related to the low level of health and occupational risk protection system affiliation and the poor quality of available care. Only 3.4 percent of coffee growers have some sort of health insurance.

Through the establishment and implementation of national occupational safety and health (OSH) policies and adequate OSH management systems at workplace level, combined with access to information and training, the majority of these injuries and diseases can be prevented.

On October 1 st 2023, the **ILO Vision Zero Fund**, in collaboration with the International Coffee Organization, launched the **#CoffeePeople campaign**¹ to promote a safe and healthy working environment in the coffee supply chain.² To date, the campaign reached over 25 million people in more than 50 countries, and numerous stakeholders have made concrete pledges to improve safety and health for coffee growers and

¹ <https://coffeepeople.vzf.ilo.org>

² The theme of the International Coffee Day 2023 was “Promoting the right to a safe and healthy working environment in the coffee supply chain”. More information: <https://www.internationalcoffeeday.org/>



Pictures showing some of the hazards faced by Colombian coffee growers. Colombia. (Laly Malagón)



Colombian coffee growers risk injury due to slippery surfaces. Colombia. (Laly Malagón)



Health risk due to lifting heavy bundles . Colombia. (Laly Malagón)

workers in the coffee chain. The campaign raises awareness of known OSH hazards and risks in the supply chain and seeks to mobilize collective action to improve working conditions. In particular, it urges coffee stakeholders to pledge concrete actions for enhancing safety and health.

The All Japan Coffee Association (AJCA), through its collaboration with the International Coffee Organization (ICO), pledged to support the campaign's activities in Colombia, a crucial contribution that significantly advanced the campaign's outcomes there.

Activities funded by the AJCA were co-funded by the ILO's **Vision Zero Fund and Supply Chains for a Sustainable Future of Work project**, in strong coordination and collaboration with the International Coffee Organization. Most of the activities supported the **Regional Committee of the Coffee Supply Chain (Huila)**³,

a multi stakeholder platform that brings together representatives from government, employers, workers, producers, exporters, and other key stakeholders to improve decent work in the supply chain, with a focus on enhanced compliance with the fundamental principles and rights at work.

ILO achievements (Summary)

For over a decade now, the ILO has been working to improve decent work conditions in the coffee supply chain in Colombia. With a specific focus on social dialogue and occupational safety and health (OSH), its work has benefitted thousands of growers, particularly in the states of Quindio, Risaralda, Caldas, and Huila. Below, a description of some of the results achieved.

Research products: OSH training experiences from the Colombian Federation of Coffee Growers (FNC); Study on temporary coffee workers; OSH perceptions and good practices in the Colombian coffee sector; Mapping of Occupational Health Services; OSH profile of women coffee producers in Colombia; Opportunities, challenges and needs to promote decent work in the Colombian cocoa supply chain.

Awareness raising products: Soap opera, radio spots, videos available [here](#) and [here](#).

Highlight! With ILO support, the Colombia National Training Service (SENA) adopted the first "Certificate of Labor Competencies for Coffee Harvesters." This certification allows growers to have their skills formally recognized and enables employers to hire a qualified workforce with confidence. To date, 2,500 coffee harvesters have received their certificates. More information [here](#) and [here](#).

The AJCA contribution served to complement and build upon these results.

³ The Huila is the largest coffee growing region in Colombia.

Objectives and activities

The AJCA – ICO – ILO collaboration was formally announced at the World Coffee Conference - WCC (Bangalore, India, September 2023) during the panel discussion “Coffee social sustainability challenges”.



Picture of the official announcement of the AJCA – ICO – ILO collaboration at the WCC 2023.

The project implemented a two-tiered approach:

- Under **outcome 1**, the project sought to raise stakeholders’ awareness and knowledge on the importance of working to improve decent work in the sector, in particular, in relation to occupational safety and health;
- Under **outcome 2**, the project built upon outcome 1 results, translating the awareness into a concrete activity: a large-scale campaign for

disseminating decent work messages to all stakeholders in the supply chain and mobilize improvement actions. Below, a description of the activities conducted under this project.

Outcome 1: Increased capacity of key global and national coffee stakeholders to promote and support OSH.

In August 2023, the ILO organized a four-day **training workshop** for 42 participants (38% women) on working conditions in the Colombian coffee supply chain, with a focus on OSH and due diligence. Participants included representatives from trade union organisations, the Huila Territorial Directorate of the Ministry of Labour, the national training service (SENA), the Huila Government, coffee producers, processors traders and exporters.



Image 1. Training on decent work provided to the members of the Regional Committee of the Coffee Supply Chain of the Huila.

The workshop developed a sectoral **“Call to Action”** aligned with international standards on responsible business conduct, focusing on OSH standards. The Call to Action unites stakeholders to tackle persistent decent work challenges in Colombia’s coffee supply chain and improve working conditions for coffee harvesters and growers.

In September 2023, the ILO hosted a booth at the **Third International Fair of Coffee, Cocoa and Agrotourism (FICCA 2023)** (Sept 28 - Oct 1), where participants played interactive games to learn about promoting fundamental principles and rights in the coffee supply chain, focusing on OSH. The fair attracted 35,473 attendees from 22 countries.



Image from the ILO participation in the FICCA fair.



Image 2. Training on decent work provided to the members of the Regional Committee of the Coffee Supply Chain of the Huila.

In March 2024, the Huila region Secretary of the Coffee Supply Chain joined a **global ILO webinar** with representatives from Colombia, Brazil, and Uganda.

The Huila representative highlighted government activities, supported by AJCA and the, to improve coffee workers’ conditions, including this project’s initiatives. The webinar had over 100 participants worldwide.

These activities raised awareness about the importance of promoting decent work conditions in the coffee supply chain and directly contributed to outcome 2 of the project.

3 The Huila is the largest coffee growing region in Colombia.

Outcome 2: Enhanced understanding of and commitment to improve OSH in the coffee sector

On February 19-20th 2024, with AJCA funding, the ILO Vision Zero Fund organized a **communication workshop** to adapt the global coffee people campaign to the Colombian context. The workshop took place in Neiva, the capital of the Huila.

A total of 41 participants (50% women) from various sectors, including the national government (Ministry of Labour; Vocational training Service–SENA; national pension administration–COLPENSIONES), the Huila Regional Government, the National Coffee Federation (FNC), workers' organizations (like the Danish-union 3F), exporters, processors, traders, producers, and academics (South Colombian University), engaged in interactive activities that served to draft the national campaign key messages, and identify communication strategies, culminating in a workplan for concrete activities until October 1, 2024 (International Coffee Day).

Workshop conclusions informed several communication materials:

- A **campaign webpage**, to serve as a one-stop-shop to share key information and knowledge on decent work in the coffee supply chain (including ILO publications)⁴;
- A **campaign brief**, with the key messages and activities that participants agreed to during the campaign (in ENG and SPA)⁵;
- A **campaign "official" video**⁶ (in ENG and SPA) and **20 social media cards**⁷ to disseminate key campaign messages.

The campaign was launched on the World Day for Safety and Health at Work (28 April 2024). It was accompanied by a **press release**⁸ signed jointly by the ILO, ICO, the Colombian Ministry of Labour, and the Government from the Huila Region. The launch of the campaign received extensive media coverage (it was covered by nine different media outlets that included four international and five national outlets), including the **Global Coffee Report**⁹ and **Comunicaffe**¹⁰. By the end of May 2024, campaign messages have reached over 20,000 people¹¹. The ILO is producing two additional videos to further disseminate the campaign messages. These videos will be launched at the end of June (on the Colombian National Coffee Day) and in August.

#FamiliasCafeteras campaign: Key messages (summary)

- Colombia is one of the main coffee producers in the world. Consumers from all over the world the opportunity to enjoy a good Colombian "tinto".
- Colombian coffee constitutes the main engine of the country's economy, resulting from the work of more than 548,000 coffee growing families.
- 85% of coffee production takes place in the informal economy, which poses serious challenges to guaranteeing decent work.
- Women's participation in Colombian coffee farming has experienced significant growth in recent decades, but their involvement in management positions is still low.
- Addressing decent work challenges in the Colombian coffee sector requires social dialogue and collective action by all stakeholders. All stakeholders in the sector must take concrete actions to guarantee decent work for all coffee growers, focusing on the promotion and realization of fundamental rights at work.
- Join the #FamiliasCafeteras campaign and help us promote decent work as the way to achieve sustainable, inclusive development and socially justice for all.

More information **available here**.

⁴ <https://www.ilo.org/es/familiascafeteras-campana-de-seguridad-y-salud-en-el-trabajo>

⁵ <https://www.canva.com/design/DAGC2ljvwpo/rcul4gegEqumecqeNUZYbg/edit>

⁶ https://youtu.be/_q9pwEK7PrY?si=f_Iv2LFAn2zSAf4I

⁷ https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Nm4AhypxsqV4GGu_AwTsqATVpHO33T

⁸ <https://www.icocoffee.org/documents/cy2023-24/pr-352e-familias-cafeteras.pdf>



Image 1. Participants of the Coffee Campaign planning workshop, organized by the ILO and funded by AJCA, that took place in Neiva (Huila) on February 19-20th 2024.



Image 2. Participants of the Coffee Campaign planning workshop, organized by the ILO and funded by AJCA, that took place in Neiva (Huila) on February 19-20th 2024.

Key performance indicators (Summary)

- 1 statement (“Call to Action”) adopted by coffee stakeholders (“Regional Committee of the Coffee Supply Chain of the Huila”).
- 2 trainings conducted (a total of 6 days of training).
- 83 people trained (50% women).
- 1 awareness raising campaign implemented (#FamiliasCafeteras).
- 24 promotional materials developed (webpage, brief, video, press release, SM cards).
- +2,000 people reached through the campaign activities, including a global webinar organized by the ILO, in which project activities were promoted.

Note: The AJCA funding contributed to achieving these targets. Activities were co-funded by the ILO.

⁹ <https://www.gcrmag.com/ilo-ico-and-local-government-launch-familiascafeteras/>

¹⁰ <https://www.comunicaffe.com/the-ilo-ministry-of-labour-ico-and-government-of-huila-join-forces-to-promote-decent-work-in-the-coffee-sector-via-the-familiascafeteras-campaign/>

¹¹ Number of impressions reported by ILO Americas, ONU Colombia, ICO, Colombian Ministry of Labour, the Huila journal, and the ILO Vision Zero Fund LinkedIn account. In addition, over 680 engagements, in the form of comments and reactions, were reported.

What's next

Colombian coffee stakeholders identified several activities that need be developed to continue to advance decent work in the coffee supply chain. These include:

- Expanding the work on OSH by providing **training to farmers and workers** using innovative modalities for them to adopt safer and healthier OSH practices at the workplace (e.g., an itinerary bus that would travel around coffee-growing municipalities in the Huila region, providing OSH training to coffee growers and covering other topics related to enhancing the sector's competitiveness);
- Supporting work for the **establishment of social protection systems** in the coffee sector (e.g., developing a technical proposal, including a financing scheme, and implementing regional pilots); and
- Raising **awareness among roasters and importers in Japan as a sourcing country on the strategic importance of tackling the decent work deficits in origin countries**, such as Colombia (e.g., organizing dialogues on responsible business conduct and business and human rights¹²) and to explore partnerships and joint action to overcome them.

These activities could be a part of a future AJCA – ICO – ILO collaboration. As relevant, outreach will be sought to key stakeholders working to improve decent work in origin countries, especially in those exporting coffee to Japan (e.g., JICA and JETRO, among others).

¹² Aligned to International and national guidelines, e.g., [the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights 2020-2025](#).

VISION ZERO FUND

International Labour Organization

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All Japan Coffee Association



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SAFETY
+ HEALTH
FOR ALL

Vision Zero Fund is part of Safety & Health for All,
an ILO flagship programme building a culture of
safe, healthy work.