International Labour Organization

Skills development in Uganda's coffee value chain

An overview of research findings

September 2026

Within the framework of the "CLEAR Supply Chains" project and with co-financing of the European Union, the ILO conducted an assessment on the current and emerging skills mismatch in Uganda's coffee value chain. This factsheet summarizes the findings of the assessment and provides recommendations for national and sectoral ILO constituents and other stakeholders to improve skills development for youth and adults that focus on skills required for added value creation and diversification of Uganda's coffee value chain with the ultimate objective of creating more decent employment.

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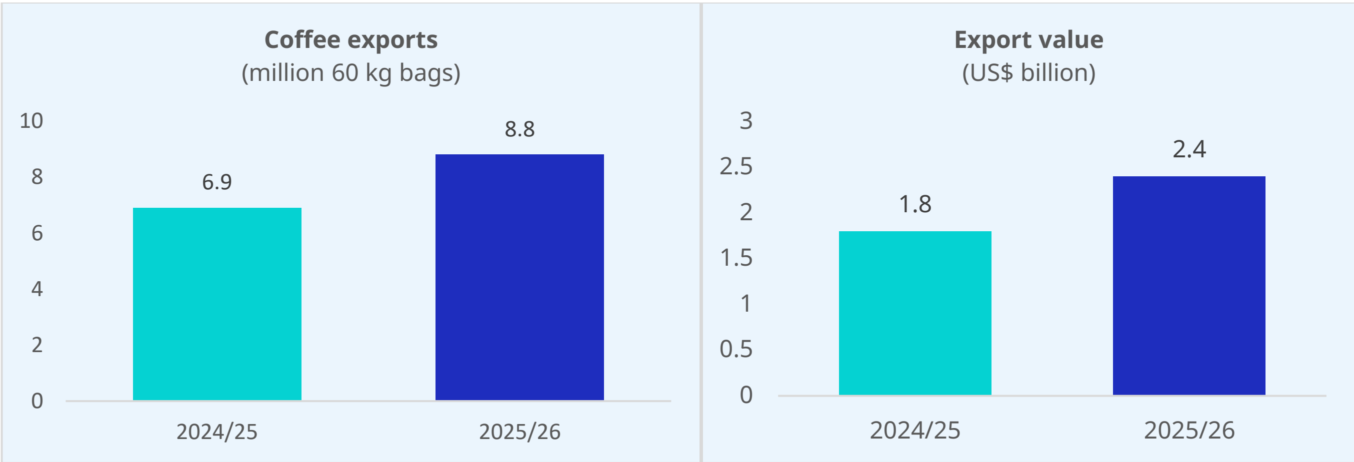
Uganda's coffee sector

Coffee plays a key role in Uganda's economy and rural development: it accounts for more than 20 per cent of export earnings and provides direct or indirect employment for approximately 12 million people (UCDA, 2020). For a long time, it was assumed that Uganda had between 1.8 and 2 million coffee farmers. However, the ongoing registration of coffee farmers in response to the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) reveals the presence of much more coffee farmers.

Coffee is Uganda's top foreign-exchange earner. Between April 2025 and March 2026, Uganda exported 8.8 million 60 kg coffee bags worth US$2.4 billion[1] compared to 6.9 million 60 kg coffee bags worth US$1.8 billion in the previous year (April 2024–March 2025). It is the leading African exporter of Robusta coffee and the second-largest exporter of Arabica, after Ethiopia. Most coffee is exported unprocessed, as commodity-grade green coffee. The European Union is the major importing market with Italy (responsible for a 32.17 per cent market share), Germany (7.96 per cent) and Spain (3.36 per cent) as the most important destination countries. Other major export markets are Sudan (11.14 per cent), India (6.56 per cent), Morocco (5.99 per cent) and China (4.20 per cent).

Figure 1: Uganda's coffee exports accelerated



Source: Uganda Coffee Development Authority, Monthly Coffee Report, March 2026.

About 85 per cent of Uganda's coffee is produced by smallholder farmers (UCDA, 2020) and despite the significant increases in export volumes and foreign exchange earnings in the past few years, the sector faces low productivity, high post-harvest losses and poor quality, which ultimately result in low incomes and widespread poverty among coffee-growing communities. Limited value addition, gender inequalities, low youth participation, the increasing impact of climate change and the widespread use of child labour[2,3] further undermine the sustainability of the sector.

More than

20%

of Uganda's export earnings comes from the coffee sector.

Almost

12M

people are employed directly or indirectly by the coffee sector.

Approximately

85%

of Uganda's coffee is produced by smallholder farmers.

The creation of decent work opportunities for youth and adults is a key instrument in preventing and remediating child labour, as well as promoting social equity, reducing poverty and creating sustainable economic growth.

1 Monthly Coffee Report March 2026, Uganda Coffee Development Authority, 2026.

2 Child labour is defined as work that is mentally, physically, socially, and morally dangerous and harmful to children and also interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely and requiring them to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. The prevention and elimination of child labour are anchored in the ILO Convention on the Minimum Age for Employment, 1973 (No. 138), the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) and the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child. These international legal instruments emphasise freedom from child labour as a human right and the elimination of child labour as a universal and fundamental value.

3 While there are no sectoral statistics on child labour in Uganda's coffee sector, various studies – AidEnvironment (2020), AfriChild & TdH (2022) and ILO (2023) – provide evidence of the presence of child labour in the coffee supply chain, with estimates ranging from 25% to 75%, depending on location and season.

National Policy Framework on Skills Development in Coffee

The coffee sector is a priority for the national government. National development plans like Vision 2040, the National Development Plan III (2020/21 – 2024/25) and IV (2025/26 – 2029/30), and Tenfold Growth Strategy identify coffee as a key commodity for sustainable agro-industrialization and a driver of export earnings, jobs and value addition. To support value addition in the coffee sector, the National Development Plan III and IV prioritize the establishment of a soluble coffee processing plant and coffee hubs to skill youth. While emphasizing the pivotal role of human capital to support Uganda's development goals, it acknowledges the gaps in knowledge, skills, and attitudes which limit employability. There is limited alignment between the skills supply and demand attributed to limited instructors with pedagogical skills and industry experience, limited work-based training, inadequate training infrastructure and facilities, absence of a national qualifications framework and limited internationalisation and certification of training programmes. The 4th National Development Plan (2025/26-2029/30) prioritizes the development of an industrialized coffee value chain that has primary, secondary, and tertiary industrial products. It notes that despite the progress made in developing the human resources necessary for enhancing agricultural productivity and value addition, the demand for skilled professionals in the agro-industrialisation value chain is outpacing supply, anticipating a need for more agricultural extension officers. It plans for the construction of Coffee Hubs to skill youths on coffee.

Table 1: Policy framework at a glance

National development framework	Coffee-sector framework
• Vision 2040 • National Development Plan IV (2025/26–2029/30) • Tenfold Growth Strategy	• National Coffee Policy (2013) • Coffee Roadmap (2017) • National Coffee Act (2021) • National Coffee Sub-Sector Strategy (2020/21–2024/25)

The National Coffee Policy (2013) and the Coffee Roadmap (2017) set out strategic objectives aimed at increasing production, added value, export earnings and domestic coffee consumption. These objectives were reinforced by the National Coffee Act (2021), which established a regulatory framework for developing the coffee sector.

The National Coffee Sub-Sector Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25 aims to increase coffee export earnings, incomes of coffee farmers and create inclusive employment along the coffee value chain. When it comes to skills development and the creation of added value, the strategy recognizes limited value addition at coffee farm level due to low adoption of good agronomic and post-harvest handling practices, further compounded by the general lack of business and managerial skills. Off-farm value addition is largely limited to primary processing.

Key gap

Despite the socio-economic importance of coffee in terms of contribution to Gross Domestic Product, export, foreign exchange, employment and livelihoods, the current national coffee sector strategic documents such as the Uganda Coffee Roadmap do not outline specific provisions on skills development.

To improve value addition throughout the coffee value chain, the National Coffee Sub-Sector Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25 prioritizes the following interventions.

Table 2: Priority interventions for skills and value addition

Priority	Intervention
A	Improvement of skills and competencies at technical and managerial level through strengthening training and skilling centres for improvement of coffee production and processing.
B	Increase access of coffee farmers to technical and vocational training to improve skills, particularly for women and youth.
C	Strengthening the capacity of farmers and farmers' organizations to control and manage pests and diseases

Methodology

To increase access to decent work opportunities in Uganda's coffee value chain as a prevention and remediation mechanism for vulnerable households whose children are at risk or in child labour, the ILO conducted a rapid skills assessment of Uganda's coffee value chain. The objective of the rapid skills assessment was to assess current and emerging skills demand and supply with the view of identifying mismatches, gaps, opportunities and specific skills needs with a focus on added value creation and diversification throughout Uganda's coffee value chain.

1 Desk research
Review of available evidence and documentation.

2 Digital survey
Online survey of private-sector stakeholders.

3 Stakeholder consultations
Face-to-face semi-structured interviews.

The assessment was conducted through desk research and consultations, both face to face semi-structured interviews as well as through an online survey, with Government Ministries and Departments, private coffee sector actors (companies, cooperatives and farmers), technical and vocational training institutes, and non-government organizations and development partners who are running projects in Uganda's coffee value chain.

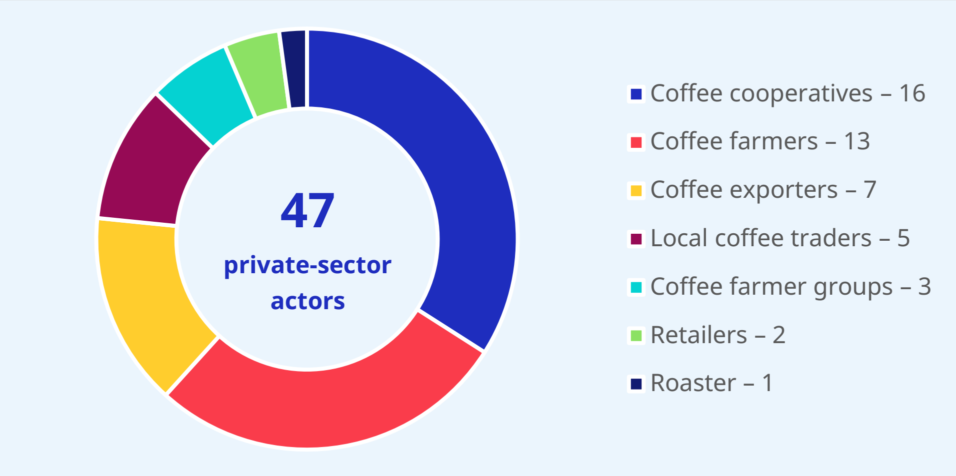
A digital survey was developed and circulated among private sector stakeholders with the aim of identifying any skills mismatch or skills gap.

In total 47 coffee private sector actors and 8 technical and vocational training centres were surveyed.

Methodological limitations

It is important to note that the assessment was conducted in the absence of a standardized system. Uganda has currently no formal national classification of occupations framework and by that extension no national occupational standards - no standardized list of occupations and profiles for each occupation in the coffee value chain. As a result, job titles/profiles and their associated skill requirements are often interpreted differently by various employers and training institutions. To overcome this challenge, a list of key occupations for each stage of Uganda's coffee value chain was drafted in consultation with coffee stakeholders, including coffee industry members, and used as a tool in the data collection process.

Figure 2: Private sector actors surveyed



Research findings

The rapid assessment reveals that, while Uganda's coffee sector is growing fast, inadequate alignment between the skills supply and demand limits the potential for value addition and inclusive employment generation.

Skills demand

Skills demand varies across the different stages of Uganda's coffee value chain. The table below summarizes the skills identified as being in high or moderate demand at each stage.

Table 3: High- and moderate-demand skills across Uganda's coffee value chain

Value-chain stage	High demand	Moderate demand
Coffee production	Agronomy; proper harvesting techniques; quality control (knowledge of coffee maturity).	Adequate use of agronomic chemicals; basic business management skills.
Processing	Post-harvest handling (knowledge of drying and moisture control, fermentation, proper storage); quality grading; machine operating; technical troubleshooting.	Management skills.
Export	Sustainable certification; human rights and environmental compliance.	Export regulations; logistics management; contract negotiation.
Domestic marketing, roasting and retailing	Roasting; product marketing and packaging; quality assurance; coffee preparation (barista).	Management.

Emerging skills identified are linked to traceability, sustainability and compliance, in particularly on the European Union Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR) and climate-smart coffee farming.

Skills supply

There is a diverse array of institutions that provide skills training for Uganda's coffee value chain. Broadly they can be categorized into three pillars.

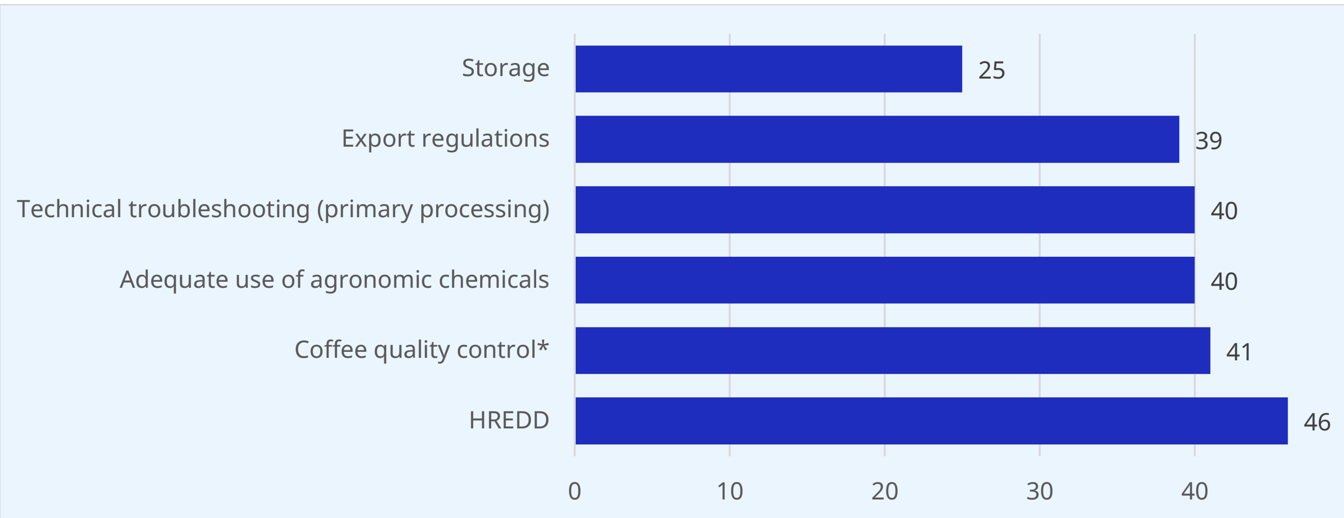
Table 4: Key providers of skills training in Uganda's coffee value chain

Value-chain stage	High demand
Government and public institutions	Government like the Ministry of Agriculture and public education and training institutions like the University of Makerere providing courses on crops agronomy and crops management that include coffee.
Non-profit and private training institutions	Non-profit and private training institutions providing courses that cover different stages of the coffee value chain. Some of them are operated by coffee industry bodies and cater for the rapidly growing consumer and hospitality side of sector, in particular quality control, roasting and barista training.
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide skills development programs for coffee farmers focused on agronomy.

Whereas training courses offered by the Government and coffee industry bodies provide diplomas and certificates that are nationally (Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board or its predecessor, the Directorate of Industrial Training) or internationally (e.g. by the Specialty Coffee Association and Coffee Quality Institute) recognized through accreditation, this is often not the case for many of the skills development courses provided by private training institutions or NGOs. As a result, the graduates of these programs risk to have non-recognized skills.

The provision of skills training in Uganda's coffee value chain is most widespread in basic agronomy, coffee hand-picking harvesting and machinery operation, and barista services, largely due to the combined efforts of Government, NGOs, development partners and the private sector. This is reflected in the **few technical and vocational curricula for coffee sector occupations certified by the relevant government authority**—the Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board (UVTAB), or its predecessor, the Directorate of Industrial Training. There is the TVET coffee farmer curriculum of 2020 and the recent developed TVET apprenticeship program for barista and bar tending as part of a wider National Competence Certificate in Hotel Operation program and the work-based learning assessment training package for coffee farm guide, developed by the Uganda Hotel and Tourism Training Institute and the Hospitality Tourism College respectively. The analysis of the skills demand assessment confirms the above.

Figure 3: Skills reported as scarce or unavailable



Note: n = 47 respondents. For coffee quality control, 40–41 respondents reported scarcity or non-availability, depending on the value-chain stage.

The skills availability assessment identified the following patterns across the coffee value chain.

Table 5: Limited and moderate skills supply across Uganda's coffee value chain

Value-chain stage	Limited demand	Moderate demand
Coffee production	Adequate use of agronomic chemicals; quality control.	Agronomy.
Processing	Quality assurance and grading; storage; technical troubleshooting.	Harvesting techniques; drying; fermentation; basic machinery operation and maintenance; management.
Export	Export regulations; contract negotiation; logistics management; human rights and environmental due diligence.	-
Domestic marketing, roasting and retailing	Marketing; product branding; supply-chain management; quality assurance.	Business management; roasting; coffee preparation; packaging

Skills mismatch

Triangulating the skills which are highly sought with the skills that are scarcely available indicates a skills mismatch[4] in the different stages of the coffee value chain.

Table 6: Skills mismatches across Uganda's coffee value chain

Value-chain stage	Identified skills mismatch
Production, harvesting and post-harvesting	Adequate use of agrochemicals; quality control; storage; basic business management.
Processing and export	Quality grading; export regulation; sustainable certification; human rights and environmental compliance; contract negotiation.
Domestic marketing, roasting and retailing	Roasting; product marketing; packaging; branding.

Two-pronged approach to addressing skills mismatches

1

Broad-based training

Upper stages: handling of agrochemicals; quality control; storage; basic business management.

2

Specialized training

Downstream stages: quality grading; roasting; marketing and branding; export regulation and compliance with global commodity requirements.

These skills mismatch findings highlight the need for a two-pronged approach. At the one hand, broad-based training focused on handling of agrochemicals, quality control, storage and basic business management in the upper stages of

[4] Skill mismatch is an encompassing term referring to different types of skill gaps and imbalances such as over-education, under-education, over-qualification, under-qualification, over skilling, skill shortages and surpluses, skills obsolescence and so forth. It can be both qualitative and quantitative thus referring to both situations where a person does not meet the job requirements and when there is a shortage or surplus of persons with a specific skill.

the coffee value chain, and on the other hand more specialized training for downstream stages that focus on quality grading, roasting, marketing and branding, and export regulation and compliance with requirements of a global commodity like coffee.

To address these challenges for skills development in Uganda's coffee sector, there is a need to look at the development of a national occupational classification and standards for Uganda's coffee sector, adequate training providers and recognition, through national or international accreditation, of trainings.

The adoption of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Act in February 2025 by the Government of Uganda provides for the establishment of sector skills expert committees. Plans are underway to set up a skills expert committee for agriculture and under it a sub-working group for coffee. The establishment of these structures and with the right representation of experts provide an opportunity to ensure that vocational training aligns with labour market demand in the coffee value chain. In addition, the Government of Uganda plans the establishment of National Coffee Institute where specific skills development training courses can be provided.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Conclusions and recommendations

The skills assessment of Uganda's coffee value chain reveals the existence of skills mismatches in different formats and forms. There are skills gaps and skills shortages that hinder the country from fully capitalizing on the growth of its coffee sector. While Uganda has successfully increased the production of green beans, inadequate knowledge and skills at both the production and post-harvesting stages result in a 30–40 per cent loss in output. This leads to reduced income and diminished international competitiveness. Additionally, the rising demand for skills in roasting, product marketing and branding, and coffee preparation (barista) reflects a strategic shift towards value addition and diversification, creating new employment opportunities across the sector. Lastly, a major novelty in the coffee market is the emergence of human rights and environmental due diligence regulation, placing increasing responsibility on coffee companies to understand, prevent and address adverse social and environmental impacts in their supply chains, resulting in an increasing demand for skills in sustainable certification and human rights and environmental compliance.

Key conclusion

There is a skills mismatch in the different stages of Uganda's coffee value chain, hindering the country's efforts to harness the potential of a strategic shift towards value addition and diversification of the coffee value chain.

Key barriers to skills development

1 Limited training provision
Limited availability of training programmes meeting quality benchmarks and accredited by accreditation body.

2 Curricula not keeping pace
Insufficient integration of new skills required by the coffee industry into existing training programmes.

3 Barriers to entry
High financial and non-financial entry requirements.

The establishment of the National Coffee Training Institute in Kampala presents a valuable opportunity to create a center of excellence for the sector. This institute can offer nationally and internationally recognized certification and high-level technical training in areas such as human rights and environmental compliance, quality grading, roasting, product packaging and marketing, and export regulations.

Below are a series of recommendations for strengthening skills development in Uganda's coffee value chain, with the goal of creating more decent work opportunities and supporting domestic value addition and diversification.

Table 7: Priority recommendations for strengthening skills development in Uganda's coffee value chain

Priority	Recommendation
1	**Development of a national occupational classification and standards for Uganda's coffee sector.** The Government, through collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Labour, and the Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board, and in consultation with the coffee industry and trade unions, should prioritize the development of comprehensive national occupational classifications and/or standards for the coffee sector, starting with formulating a list of occupations and their profiles at each stage of the coffee value chain. Such a classification and standards framework for the coffee sector will support the systemic assessment, recognition and certification of the skills of workers in the various related occupations. Its current absence hampers the ability of training institutions to align their curricula with industry standards, creates challenges for employers in identifying qualified personnel, limits worker mobility between companies and regions, and undermines efforts to professionalize the sector.
2	**Develop and strengthen work-based learning programmes, including apprenticeship programmes, in Uganda's coffee sector.** The Government, in collaboration with employers' and workers' organizations and the coffee industry, should develop a national apprenticeship program to provide job seekers, in particular youth, and workers with a structured pathway to gain relevant skills, improve the school-to-work transition and enhance their employability, and boost enterprise productivity.
3	**Review and/or develop new standardized curricula covering all stages (upstream and downstream occupations) of the coffee value chain that are delivered through work-based learning, benchmarked against established national and international standards, e.g. Specialty Coffee Association and Global Coffee Platform programs, and certified by the Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board.** Ensure that upper-tier skills development includes basic management, regenerative coffee production, integrated pest management, improved occupational safety and health, and quality control. Downstream skills development curricula should focus on quality grading, product branding, marketing, roasting, sustainability, and human rights and environmental compliance.

Priority	Recommendation
4	**Establish a sectoral skills council for agriculture with a coffee working group composed of Government, workers' and employers' organizations, and representatives of the coffee industry and learning institutions.** This sectoral skills council will be responsible for developing and monitoring a national skills development strategy and apprenticeship framework, advising on the development or revision of vocational and technical education curricula, accrediting training institutions, and monitoring and advising on skills shortages in Uganda's coffee value chain.
5	**Training institutions, in particular, private and non-profit training centres, should provide institution- and work-based learning programmes related to coffee that are certified by the Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board.** The coffee industry should provide internships to graduates of institution- and work-based coffee learning programs.
6	**Continuously strengthen government agricultural extension services to farmers, with a specific focus on regenerative agriculture, pest and disease control, good (post-)harvest practices and quality control.**
7	**Establish regional value-addition and quality control hubs to address critical skills gaps in primary and secondary processing.** These hubs, funded through a public-private partnership model, would serve as both commercial processing facilities and hands-on training centres, providing an opportunity to gain practical experience with modern washing and hulling equipment and quality control labs. The private sector could manage the commercial operations, ensuring the hubs are sustainable, while development partners and TVET institutions could design and deliver the training curricula. Such an approach would decentralize the supply of skills beyond Kampala.

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The "Ending child labour in supply chains: Addressing the root causes of child labour in supply chains through an area-based approach" (CLEAR Supply Chains) project brings together the International Labour Organization (ILO) as the leading UN agency, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to address jointly the root causes of child labour, with a primarily focus on the coffee supply chain, and to leverage existing efforts in the minerals supply chain, particularly in cobalt.

The CLEAR Supply Chains project is implemented within the framework of the ILO 8.7 Accelerator Lab.

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