



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



INTERNATIONAL
COFFEE
ORGANIZATION

PR 364/26

15 July 2026

English only

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PRESS RELEASE

COFFEE AND EDUCATION: BREWING KNOWLEDGE – GROWING THE FUTURE

World of Coffee Brussels | 15 July 2026 |

"Education as the most sustainable investment in the future of coffee."

15 July 2026 – Global leaders in coffee, education, and international development convened at World of Coffee Brussels for a landmark panel discussion on the role of education in shaping the future of the coffee sector. Organized by Fondazione Ernesto Illy ETS, UNIDO, the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA), and ICO, the event celebrated 15 years of the Master in Coffee Economics and Science - Ernesto Illy, launched its Alumni Community, and explored collaborative frameworks for workforce development in African producing countries. The panels were moderated by Gerardo Pataconi, Strategy Advisor/Director, Ernesto Illy Master Coffee Economics and Science.

Panel I – 15 Years of the Ernesto Illy Master & Launch of the Alumni Community

The first session celebrated 15 editions of the only international first-level Master's programme in Coffee Economics and Science taught in English, featuring founding faculty members, industry partners, and alumni from Costa Rica and Ethiopia. The panel culminated in the official launch of the Ernesto Illy Master Alumni Community – a global professional network and digital platform extending the programme's impact beyond the classroom.

Speakers: Anna Illy (Chair of Fondazione Ernesto Illy ETS), Sunalini Menon (President of M/s. Coffeelab Limited), Eliana Cossio (Chief Research Officer SCA), Daniel Sanchez (Alumni 2018, Costa Rica), Addisu Dulacha Gobana (Alumni 2019, Ethiopia).

"The Master in Coffee Economics and Science - Ernesto Illy was born from a bold vision: to recognize coffee not just as a product, but as a field of knowledge bringing together science, economics, culture, and sustainability in a truly multidisciplinary and international dialogue. Fifteen editions later, it has grown into much more than an academic program: it is a global community of 300 passionate professionals who share a deeper understanding of coffee from plant to cup. With the launch of the Ernesto Illy Master Alumni Community, this shared knowledge becomes an even stronger force: connecting people, inspiring ideas and shaping the future of coffee."

– Anna Illy, Chair, Fondazione Ernesto Illy ETS

Panel II – Innovation for Capacity Building: A Collaborative Agenda

The second session examined how international organisations, governments, and the private sector can jointly strengthen human capital in coffee producing countries. Focus areas included:

- UNIDO/ACT Programme Coffee Training Centres (CTCs): skills platforms across East African countries
- SCA Coffee Education Systems, Certification Pathways and New Collaboration Models for Africa
- Ethiopia's CTC experience, presented by Ethiopian Coffee and Tea Authority – ECTA- Director General, Dr. Aduugna Debela

Speakers: Vanusia Nogueira (ICO), Iannis Apostolopoulos (SCA), Providence Mavubi (UNIDO), Dr. Aduugna Debela (ECTA), Stijn De Lameillieure (GPE/WB) Wouter Cools (ILO).

Across both panels, a shared conviction emerged: sustainable transformation of the coffee sector requires investing in the enabling environment for skills advancement – robust institutions, accessible training pathways, and internationally recognised certification frameworks that allow local professionals to compete, innovate, and lead.

By equipping local actors with technical skills and linking them to advanced training opportunities, CTCs lay the foundation for inclusive value chain participation and increased local value addition.

“For decades, the ICO has recognized that education, skill development, and the transfer of innovation and technology are essential to building a more resilient, sustainable, and prosperous coffee sector. Partnerships are the catalyst for this change, connecting local talent with global expertise, strong institutions, and internationally recognized training and certification pathways. We would like to congratulate the Fondazione Ernesto Illy ETS for putting this vision into practice over the past 15 years through its Master’s programme and the many initiatives such as the Alumni Community it has developed to date. Together, we can transform capacity building into lasting economic and social progress for coffee-producing countries.”

– Vanusia Nogueira, Executive Director, International Coffee Organization (ICO)

“Education is not merely a tool for knowledge transfer – it is a foundational investment in the long-term resilience and inclusiveness of the coffee sector. Through its ACT Coffee Programme, UNIDO is committed to building the enabling environment in which skills advancement can take root and thrive. Coffee Training Centres across Africa are proof that when we invest in people, we invest in the entire value chain.”

– Providence Mavubi, Director, Agribusiness and Infrastructure Development, UNIDO

“The Ethiopia Coffee Training Centre demonstrates what becomes possible when local expertise meets international standards. Our producers and professionals are not only learning – they are leading.”

– Dr. Aduugna Debela, Director General, Ethiopian Coffee and Tea Authority (ECTA)

“Building a more equitable coffee sector begins with creating more access for the people within our industry. SCA is proud to be part of a growing ecosystem of organizations that recognize education as the foundation of a resilient, inclusive value chain. When local professionals have access to internationally recognized pathways, everyone in coffee benefits.”

– Yannis Apostolopoulos, CEO, Specialty Coffee Association (SCA)

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About Fondazione Ernesto Illy ETS

Established to preserve, promote and disseminate the thought and legacy of its namesake, the Fondazione Ernesto Illy ETS is a corporate foundation representing the entrepreneurial family. It was founded on 30 October 2008 and is chaired by Anna Illy. In line with Ernesto Illy's vision, the Foundation's core value is Ethics, understood as the guiding principle that regulates all human activities and as a sense of responsibility towards Nature and fellow human beings. The Foundation safeguards and promotes Ernesto Illy's vision through scientific research and innovation, education and dissemination, and the implementation of sustainability and philanthropic projects dedicated to the coffee value chains. Its activities mainly focus on the science and culture of coffee, as well as on training and education for producers and value chain operators. Particular attention is devoted to agronomic research through projects such as Virtuous Agriculture and the Ernesto Illy Colloquia, with the aim of helping producing countries and farmers improve their living conditions and identify innovative solutions for the cultivation of the coffee of the future. The Foundation is also strongly committed to education through initiatives such as the Master in Coffee Economics and Science – Ernesto Illy.

About UNIDO

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is the UN's specialized agency that promotes inclusive and sustainable industrial development. UNIDO supports sustainable supply chains, combats climate breakdown through renewable energy and efficiency, and strengthens agribusinesses to end hunger. Its work creates new jobs and drives economic transformation while advancing technology transfer, digitalization, investment promotion, skills development, the circular economy, and women's economic empowerment. In Africa and beyond, initiatives such as the ACT Coffee Programme enhance climate resilience and local value addition, contributing to equitable growth and to fairer and more sustainable global trade.

For more information: www.unido.org

About International Coffee Organization

The International Coffee Organization (ICO) is the only intergovernmental organization dedicated to enhancing the sustainability of the coffee sector for both exporting and importing countries. It serves as a high-level platform for public and private stakeholders, offering official statistics on coffee production, trade, and consumption. Additionally, the ICO facilitates the development and funding of technical cooperation projects and public-private partnerships, fostering collaboration to drive meaningful progress in the coffee industry.

About ECTA and CTC in Addis Ababa

The Ethiopian Coffee and Tea Authority (ECTA) is Ethiopia's national body overseeing coffee quality, exports, and sector development – recording \$1.43 billion in export revenue in 2023/24. Within its premises in Addis Ababa, ECTA hosts the Coffee Training Centre (CTC), established with AICS funding and UNIDO technical support, in partnership with Illycaffè and the Ernesto Illy Foundation. Equipped with roasting, brewing, and sensory laboratories, the CTC delivers internationally standardized training across the post-harvest coffee value chain and has already certified hundreds of professionals from across Africa.

About the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA)

The SCA is the global stage for specialty coffee, where culture, commerce and community collide. As the world's largest coffee trade association, we bring together diverse voices across the value chain to spark dialogue, fuel innovation and make coffee a vibrant, relevant force for all. Through collaboration and progressive approaches, SCA supports the industry through research, standards, education, and events.

Media enquiries:

Fondazione Ernesto Illy ETS | <https://fondazionernestoilly.org/en> |

UNIDO ACT Coffee Programme | www.unido.org/act |

International Coffee Organization | www.ico.org/

ECTA and CTC | www.ctc.et | www.ethiocta.gov.et

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