

Coffee: Ethiopia, Uganda and the Lake Geneva traders

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

African coffee deserves a treatment of its own, which this chapter has so far dealt with alongside cocoa. Ethiopia, the cradle of arabica, is the continent's largest producer and one of the world's principal exporters, followed by Uganda, a major robusta producer, and then by Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda and Burundi. For several of these countries, coffee is the first source of foreign currency and supports millions of smallholders.¹ Marketing passes through cooperatives, local exporters, commodity exchanges, including that of Addis Ababa, and public marketing boards, with varying degrees of liberalisation. International traders buy from the exporters, finance the harvest seasons and sell to the roasters.²

The Lake Geneva region is home to some of the world's leading coffee traders, among them the Geneva house named among the Swiss companies active in Africa at the 2017 forum. Swiss roasters, beginning with the Vevey group, are buyers of the first rank.³ The issues are those of cocoa, with some differences. African coffee competes with Brazil and Vietnam, which limits the market power of the producing states. Certification and traceability programmes are of longer standing there. Finally, the European regulation on deforestation-free products, whose application has been postponed, requires traders to geolocate plots of land, something that African smallholders struggle to provide.⁴ The Lake Geneva trader who buys Ethiopian or Ugandan coffee finds itself, as with cocoa, between producers who ask for prices and manufacturers who ask for guarantees. Its added value consists more and more of data.

1 Notes

1. Agence Ecofin, 8 December 2025, after the International Coffee Organization: "African countries exported 19.69 million bags of coffee,

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equivalent to 1.18 million tons” in 2024/25 (+18.6 per cent), with Uganda (495,600 tonnes, +29.6 per cent) and Ethiopia (442,200 tonnes, +27.3 per cent) accounting for nearly 80 per cent of the continent’s shipments; Africa accounts for only 11.6 per cent of world coffee exports; world shipments of 139.01 million bags. ↩

2. Wikipedia (en), art. “Ethiopia Commodity Exchange”: exchange “established April 2008 in Ethiopia”, led by Eleni Gebre-Madhin, a former economist at IFPRI and the World Bank; spot contracts in coffee, sesame, beans, maize and wheat; volumes rising from 138,000 tonnes in the first year to 508,000 tonnes in the third, value of USD 1.1 billion in 2011; 55 warehouses in 17 locations (2011), settlement at T+1. ↩
3. “Genève deviendra la capitale de l’Afrique” (Geneva will become the capital of Africa), Bilan, 27 January 2017, which cites Sucafina. ↩
4. Postponement of the application of Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 to 30 December 2026 for large companies and to 30 June 2027 for small ones, decided in November 2025; Deloitte Société d’Avocats, blog.avocats.deloitte.fr, cited above. ↩

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