



**GLOBAL COFFEE
PLATFORM**

for a sustainable coffee world

EQUIVALENCE MECHANISM REVISION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) | November 2022

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of the Equivalence Mechanism?

The Equivalence Mechanism (EM) is a framework developed by GCP to assess whether a sustainability scheme can be considered equivalent to the Coffee Sustainability Reference Code (Coffee SR Code) and a set of Operational Criteria. Sustainability schemes include a range of initiatives and can be public, private and voluntary codes, and standards. Operational Criteria cover aspects around system implementation and include topics like governance, standard-setting, assurance, data and claims. The EM can be used by sustainability schemes and/or supply chain actors for different purposes including: a) to assess their schemes/programs against the Principles and Practices outlined in the Coffee SR Code and Operational Criteria for self-assessment and improvement, b) to objectively demonstrate meeting credibility baselines or/and c) to be eligible for the [GCP's Collective Reporting on Sustainable Coffee Purchases](#). Overall, it supports an increased demand for coffee that is produced following (at least) baseline practices of sustainability and encourages the uptake of these practices in coffee producing countries, especially amongst smallholder farmers. Schemes that meet both the Code and the Operational Criteria are recognized as “equivalent” to the Coffee SR Code by GCP.

2. GCP recently published the Coffee SR Code. What is the difference between the Coffee SR Code and the GCP Equivalence Mechanism and why was a revision of the Equivalence Mechanism needed?

The EM is a framework (tool) developed by GCP to assess equivalency (see previous). The EM assessment covers two sections: sustainability criteria (the Coffee SR Code) and Operational Criteria. **Thus, the Coffee SR Code is a part of the EM.** Following the publication of the revised Coffee SR Code in October 2021, the EM needed to be updated to reflect the changes in the Code.

GCP used the opportunity to review and update the Operational Criteria as well. The last revision of the EM (Version 1.2) in early 2020 highlighted areas that required further refinement to consider the changing sustainability landscape and evolving approaches such as private-led sustainability schemes.

What is the Coffee SR Code? The Coffee SR Code (previously known as the Baseline Coffee Code) is a sector wide reference on the foundations of sustainability in the economic, social and environmental dimensions for green coffee production and primary processing worldwide.

3. How was the Equivalence Mechanism v2.0 developed?

The EM was first launched in 2016 and provided the first global reference point for users of coffee sustainability schemes. The EM 2.0 builds upon the interim version EM 1.2 developed and tested in 2020. The EM revision started in November 2021. Building on the work carried out for the Coffee SR Code revision, the research part included an assessment of relevant sustainability/credibility frameworks. The process has been supported by the GCP Technical Committee and an Advisory Task Force that included actors from all segments in the supply chain as well as NGOs.

The revision included a beta testing exercise and a public consultation. During the beta testing 7 schemes self-assessed themselves against the Coffee SR Code and 6 against the Operational Criteria. Not all the schemes that participated in the beta testing have already been recognized by GCP. A public consultation was carried out from 16 March to 20 April 2022, and the input received plus the discussions with the Technical Committee and Advisory Task Force informed the final version. The final version of the EM was approved by the multistakeholder Board, the highest decision-making body of the Global Coffee Platform in July 2022.

4. What are the main differences between the EM v1.2 and EM v2.0?

This version of the EM (v2.0) includes sections on governance and standard setting that were part of original EM v1.1, but not of EM Version 1.2. All the Operational Criteria were revised for clarity and streamlining. Based on the beta testing and input from schemes, guidance and references were added to facilitate understanding and consistency. The revised EM requires additional information from schemes to be publicly available in line with good practice and stakeholder expectations. The claims about the GCP recognition were revised and the option for schemes based on 1st party assurance models to be recognized was removed. It may be considered for future versions. The references to the Sustainability (performance) Criteria were aligned with the Coffee SR Code.

5. What is the relationship between the Equivalence Mechanism and GCP's Collective Reporting on Sustainable Purchases?

The [GCP Collective Reporting on Sustainable Purchases](#) includes purchases by roasters and retailers under sustainability schemes/programs that are considered equivalent to the Baseline Coffee Code and have been assessed under the EM v1.1 and v1.2. The third edition of this report was published in August 2022 and can be accessed [here](#).

For the GCP Collective Reporting of 2022 volumes, existing recognized schemes will be included, as well as any new schemes which go through the Equivalence Process against EM 2.0 before Feb/March 2023.

From then onwards the report will include only the schemes that have been assessed against the EM 2.0.

6. How relevant is this work if it focuses around baseline/foundation practices and if it does not cover some important elements of sustainability at farm level, or along the supply chain?

Sustainability is not an end point but an evolving concept. The Coffee SR Code and the EM are tools to align on a shared understanding of baseline sustainability and a key opportunity to reach more coffee farmers who are currently not able to access sustainability practices at baseline level. At the same time the Coffee SR Code inspires innovations and investments at farm level and includes the principle of continuous improvement. Therefore, the Coffee SR Code and the EM as well as the Collective Reporting on Sustainable Coffee Purchases are enablers to achieve GCP's 2030 Goal of transformational change for more than 1 million coffee farmers and are complementary to other tools and strategies to drive coffee sustainability forward at scale.

About the implementation of the EM v2.0

1. Is the EM open to assess any schemes or only those of GCP Members?

The EM is open for any scheme in the coffee sector. However, for the re-assessment of existing schemes and assessment of new schemes, schemes from GCP Members will be prioritized. To date, there are 14 sustainability schemes that have been recognized by GCP under the EM 1.1 or 1.2 as equivalent to the Baseline Coffee Code 2nd or 3rd party assurance. For more information on the schemes that are recognized as equivalent to the Code [see this link](#).

2. GCP has already recognized various sustainability schemes as equivalent to the Baseline Coffee Code. Will currently recognized schemes be reassessed against the Coffee SR Code?

Yes, all schemes that to date have been recognized by GCP as equivalent to the Baseline Coffee Code will be required to be reassessed against the revised EM 2.0 within the transition period, to maintain their status of equivalency. This will be a full assessment of schemes against the sustainability criteria included in the Coffee SR Code and the revised Operational Criteria in the EM v2.0. New schemes that are interested going through the Equivalence Process and become recognized by GCP will be assessed against the Equivalence Mechanism 2.0.

3. How long will be the transition period for recognized schemes to be aligned with the EM v2.0?

Schemes that have been recognized by GCP under previous versions of the Equivalence Mechanism have until 2nd November 2023 to align their schemes with the requirements in the EM and to go through the Equivalence Process and re-assess their schemes.

4. When will schemes start to be assessed against the revised Equivalence Mechanism?

After 3rd November 2022, once schemes have aligned their systems with the EM v2.0 they can apply to be considered for recognition. GCP will be working with the United Nations International Trade Centre (ITC), for the assessment of the schemes against the Coffee SR Code and the Operational Criteria included in the EM v2.0. ITC will leverage their deep experience with benchmarking (public and private) and extensive database on sustainability initiatives to carry out the assessment. **GCP** will manage the applications and **will make the final decision** about the recognition of the schemes.

If your company/organization has developed a sustainability scheme that is recognized by GCP under the EM v1.1 or v1.2 or interested in becoming recognized under the EM v2.0, please contact info@globalcoffeeplatform.org for more information.

5. Does a scheme need to go public on the ITC Standards Map to go through the Equivalence Process?

GCP encourages all schemes to go public on the ITC Standards Map as it increases the credibility and transparency of the schemes, important for stakeholders' trust and considering emerging legislation on sustainability reporting. However, it is not at present a pre-requisite. Future reviews of the Equivalence Mechanism may make this a requirement. Scheme Owners always retain ownership of assessment data in the ITC database and can decide at any time if data is public or even retained in the database.

6. Will ITC check documentation by areas or topics or Scheme Owners have to share all the information at the same time?

For efficiencies, schemes should submit all information at the same time. ITC will follow up as needed if case of information missing or clarifications.

7. Will results of schemes assessed against the revised Equivalence Mechanism be publicly available?

The status of recognized schemes will be published, but not the detailed assessments. GCP will not publish information about schemes in process or that have not been successful in the Equivalence Process.

8. When will GCP announce the schemes that successfully go through the Equivalence Process?

Rather than individual announcements, GCP will make two rounds of announcements of schemes that successfully go through Equivalence Process: Feb/March 2023 and Sept/Oct 2023.

9. What are the timelines for schemes to be eligible in the GCP Collective Reporting/Snapshot on Sustainable Coffee Purchases 2022?

- Currently recognized schemes are automatically eligible
- New schemes have until Feb/March 2023 to be assessed and recognized under EM 2.0 to be eligible for this report.