YESS: Yarn Ethically & Sustainably Sourced
Online Supplement for Annex IV: Methodology for Determination of Low-risk and High-risk Countries for the YESS Standard

Emerging-risk Countries

Lack of sufficient and accurate data is a challenge in understanding the nature, scale, and scope of forced labor in cotton production. With that in mind, countries where sources identified forced labor (adult or child), but did not reference at least three of the specific ILO medium or strong indicators listed in the Annex IV methodology, have been assigned an “emerging-risk” designation. These countries are currently included in the “low-risk” category in the YESS standard.

The nature of global cotton production varies greatly by geography, and creating an industry-wide standard, like YESS, requires zooming out to the macro-scale and initially conducting desk research. As the development of the YESS initiative continues, its identification of “high-risk” origins will evolve and become more precise, and the determination of high- and low-risk countries will be reviewed periodically. Emerging risk countries will be particularly scrutinized during the review process, due to their relatively higher potential for forced labor in cotton production.

For definitions of high- and low-risk, please see Definitions of Terms and Acronyms starting on page 4 of the YESS Standard. To view the full Methodology Determination, link here, or refer to Annex IV starting on page 29 of the YESS Standard.

Emerging-risk countries:
- Cameroon
- Kyrgyz Republic
- Syria
- Togo

Emerging-Risk Countries Bibliography

Cameroon
The 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report by the U.S. Department of State highlighted the exploitation of children in Cameroon’s cotton fields. In its Commodity Atlas, Verité lists Cameroon as having forced adult labor in its cotton production. More research is necessary to demonstrate which ILO indicators of forced labor are present in Cameroon’s cotton fields, as well as the methods and scale of the issue.

Sources:
- U.S. State Department. Trafficking in Persons Report. 2018.¹
- Verité. Cotton. 2017.²

Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan)
In Verité’s Commodity Atlas, the Kyrgyz Republic is listed for having forced labor and child labor in cotton production. World Action Vision cited that the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic sanctioned the removal of children from school to go to the cotton fields to harvest. Although, there is some evidence of forced labor in the cotton sector of the Kyrgyz Republic, the specific examples are limited and do not demonstrate sufficient evidence of three or more ILO forced labor indicators. Future research about the scope and scale of its forced labor is necessary.

Sources
- Verité. Cotton. 2017.³

Syria
Reports dating back to 2015 indicate the high proportion (up to 90 percent) of Syria’s cotton production that is owned or regulated by ISIL. Revenue from Syria’s cotton production thus is a key component in the funding of ISIL militarization. Additionally, for its 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report, the U.S. State Department listed Syria in Tier 3, which means Syria “does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so.” Several international brands and companies have pledged not to source Syrian cotton in response to this transition of power to ISIL. Additional research is needed to assess the magnitude of this issue, and to learn whether forced labor plays a role in this “conflict cotton” production. Regardless, this evidence has sparked interest in and demanded attention on this issue, and has warranted Syria being placed on the high-risk list of the YESS Standard under Special Consideration.

Sources:
- Quartz. Keeping ISIL-Produced “Conflict Cotton” Out of Our Closets is Easier Said Than Done. 2015.⁵
- The Times. Isis Takes Over Cotton Crops to Supply the Fashion Industry. 2015.⁶

Togo
Togo’s country narrative in the 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report by the U.S. State Department says “[f]orced child labor occurs in the agricultural sector—particularly on coffee, cocoa, and cotton farms.” Verité lists Togo as having forced adult or child labor in its cotton fields. However, data is limited, and sufficient evidence of three or more ILO indicators in the YESS Standard methodology has yet to be identified. Future research about the scope and scale of its forced labor is necessary.

Sources:
- U.S. State Department. Trafficking in Persons Report. 2018.⁷
- Verité. Cotton. 2017.⁸

Appendix IV
¹https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/282798.pdf
²https://www.verite.org/project/cotton/
³https://www.verite.org/project/cotton/
⁶https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/isis-takes-over-cotton-crops-to-supply-the-fashion-industry-3c3jrczz3dl
⁷https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/282798.pdf
⁸https://www.verite.org/project/cotton/

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