Supplement to the Methodology for Determination of Low-risk and High-risk Countries for the YESS Standard for Spinners:
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 have been assigned an “emerging-risk” designation 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 risk determination methodology. These countries are currently included in the “low-risk” category in the YESS Standard for Spinners.

It should be acknowledged that while forced child labor is mentioned where applicable, child labor by itself is not an indicator used to determine a high-risk of forced labor.

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. In addition, the determination of high- and low-risk countries will be reviewed periodically. Evidence for the indicators must have been published within the past three years of the date the risk-determination occurred (January 2017 to November 2020). 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 for Spinners. To view the full risk-determination methodology, link here, or refer to Annex IV starting on page 29 of the YESS Standard for Spinners.

Emerging-risk Countries:
- Azerbaijan
- Cameroon
- Kyrgyz Republic
- Syria
- Togo
Emerging-risk Countries Bibliography

Azerbaijan
The YESS methodology determines Azerbaijan to be an emerging-risk country, but it needs to be watched closely. The 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report) claims that “civil society and government officials reported no instances of forced labor in the 2019 cotton harvest due to widespread use of affordable harvesting machinery.” However, Azerbaijan is a country transitioning to mechanized agriculture and away from hand-harvested picking, and there are reports that the hand-harvesting continues to include forced labor. Therefore, it will continue to be listed as an emerging-risk country, and will be reevaluated in the future with additional information provided by local NGOs and monitoring groups.

Sources:
- Turan. Increased Yields or Azerbaijani Cotton Relying on Children. 2019
- Osservatorio balcani e caucaso transeuropa. Azerbaijan: white gold, black labour. 28 August 2018.

Cameroon
U.S. government reports state that Cameroonian children labor in cotton fields, and that parents view child labor as a tradition and rite of passage. NGO reports state Cameroon as a destination for forced migrant laborers in cotton fields, though this information comes from older sources, and do not cite evidence of at least three of the ILO indicators listed in the YESS risk determination methodology. No new NGO reports with evidence of forced labor in Cameroon’s cotton sector have been published in the past three years.

Sources:

Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan)
Kyrgyz people are exploited in several countries throughout Asia and Europe for agricultural production. Because of a Russian re-entry ban, migrants are unable to return legally to work. Many send their children to Russia, where they are vulnerable to trafficking. Children in the Kyrgyz Republic are exploited to pick cotton, and law enforcement in agriculture is inadequate. No new NGO reports with evidence of forced labor in Kyrgyzstan’s cotton sector have been published in the past three years. While we do not include child labor in the determination of high-risk as per YESS Methodology standard, Solidarity Center
notably published a report in 2018 finding prevalence of the worst forms of child labor in cotton picking in the Kyrgyz Republic.

**Sources:**
- Solidarity Center. *Child Labor Problem Urgent. Kyrgyz Workers.* 2018.x

**Syria**
Reports dating back to 2015 indicate that a high proportion (up to 90 percent) of Syria’s cotton production 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 2020 *Trafficking in Persons Report,* the U.S. State Department listed Syria in Tier 3, due to child labor in agriculture and exploitation of Syrian refugees abroad in agriculture and other sectors. Several international brands and companies have pledged not to source Syrian cotton in response to this transition of power to ISIL. Since 2015, very little information has been published on this issue, meaning the current scope of the issue is unknown, and needs to be watched closely. No new NGO reports with evidence of forced labor or conflict cotton in Syria’s cotton sector have been published in the past three years.

**Sources:**

**Togo**
According to the 2020 TIP Report, “Traffickers force Togolese children to work in the agricultural sector—particularly on coffee, cocoa, and cotton farms... Observers stated trafficking networks are predominantly community-based and loosely organized by local actors.” Verité lists Togo as having forced adult and child labor in its cotton fields. However, data is limited, and sufficient evidence of three or more ILO indicators per the YESS Standard risk determination methodology have yet to be identified. No new NGO reports with evidence of forced labor in Cameroon’s cotton sector have been published in the past three years.

**Sources:**
Endnotes:

i  https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/azerbaijan/
ii  https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/azerbaijan
iv  https://en.hromadske.ua/posts/the-true-price-of-azerbaijani-cotton?link_id=99&can_id=c012fb00178c3fe81b45b701d3d72a30
vi  https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/cameroon/

vii  https://www.state.gov/reports/2016-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/cameroon/

viii  https://www.verite.org/africa/explore-by-country/cameroon/


x  https://www.solidaritycenter.org/child-labor-problem-urgent-kyrgyzstan-workers/

xi  https://www.verite.org/project/cotton/


xiii  https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/syria/


xvi  https://www.verite.org/project/cotton/