



MITIGATING CHILD LABOUR RISKS IN COTTON:

Action-based collaborative project to investigate child labour issues in upstream cotton supply chains in Turkey

October 2015 - November 2016

INTRODUCTION

In June 2013, an 'Action Plan for Improving Sustainability in the Dutch Textile and Clothing Sector 1.0' was developed collectively by civil society organizations, the Dutch government, and industry representatives to improve the social, structural, ecological and economic conditions in global supply chains. The Working Group on Child Labour established under this Action Plan has launched this pilot project with **the Fair Labor Association and Development Workshop Cooperative** to map, identify and mitigate child labour risks in the Turkish apparel supply chain extending back to cotton farms.

BACKGROUND

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), an estimated 168 million children worldwide are forced to work in places such as mines, factories, and in the agricultural sector, including as cotton pickers. Millions of these children, between 5 and 17 years of age, are engaged in paid or unpaid work, in the home of third parties or employers. The cotton supply chain consists of several interconnected entities, including buyers and formally registered companies that produce directly for the brands (Tier 1) and other raw material suppliers (Tier 2) – while Tier 2 may also include numerous intermediaries

and agents who are not covered by companies' workplace standards (Codes of Conduct) or legal frameworks, increasing the risk of child labour.

INVISIBLE SUPPLY CHAIN

Garment and textile companies based in Europe have limited visibility and knowledge about their upstream supply chain, including in Turkey, which limits their knowledge about how their business operations may be connected to child labour in their supply chains. Although there is already insight on the issue of child labour in the production of cotton, data about the prevalence, incidence, risks of child labour situation in the Turkish garment industry and in ginning, spinning mills and textile mills in particular has never been collected systematically, and therefore specific information is not available. According to TÜİK - Turkish Statistics Institute's 2012 Child Labour Survey, total number of employed children engaged in agricultural sector increased from 36.6 percent (in 2006) to 44.7 percent (399,000 persons). Meanwhile, statistics on child labour in seasonal agricultural work was not sufficiently collected due to unregistered, informal, irregular work. Illegal subcontracting to Tier 2 garment and clothing manufactures, often undisclosed to international buyers, complicates matters further.



CHILD LABOUR IN TURKEY

The agriculture sector in Turkey makes use of a substantial number of seasonal temporary workers. Many Syrian national living in Turkey under temporary protection status work in the cotton-growing areas in the south of Turkey without proper work permits. Seasonal agricultural workers are often locals or from various regions of Turkey and they migrate with their families including their children. The legal minimum working age in Turkey is 14 years; however, assessors reporting on working conditions in farms often report much younger children working alongside their parents. The establishment of 16 as the minimum working age remains highly controversial in Turkey, given that the country has ratified Child Rights Convention (which defines the term “child” as referring to all persons under the age of 18) and ILO Convention 182 (which defines the worst forms of labour that includes seasonal agricultural work in Turkey) and promised to end child labour in seasonal agricultural work by 2015.

The Development Workshop’s field reports show that children in cotton harvest are working an average of more than six days per week, with an average of 11.35 working hours per day. Many end up dropping out of school, become injured or even lose their lives in accidents, while poor living circumstances, heavy or inappropriate working conditions and malnutrition lead to temporary or chronic health problems.

PROJECT GOALS

The main objective of the project is to work collaboratively with the Working Group on Child Labour members and clothing and textile retailers to increase awareness of child labour in garment supply chains, with the goal of mitigating its root causes. The collaborative activities include;

- 1) Engagement with companies (retailers) to map their upstream clothing and cotton supply chain in Turkey;
- 2) Engagement and collaboration with Tier 1 suppliers based in Turkey to map their upstream cotton supply chain including textile, spinning, and ginning mills;
- 3) Introduction of tools and procedures for companies and suppliers to systematically collect information about the presence and risks of child labour in their supply chain;

Project Participating Companies

C&A	PVH
Coolinvestments	Varova Fashion
DPDB	WE
Just Brands	

- 4) Working with companies and Tier 1 suppliers to design child labour risk mitigation strategies;
- 5) Sharing of methodology and project outcomes with stakeholders in a convening in Turkey in 2016;
- 6) Providing timely and periodic updates to the Working Group and other companies; and
- 7) Defining future strategy, including scaling up with the Working Group.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

The project will build a systematic approach to supply chain mapping. Various stakeholders can continue to use the mapping tools independently and implement an action plan that will be jointly developed with local stakeholders. Establishment of new communications channels between international buyers and Turkish suppliers at Tier 1 of the supply chain — as well as between Turkish suppliers at further supply chain tiers — about working conditions and child labour risks in particular, is an intended outcome of this project. Through this project, the companies will see and understand the links between child labour at the upstream tiers with the finished products they source from Turkey. The joint action plan will prioritize remedial action for child labour and identify synergies between the different actors involved, including civil society, government, and international and Turkish companies.

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