

Sustainable Spices Initiative (SSI) Position on Child Labor

What is our position

The Sustainable Spices Initiative (SSI) condemns child labor. We strive to continuously investigate and, if present, eradicate child labor from our members' supply chains. SSI will do everything within its power to help its members comply with their due diligence obligations regarding child labor.

Child labor remains a reality in many countries. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), 125 million children between the ages of 5 – 17 are involved in child labor. It is estimated that 60% of these child labor cases take place in the agricultural sector ¹. The agricultural nature of SSI member products therefore presents a heightened risk of child labor issues in their supply chains. SSI believes that crop-rotation, transient laborers and, in some cases, the proximity of coffee, tea and cashew farming demand for an industry wide – rather than a sector specific – approach.

How should child labor be addressed?

The best way to eliminate child labor is to tackle its root causes, which range from rural poverty and weak law enforcement to traditional gender norms and a lack of access to quality education. It is critical that all actions are tailored to specific contexts, which may range from small, remote family farms living below poverty lines to big plantations using migrant laborers who may bring their children to help with the harvest and earn a bit extra. Organizations on their own cannot solve a challenge of this complexity and scale. Resolving it requires long-term collaboration between different actors - parents, teachers, farmers, governments, NGOs, and businesses – working collectively to ensure that all children grow up in dignity.

The collective approach

The Child Labor Working Group within SSI has taken several steps to move forward. These include.

- Conducting in-depth mapping studies for priority spices in Türkiye, India, and Vietnam.
- Leading discussions on remedial project proposals based on these studies conducted.
- Joining local Child Labor Coalitions with our members, local governments, and civil society organizations.
- Continue to build strong strategic alliances with other actors and other companies to have a broader impact.

Commitment

SSI members are committed to a shared responsibility of eradicating child labor from their supply chains. Therefore,

¹ International Labor Organization, InfoStories, *Child Labour in agriculture*, published in October 2015, Updated in May 2016, <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Child-Labour/Child-Labour-In-Agriculture#introduction>.

over the course of the years, SSI has supported and implemented projects with the goal of tackling child labor in specific geographical areas:

- **Addressing Child labor in Türkiye** – The project aims to eradicate child labor in cumin cultivations in Türkiye by 2025, as well as to help creating basic decent living and working standards for workers in cumin fields. During 2021 and 2022 harvesting seasons, summer schools were created, giving children an alternative opportunity, other than going to work in cumin plantations. The SSI Child Labor Working Group and project partners will engage with local authorities to look for new project and funding opportunities for the next harvesting season.
- **Eradication of Child Labor in Spices Supply Chains in Vietnam and India** – A consortium consisting of companies working in the spices sector took the commitment of eradicating child labor in black pepper plantations in Vietnam and chili in India. After having carried out the impact assessment, the consortium, which now includes SSI, is developing an action plan, with preventive and mitigation measures that will be implemented over the course of the next years. Besides SSI as a group having a leading role in the implementation of the project, some individual SSI members have committed to join the consortium and assist the development and implementation of the action plan.

The SSI Child Labor Working Group is open to new collaborations and to join efforts with other initiatives and associations to address and contribute to solving child labor.

Definitions
SSI definitions of child labor, hazardous work, and minimum age requirements are based on relevant ILO standards, in particular C. 138, Minimum Age Convention and C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention and are as follows:
Child – Human being below the age of 18 years
<p>Child labor</p> <p>Child labor is defined as any work that deprives children of their childhood, their access to education, their potential, and their dignity and that is harmful to physical and mental development, and that exceeds minimum hours depending on the age of child and on the type of work.</p>
<p>Hazardous work</p> <p>Hazardous child labor work is children (anyone under the age of 18) performing work which is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals. This includes 1) work that exposes children to physical, emotional or sexual abuse, 2) work underground, underwater, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces, 3) work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools or work that involves handling of heavy loads, 4) work in unhealthy environments, which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances or temperatures, 5) work under particularly difficult conditions, such as work for long hours or during the night, and 6) work that prevents children from returning home each day.</p>
<p>Permissible work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young workers (15-18 years): persons under 18 years of age but above the legal minimum working age (15), who are engaged in non-hazardous work. • Light work (13-14 years): The ILO Convention (No. 138) allows countries to permit light work for children younger than the minimum age. Light work is generally defined as simple and limited tasks performed under adequate adult supervision, as long as they do not threaten the child’s health and safety, negatively impact their education or vocational orientation and training or threaten their right to play. Light work in this sense can contribute to children’s development and to the wellbeing of their household and is a complementary activity to their education.
<p>Minimum age requirements</p> <p>Minimum age requirements are applied as follows: situations in where a child is working under the legal age to work, as established by the national or local law of that country or is engaged in work that is hazardous or prohibited for all persons under the age of 18.</p>