

Statement by Fairtrade Germany on the Südwind fact sheet "Certified and then everything is good? An update"

Fairtrade takes the allegations published by Südwind seriously. For this reason, as was the case after the first report in September 2021, we have taken two immediate actions:

First, Fairtrade has initiated an independent investigation of the standard violations. Such an investigation had already taken place last year. However, the allegations could not be confirmed by FLOCERT at that time. Secondly, we have also triggered the Fairtrade Protection Policy for Children and Vulnerable Adults, based on the findings. The Fairtrade standards contain clear language prohibiting child labour, forced labour and other exploitation.

In response to the initial investigation from 2021, FLOCERT announced that it would increase its presence for the next harvest season. Therefore, for the harvest season October 2021 to February 2022 FLOCERT increased physical audits on site. A total of four unannounced audits and one announced audit were conducted at the nine cotton producers certified under Contract Production (CP). Due to the pandemic situation some further audits (planned for January and February) could not take place. These were made up during the sowing season in May and June 2022.

To raise awareness of workers' and children's rights in the affected regions, the Fairtrade Network of Asia and Pacific Producers (NAPP) has also developed a new training program in which the affected producer organizations have been actively involved. At the time of the second investigation in December 2021, however, the planned measures could not yet be implemented. The programs initiated by NAPP were only rolled out this year. The first training sessions are expected to be completed by the end of July. For September, Fairtrade is therefore planning an information event on the measures implemented and the producers reached as a result. More information will follow.

Fairtrade is aware of the challenges in cotton production in India, such as low wages of migrant workers and cultural discrimination, and we are continuously working to improve the situation on the ground. Such an improvement is, among other things, linked to a revision of the Fairtrade Standard for Contract Production and cannot be realized within half a year. The revision of the Standard will be put out to tender this year so that it can begin in early 2023.

Unfortunately, no certification system in the world can guarantee that a product is 100 percent free of child labor or exploitation - not even Fairtrade. What Fairtrade can assure, however, is that if we suspect such violations, we will take immediate action to protect the children or vulnerable people involved. For this, it is important that we receive all available information without delay. Only when information is reported in a timely manner to Fairtrade or other NGOs as well as government authorities can affected persons be helped.

As already emphasized in 2021, the root of low wages and child labour in most cases is poverty. This - it must be said so clearly - cannot be eliminated overnight and especially not by Fairtrade alone. Nevertheless, the current study once again shows the urgency that is needed on this issue and that we as Fairtrade Germany will bring to the attention of all stakeholders as well as to the international Fairtrade system.