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ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

1. What is the Global Social Compliance Programme?

The Global Social Compliance Programme is a business-driven programme for the continuous improvement of working and environmental conditions in global supply chains. The GSCP was created by and for global buying companies wanting to work collaboratively on improving the sustainability (ethical, social and environmental) of their often-shared supply base. To this end, these companies do not seek to reinvent the wheel, but instead to harmonize existing efforts to deliver a shared, global and sustainable approach. This will serve the GSCP's ultimate objective: to develop a collaborative approach to remediation by taking the focus off compliance audits and concentrating efforts and resources on capacity building.

The GSCP therefore offers a global platform to promote knowledge exchange and best practices, in order to build comparability and transparency between existing social compliance and environmental compliance systems.

To this effect, the GSCP is developing a set of reference tools and processes that describe best practices and provide a common interpretation of fair labour requirements / good environmental practices and their implementation at supplier level.

The GSCP brings together buying companies throughout the consumer goods industry (textile, electronics, toys, furniture, food, footwear, etc; retailers and manufacturers) and the world, which together drive this work towards convergence.

2. Why is the GSCP needed?

New challenges and diverging responses

Buying companies have responded to the challenges around fair labour and environmental conditions in their supply chains by developing codes of conduct and monitoring systems, either individual or collaborative. However, the number of codes has proliferated (there now exist over 1000 different codes and implementation systems) and approaches by companies and schemes have somewhat diverged. This has led to duplication (with the multiplication of overlapping audits per supplier) and sends a confused message to suppliers and to public authorities as to what is expected in terms of fundamental labour rights and site-specific environmental practices.

Adverse effect

This is causing inefficiency and slowing improvement within the supply chain. Moreover, it is in many cases hindering the application of international labour standards and hence the respect of human and workers' rights, as buying companies and their suppliers suffer from confusion over requirements and a lack of clarity on best practice and accountability – basically not knowing what they have to do, what they can do and how to do it.

Potential for collaboration

The GSCP was born from the understanding that cross-industry collaboration is possible, and essential to truly drive change in this area. There is a need - and an opportunity - for collaborative work to bring about consistency and efficiency and drive remediation to root causes of social and environmental non-compliances through continuous improvement, training and capacity building.

Note from the GSCP Advisory Board, May 2009: *“The GSCP is focused on protecting and improving the social and labour conditions of workers who are engaged in the supply chains of companies who buy products and services in countries where national and local authorities and social partners for various reasons cannot ensure that the principles of decent work are fully applied on all workers.”* [Read the full text here](#)

Note from the Advisory Board, November 2010: *“It is the view of the Advisory Board that if the GSCP succeeds in its mission, with its huge and growing coverage and mass, and a serious commitment by participating retailers and brands and other companies, it can contribute to a genuine paradigm change in global trade.”* [Read the full text here](#)



3. What is the scope of the Programme?

The GSCP is a global cross-industry platform which includes all buying companies, all consumer goods in all geographies. The GSCP is not about individual business practices but about giving the means to buying companies to collaborate with regards to supply chain sustainability management. It is about how these companies (retailers and brands) can work together to ultimately guarantee fair labour conditions and decent environmental practices in their supply chains.

The scope of the Programme encompasses:

- Social and labour practices
- Site-specific environmental practices (not product related)

At all levels of the supply chain

The Programme is neither another monitoring initiative, nor a substitute to existing systems. **The GSCP will not undertake accreditation or certification activities** as it must remain a non-aligned, neutral reference framework.

4. Is there a GSCP certification or accreditation?

No. The GSCP’s aim is to build a neutral overarching framework supporting collaboration, for companies and schemes to work together towards more sustainable supply chains. The GSCP reference tools are not designed as standards, but as references reflecting good social / environmental practice.

The responsibility of the implementation of the GSCP reference tools, of the monitoring of any company’s supply chain’s compliance and of any due diligence linked to it, resides with the company or scheme owner, as the case may be.

5. What is the relationship between the GSCP and the Consumer Goods Forum?

The GSCP is hosted and facilitated by the Consumer Goods Forum (TCGF, formerly CIES – The Food Business Forum), and was launched within the CIES in December 2006. The GSCP has a separate governance structure with an independent Executive Board and Advisory Board. The GSCP Executive Board provides the strategic direction of the Programme and oversees the daily management of the GSCP. Furthermore, GSCP members include both TCGF member companies and other companies.

6. How can I become a GSCP member and what commitments do I have to make?

The GSCP is powered by the buying companies out there who truly understand and value the importance of improving social and environmental conditions throughout their supply chains, and who are committed to acting on it. Joining the Programme does not mean that you have to adopt a new system, and members’ performance in terms of social and environmental responsibility is not monitored.

Membership is open to buying companies in the consumer goods industry, retailers and brand manufacturers, worldwide. Companies do not have to be members of The Consumer Goods Forum to participate in this platform.

Basic requirements

- to commit to the principles and objectives of the programme
- to commit at least one senior executive to participate
- to ensure this person has the resources to actively contribute and participate
- to attend the annual Members’ Meeting and General Meeting
- to ensure relevant internal departments are informed about the programme and its developments
- to share knowledge and actively participate in web-based consultations
- not to use participation in the GSCP and the result of its work for marketing purposes or in order to gain competitive advantage
- to support the GSCP financially, with 12-month fee applicable as below:
 - €10,000 (turnover <€40bn)
 - €17,000 (€40bn-€150bn)
 - €24,000 (>€150bn)

For more information about GSCP membership and to discuss this with the GSCP team, please email us on gscp@theconsumergoodsforum.com

7. What are the benefits of being a GSCP member?

Expert Working Groups

Members can be as active as they wish within the Task Force, with regards to participation in the development of the reference tools for example. They have the opportunity, if they so wish, to nominate themselves, or one of their company's experts, to participate in one or more Expert Working Groups (EWG). This will enable them to share leadership, directly taking part in the definition of best existing practice in the scope of said EWG, and put forth any specific issue for discussion and analysis in this same scope.

Strategic input

As part of the GSCP Task Force, companies can also recommend topics to be tackled within the GSCP framework – for example hotspots such as homeworking, which they may have to deal with in their supply chain, and for which there is an opportunity to define common high level requirements / guidelines.

Access to information and experience

The GSCP offers a forum on remediation through its Member Meetings and General Meetings, where companies can openly discuss key issues of common interest, exchange experiences and learn from each other's practice in the field, and strengthen collaborative approaches.

The GSCP also hosts regular webinars open to Task Force members only. These aim at informing members on existing projects and initiatives which support the continuous improvement of working and environmental conditions in global supply chains. Members also have the opportunity to submit projects or initiatives to be presented through such webinars, allowing the project to gain exposure vis-à-vis other GSCP member companies.

8. How does the GSCP work with existing initiatives?

Harmonising and scaling up existing efforts

The GSCP seeks to promote harmonisation by building on what has already been achieved. The Programme offers a neutral and inclusive global platform for businesses, initiatives and other stakeholders where differences can be aired, discussed and reconciled in order to foster convergence and move towards remediation. In the same way, the GSCP will work with existing initiatives on scaling-up efforts, in remediation and capacity building notably, where relevant.

Consultations

The GSCP also involves initiatives in the reference tool development process through the consultations led by its Expert Working Groups. Initiatives can also be called upon to provide their knowledge and experience in the context of a given Expert Working Group's project – where the project in question touches to one of their areas of expertise.

General Meetings

Finally, initiatives are invited to participate in the GSCP General Meetings held annually for its members, other interested companies and stakeholders.

9. I already am a member of an initiative or a scheme – are there benefits to also joining the GSCP?

Most of the GSCP member companies are actively involved in one or more existing initiatives. They bring to the Programme the expertise and perspective of the initiatives they belong to. This gives the initiatives in question a first-hand voice in the Programme and in the definition of high level guidance and tools, which the initiatives themselves may implement or use to benchmark their own tools and system.

This relationship also provides the GSCP and the initiatives with a constant stream of information on the projects undertaken and the issues tackled by each party at any time – ensuring that duplication is avoided and collaboration looked at instead (between the initiatives and the GSCP, but also between the diverse initiatives themselves).

Such cross-membership is therefore a powerful tool to assist sustainable sourcing efforts and programmes in moving away from working in silos, a pattern which naturally came into being as different, unlinked entities sought to find and implement their own solutions at different times and paces.

Now that corporate responsibility has become a priority for a vast majority of buying companies, it is time to foster convergence – this is where cross-membership with the GSCP can play an essential role.



10. How does the GSCP involve civil society stakeholders?

GSCP Advisory Board

The GSCP involves civil society stakeholders firstly through its Advisory Board. The Advisory Board is composed of influential and knowledgeable experts drawn from a broad and balanced variety of civil society international stakeholders such as NGOs, IOs, Trade Unions, Academics, SRIs etc. Each member of the Advisory Board contributes to the Programme within her or his respective field of competence.

The Advisory Board's role is to advise and challenge the Executive Board on the strategy, direction of the Programme and best practice for each step of the working plan. Moreover, it helps monitor and evaluate progress.

[More on the GSCP Advisory Board here](#)

Note from the Advisory Board, May 2009: *“the members of the Advisory Board, representing stakeholders, have a full oversight of and influence on all issues and activities related to the standards and their implementation.”* [Read the full text here](#)

Consultations and General Meetings

Other representatives of civil society are continuously involved in the GSCP's work through consultations on the GSCP reference tools and guidelines, and participation in the GSCP annual meetings. This gives these actors the opportunity to provide input on the programme's direction, recommend areas and topics to be addressed and generally to be included in the GSCP forum with companies, schemes, initiatives and other stakeholders.

THE REFERENCE TOOLS AND PROCESSES

11. Why is there a need for reference tools?

Why is there a need to develop a shared set of reference tools as a preamble to training, capacity building and development of management systems?

Compliance auditing

Part of the reason why suppliers do not concentrate enough on improving working and environmental conditions is that they spend a lot of time trying to 'pass' audits – with different requirements imposed on them by each company they are supplying.

There's been a long-standing discussion that now recognises that such audits only prove momentary compliance and do not drive change when used in isolation. They remain an important tool that however provides inconsistent outcomes at present.

Need for commonly accepted requirements

There is a need to define a common understanding of social and environmental requirements, and how they can be implemented by suppliers before tackling training and capacity building. It is necessary to provide a solid foundation to guarantee effective remediation and sustainability in change; this is the role of the GSCP reference tools.

If buying companies can agree on which social and environmental conditions should be required from their suppliers, they will ultimately be able to share audit-related data and results, thus reducing the number of audits performed every year at any one employment site. The supplier will therefore be able to focus on one comprehensive list of non-compliances observed and, with the support of their clients (in time and resources), remediate the root causes of these non-compliances. This will concurrently allow suppliers and their clients to move away from auditing and compliance, and focus on building capacity, developing supplier-owned solutions, knowledge and skills.

12. How are the tools developed?

The GSCP follows a 6-step working plan, complemented by the development of an Equivalence Process (see Q9: the reference tools). Each step of the working plan and complementary project is managed by an Expert Working Group composed of experts from Task Force member companies.

[Click here](#) for information on the step-by-step methodology followed by each EWG, and on the review process led by the GSCP after publication of each reference tool.



13. What are the different GSCP tools and what are their objectives?

The GSCP working plan represents a staged approach with 6 distinct steps, which among others include the development of 4 sets of reference tools. Where relevant the reference tools are accompanied by guidelines for implementation.

Please follow the links below for details and an updated development status for each tool and project. You can also access all the reference tools and guidelines published to date on every page of the website.

Step 1 - Reference Code: common interpretation of working requirements and their implementation (social)

Step 2 – reference tools on Audit Process & Methodology: gathers best practice for each step of the social audit process in order to bring consistency to the way audits are prepared, led and followed-up (social)

Step 3 – reference tool for Auditing Competence: the requirements that define a reliable and appropriate level of competence for organisations and individuals undertaking audits in relation to social compliance and environmental compliance

Step 4 – Companies’ and Schemes’ Management Systems: looks at where a social compliance / environmental compliance programme sits within a buying company or scheme: the structure provided, resources allotted, hierarchy involved, communication processes in place etc.

The Environmental Module: module for the integration of basic site-specific environmental requirements within the GSCP framework (steps 1 to 4)



14. How can I use the reference tools?

To drive convergence, the GSCP is building a set of reference tools describing best practice, and providing the basic documents found in a classical monitoring system. For information on these tools please see Q12.

These tools are openly available (www.gscpnet.com) and can voluntarily either be:

- integrated by companies or schemes into their respective systems; or
- used by companies or schemes as a reference against which to compare their existing tools through the GSCP Equivalence Process

In both cases, the responsibility of the implementation of these tools, of the monitoring of the company’s supply chain’s compliance and of any due diligence linked to it, resides with the company or scheme owner, as the case may be.

15. How will the GSCP facilitate the transfer of sustainability data?

Step 5 of the GSCP working plan looks at Data Sharing. This step aims at developing protocols for data and information sharing starting with a careful analysis of existing best practices. This step does not aim at developing another database but rather at enabling existing data sharing platforms to communicate, hence reducing duplication and improving transparency. This will allow for best use of the information sourced through monitoring, and to support improvements in remediation through data mining.

Objectives:

- improve transparency
- gain better and wider market knowledge
- facilitate better planning and remediation
- develop protocols for data ownership and sharing

16. What is the GSCP Equivalence Process?

The GSCP Equivalence Process aims at driving convergence by allowing for more comparability, transparency and trust between existing systems and schemes, using the GSCP reference tools as a benchmark. The Equivalence Process includes 2 tools:

(1) **Self-Assessment:** the companies / schemes assess their internal tools, systems and methodology – point by point check against each GSCP reference tool. *Objective: to understand what needs to be reviewed to reach best practice.*

(2) **Equivalence Assessment:** An independent panel of experts validates the Self-Assessment. *Objective: the companies / schemes can exchange their Equivalence Assessments. It allows transparency, comparability and trust.*

What can the Equivalence Process be used for?

Objectives:

- to build comparability and transparency between existing systems while allowing them to maintain their specificities
- to allow interested parties to trust each other's audit reports with a view to drive out duplication in auditing
- to contribute to the definition and delivery of a clear and consistent message towards global suppliers based on best practice
- to support continuous improvement of existing practices towards best practice

Potential users of the Equivalence Process:

- buying companies
- suppliers
- schemes
- business initiatives
- auditing bodies and certification bodies
- NGOs that have their own standards & can perform audits
- public authorities

Examples of use by buying companies:

- assess internal tools & processes against one or more GSCP reference tools
- drive internal alignment: ensure internal processes are up to standard and that all business units follow a global approach

- compare internal tools with business partners' (suppliers, customers) and peers' codes, processes & tools
- assess service providers (auditing bodies) and schemes not yet used or recognised

17. I already use a collaborative system – why and how should I make use of the GSCP tools?

The GSCP reference tools can be taken by any company and integrated into its compliance system as they are. This obviously is particularly interesting for companies starting out in social and / or environmental compliance, or broadening their scope (e.g. adding the social dimension to an environment-focussed programme). However the GSCP reference tools can also be used by companies which already have an established compliance programme in place and the necessary tools to implement it. Here the company can use the openly available GSCP reference tools to see how its own tools compare to best practice, through the use of the Equivalence Process.

For example if a company already has a Supplier Code of Conduct in place (Code X), the GSCP Reference Code can be used to verify that Code X covers all the provisions required to achieve best practice. This is done by benchmarking Code X to the Reference Code through the Equivalence Process.

This comparison can be undertaken against each of the GSCP reference tools.

The aim is to improve transparency between all the different systems out there: if we have the possibility to benchmark each one to the same reference, we will be able to understand where the differences lie between each system, and little by little converge towards best practice.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO REMEDIATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

18. How is the GSCP working towards remediation and capacity building?

Preliminary work

The GSCP has gone through several phases since its inception in 2007: first a structural building phase of the Programme followed by the progressive unrolling of the

GSCP's working plan with the development of the reference tools and of the Equivalence Process.

These two phases are providing the foundation to achieve the GSCP's main goal: to work on remediation of root causes to social and environmental non-compliances in the supply chain. Having built convergence where possible, and having promoted understanding and transfer of information, buying companies will then be better placed to work collaboratively on remediation of non-compliances and improvement of working and environmental conditions. Differences in remediation methods will in turn need to be discussed and understood.

Forum on remediation

The GSCP already offers a forum on remediation in the form of its annual General Meetings, which allow businesses and stakeholders to exchange on best practices, experiences and learnings from remediation methods applied in their individual systems.

Objectives of the GSCP forum on remediation (General Meetings and webinars)

- build relevant tools
- openly discuss issues of common interest
- exchange experiences and learn from each other's practice in the field
- strengthen collaborative approaches

Collaborative approach to remediation

The GSCP is also working on fostering a collaborative approach to remediation. This is done first through the application by buying companies of the requirements embedded in the GSCP reference tools: the development and adoption of a common language and common tools by all buying companies will allow the delivery of one common message to suppliers, giving the latter the means and support to develop the necessary solutions to improve their systems. This in itself will generate improvement of working and environmental conditions at supplier level.

GSCP member companies will further the collaborative approach by working together on capacity building projects, in collaboration with their suppliers and other organisations on the ground (initiatives, NGOs, governments etc).

Topic-driven Expert Working Groups on remediation / capacity building issues

The GSCP is now working on the inception of topic-driven Expert Working Groups, which will examine particular social or environmental hotspots and develop tools or guidelines on – for example – how to best deal with particular employment situations such as homeworking, seasonal or migrant labour etc; or how to best accompany the implementation of change within their suppliers' structure.

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