



Questions and answers on our audit schemes and processes

Our experts have answered key questions regarding our audit schemes according to international standards and the audit processes in a FAQ. Would you like to learn more?

Contact us!

1. HOW MUCH EFFORT DOES IT TAKE TO AUDIT AN ENTIRE SUPPLY CHAIN?

The complexity of the schemes – in other words, the checklists – depends on the company and the standard we use, such as amfori BSCI (Business Social Compliance Initiative) or SMETA (Sedex Members' Ethical Trade Audit). In general, most of the social standards are much more detailed than ISO standards.

Our auditors have to precisely fill out questionnaires, investigate many specific points, conduct interviews, carry out research and do cross-checking. The effort required for this process also depends on the company's branch, size and individual priorities. When our experts audit large companies they work as a team. An audit usually lasts several days.

2. WHAT IS AMFORI BSCI?

The abbreviation BSCI stands for Business Social Compliance Initiative. It was established in 2003 by the Foreign Trade Association (FTA, renamed amfori in 2018). The amfori BSCI members have developed the amfori BSCI Code of Conduct, whose provisions are based, among other things, on the standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the UN Charter of Human Rights and national laws and regulations.

Through membership in the amfori BSCI, companies commit themselves to acknowledging the provisions of the Code of Conduct in their corporate environment and to implementing them in their corporate policy with suitable measures. Suppliers must also ensure that sub-contractors adhere to the amfori BSCI Code of Conduct. Compliance with the Code of Conduct is supervised through audits by independent auditing firms.

3. WHAT IS SEDEX?

The acronym SEDEX stands for Supplier Ethical Data Exchange. With a not-for-profit membership in this organisation companies commit to the continuous improvement of ethical performance within their supply chains. Founded in 2011 by a group of UK retailers, the organisation drives convergence in social audit standards and monitoring practices. This engagement aims to ease the auditing burden on suppliers through the sharing of reports and to develop improvements in supply chain standards.

The Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA) was created for this purpose. The audit was developed in response to member demand for an ethical audit report that could be shared more easily. SMETA is designed to reduce or avoid duplication of effort in ethical trade auditing, benefitting retailers, consumer brands, and their suppliers.

4. HOW DO COMPANIES FIND OUT WHERE TO IMPROVE?

If a company becomes a member of an initiative such as amfori BSCI, it can compare its own supplier chain with the amfori BSCI database. That way it can find out which of its suppliers have not yet been audited. And that is how companies can know where there is still room for improvement in terms of HSE (Health Safety Environment) and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility).

TÜV Rheinland's auditors check the status of the suppliers by means of a questionnaire that can be based on the customer's specific standards or international ones. That is how we create comparability. Our auditors know from experience how to organize investigations to monitor these factors. In addition, the audits can be individually expanded, for example by conducting an environmental audit in parallel with the social audit.

5. WHAT IS A CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN?

After an audit, our auditors work together with the customer to create a corrective action plan. This plan specifies which deviations from the standard must be corrected by when, as well as the date when a follow-up audit should be conducted. A corrective action plan is usually formulated on the very same day as the audit. We check for compliance again in our follow-up audits.

6. WHICH TYPICAL PROBLEMS CAN A SUPPLY CHAIN AUDIT DISCLOSE?

The biggest problem is the verifiability of working times. It is followed by HSE (Health Safety Environment) deficiencies, not only regarding the buildings but also in the handling of equipment such as sewing machines and safe work clothing. Discrimination exists especially in the textile industry, in which women make up about 80 percent of the workforce. And in many companies there is no empowerment of the employees. As a result, the employees do not dare to express suggestions for improvement or express criticism that would actually be useful for the company. Our auditors investigate these aspects as well and discover where the company can improve.

6. WHY SHOULD COMPANIES COMMISSION TÜV RHEINLAND TO CONDUCT AUDITS?

Our auditors continuously update their skills, operate all over the world, and share their experiences every year. They are authorized to audit according to all of the current international social standards, and they can also conduct audits focussing on other areas during an appointment with the customer – for example, environmental protection or the handling of chemicals. That saves time and money. We can demonstrate that our auditors in the social audit sector, which has existed for 20 years, have ten years of experience on average. That makes them the most experienced auditors in the sector.

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