

# BSCI Code of Conduct

The present **BSCI Code of Conduct version 1/2014** aims at setting up the values and principles that the BSCI Participants strive to implement in their supply chains. It was approved by the Foreign Trade Association (**FTA**) Board on 28 November 2013 and overrules the BSCI Code of Conduct version 2009 in all its translations. The present BSCI Code of Conduct consists of three major sections of information: a) Preamble, Interpretation, Our Values and Implementation, which apply to all Business Enterprises; b) Principles, which address more specifically the BSCI Participants' Business Partners and c) BSCI Terms of Implementation, BSCI Reference and BSCI Glossary, which are integral parts of the Code and provide more detailed information on interpretation and implementation of the BSCI.

The BSCI Code of Conduct version 1/2014 enters into force on 1 January 2014. The English version of this document is the legally binding one.

## I. Preamble

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The Business Social Compliance Initiative (**BSCI**) was launched by the Foreign Trade Association **FTA**, acknowledging that international trade is an essential vehicle for human prosperity and social economic growth.

This code of conduct (the **BSCI Code of Conduct**) is a set of principles and values that reflect the beliefs of BSCI Participants and the expectations they have towards their business partners.

The BSCI Code of Conduct refers to international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Children's Rights and Business Principles, UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights, OECD Guidelines, UN Global Compact and International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and Recommendations relevant to improve working conditions in the supply chain.

Business enterprises that endorse the BSCI Code of Conduct are committed to the principles set out in this document and to meeting, within their sphere of influence, their responsibility to respect human rights.

BSCI and its participants (**BSCI Participants**) pursue a constructive and open dialogue among business partners and stakeholders in order to reinforce the principles of socially responsible business. Furthermore, they see the building up of mature industrial relations between workers and management as being key for sustainable businesses.

## II. Interpretation

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In the BSCI Code of Conduct, the terms “business enterprises” cover both BSCI Participants and their Business Partners in the supply chain, particularly Producers.

The appendices referred to at the end of the BSCI Code of Conduct (Terms of Implementation, BSCI References and BSCI Glossary) form an integral part of the BSCI Code of Conduct. The BSCI Code is to be read and interpreted in combination with them.

Every business enterprise has different Terms of Implementation to adhere to, depending on their role in the supply chain and on whether or not they are going to be monitored within the BSCI.

## III. Our Values

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By endorsing the BSCI Code of Conduct and communicating it to their supply chain, BSCI Participants are guided by the following values:

- **Continuous improvement:** BSCI Participants undertake to implement the BSCI Code of Conduct in a step-by-step development approach. BSCI Participants expect their business partners to ensure the continuous improvement of working conditions within their organisations.
- **Cooperation:** By working together and taking a common approach, BSCI Participants will have a greater impact on, and better chance of improving working conditions in their supply chains. The value of cooperation is equally important in the relationship with the business partners in the supply chain, particularly those that need support in order to improve.  
Likewise, the spirit of cooperation is also critical in the relationship between business and affected stakeholders at different levels.
- **Empowerment:** A central aim for the BSCI is to empower BSCI Participants and their business partners, particularly in the case of producers who will be monitored, to develop their supply chains in a way that respects human and labour rights as well as to provide business units in the supply chain with the tools needed to improve working conditions in a sustainable manner. The development of internal management systems plays a critical role in bringing BSCI principles to the heart of business enterprises' culture.

## IV. Implementation

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The principles set out in the BSCI Code of Conduct represent the **aspirational goals and minimum expectations** that BSCI Participants have with regard to their supply chains' social conduct.

Even though the aspirations will remain unchanged, the minimum expectations of the BSCI Code of Conduct, which are translated into verifiable social standards, may change in line with changes in society.

**BSCI Participants commit to use reasonable endeavors to achieve the goals set out in the BSCI Code of Conduct.** While they cannot guarantee full observance of all their business partners at all times, BSCI Participants commit to take reasonable measures to abide by the principles of the BSCI Code of Conduct, particularly in those regions and or sectors where higher risks of non-observance of the BSCI Code of Conduct exist. Needless to say, full observance is a process that takes considerable time, resources and effort; and gaps, shortcomings, failures and unpredictable occurrences will always remain a possibility. Nonetheless, BSCI Participants commit strongly to the early detection, monitoring and remediation of all such failures **in their supply chains** and remain open to constructive engagement with stakeholders who are genuinely concerned with social compliance.

## Code Observance

Obeying domestic laws is the first obligation of business enterprises. In countries where domestic laws and regulations are in conflict with, or set a different standard of protection than the BSCI Code of Conduct, business enterprises should seek ways to abide by the principles that provide the highest protection to the workers and environment.

## Supply Chain Management and Cascade Effect

BSCI Participants acknowledge their capacity to influence social changes in their supply chains through their purchasing activities. They manage their relationships with all business partners in a responsible way and expect the same in return.

This requires a co-operative approach where every business enterprise, (a) involves its respective business partners; (b) takes all reasonable and appropriate measures in its sphere of influence, needed to implement the BSCI Code of Conduct and (c) exchanges information to timely identify any challenge that requires mitigation.

BSCI Participants and their business partners strive to further detail the root causes of any such adverse impact in human rights, particularly when sourcing from high-risk regions or sectors. So as to embed this responsibility, business enterprises should act with due diligence and develop the necessary management systems, policies and processes to a reasonable extent as well as effectively prevent and address any adverse human rights impacts that may be detected in the supply chain.

For producers that will be monitored, internal management systems are particularly encouraged as an effective way to embed the BSCI Code of Conduct in their business practices.

Terminating a business relationship or an individual contract with a business partner because of a struggle to implement the BSCI Code of Conduct is considered a last resort. However, it may be necessary to terminate a business relationship or individual contract if the business partner fails to act in a manner consistent with the principles set out in the BSCI Code of

Conduct, and/or when the business partner is unwilling to undertake the measures needed to fulfill any of the obligations set out in and/or inherent to the BSCI Code of Conduct.

## **Workers Involvement and Protection**

Business enterprises should establish good management practices that involve workers and their representatives in sound information exchange on workplace issues, and allow for appropriate measures for protecting workers in line with the aspirations of the BSCI Code of Conduct. Business enterprises should take specific steps to make workers aware of their rights and responsibilities.

In addition, business enterprises are required to build sufficient competence among employers, managers, workers and workers representatives in order to embed these practices in the business operation successfully. Continuous education and training at each level of work is essential, particularly with regard to Occupational Health and Safety.

Business enterprises should establish or participate in effective operational-level grievance mechanisms for individuals and communities who may be adversely impacted. Even where judicial systems are effective and well-resourced, grievance mechanisms may offer particular advantages such as speed of access and remediation, reduced costs and transnational reach.

## **V. Principles**

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BSCI Participants expect all their business partners to observe the BSCI Code of Conduct. Furthermore, any business partners that are monitored against the principles below are to show evidence that they take (a) all necessary measures to ensure their own observance of the BSCI Code of Conduct and (b) reasonable measures to ensure that all of their business partners involved in the production process(es) observe the BSCI Code of Conduct.

### **The rights of Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

Business partners shall: (a) respect the right of workers to form unions in a free and democratic way; (b) not discriminate against workers because of trade union membership and (c) respect workers' right to bargain collectively.

Business partners shall not prevent workers' representatives from having access to workers in the workplace or from interacting with them.

When operating in countries where trade union activity is unlawful or where free and democratic trade union activity is not allowed, business partners shall respect this principle by allowing workers to freely elect their own representatives with whom the company can enter into dialogue about workplace issues.

## No Discrimination

Business partners shall not discriminate, exclude or have a certain preference for persons on the basis of gender, age, religion, race, caste, birth, social background, disability, ethnic and national origin, nationality, membership in unions or any other legitimated organisations, political affiliation or opinions, sexual orientation, family responsibilities, marital status, diseases or any other condition that could give rise to discrimination. In particular, workers shall not be harassed or disciplined on any of the grounds listed above.

## Fair Remuneration

Business partners observe this principle when they respect the right of the workers to receive fair remuneration that is sufficient to provide them with a decent living for themselves and their families, as well as the social benefits legally granted, without prejudice to the specific expectations set out hereunder.

Business partners shall comply, as a minimum, with wages mandated by governments' minimum wage legislation, or industry standards approved on the basis of collective bargaining, whichever is higher.

Wages are to be paid in a timely manner, regularly, and fully in legal tender. Partial payment in the form of allowance "in kind" is accepted in line with ILO specifications. The level of wages is to reflect the skills and education of workers and shall refer to regular working hours.

Deductions will be permitted only under the conditions and to the extent prescribed by law or fixed by collective agreement.

## Decent Working Hours

Business partners observe this principle when they ensure that workers are not required to work more than 48 regular hours per week, without prejudice to the specific expectations set out hereunder. However, the BSCI recognizes the exceptions specified by the ILO.

Applicable national laws, industry benchmark standards or collective agreements are to be interpreted within the international framework set out by the ILO.

In exceptional cases defined by the ILO, the limit of hours of work prescribed above may be exceeded, in which case overtime is permitted.

The use of overtime is meant to be exceptional, voluntary, paid at a premium rate of not less than one and one-quarter times the regular rate and shall not represent a significantly higher likelihood of occupational hazards. Furthermore, Business Partners shall grant their workers with the right to resting breaks in every working day and the right to at least one day off in every seven days, unless exceptions defined by collective agreements apply.

## Occupational Health and Safety

Business partners observe this principle when they respect the right to healthy working and living conditions of workers and local communities, without prejudice to the specific expectations set out hereunder. Vulnerable individuals such as - but not limited to - young workers, new and expecting mothers and persons with disabilities, shall receive special protection.

Business partners shall comply with occupational health and safety regulations, or with international standards where domestic legislation is weak or poorly enforced.

The active co-operation between management and workers, and/or their representatives is essential in order to develop and implement systems towards ensuring a safe and healthy work environment. This may be achieved through the establishment of Occupational Health and Safety Committees.

Business partners shall ensure that there are systems in place to detect, assess, avoid and respond to potential threats to the health and safety of workers. They shall take effective measures to prevent workers from having accidents, injuries or illnesses, arising from, associated with, or occurring during work. These measures should aim at minimizing so far as is reasonable the causes of hazards inherent within the workplace.

Business partners will seek improving workers protection in case of accident including through compulsory insurance schemes.

Business partners shall take all appropriate measures within their sphere of influence, to see to the stability and safety of the equipment and buildings they use, including residential facilities to workers when these are provided by the employer as well as to protect against any foreseeable emergency. Business partners shall respect the workers' right to exit the premises from imminent danger without seeking permission.

Business partners shall ensure adequate occupational medical assistance and related facilities.

Business partners shall ensure access to drinking water, safe and clean eating and resting areas as well as clean and safe cooking and food storage areas. Furthermore, business partners shall always provide effective Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to all workers free of charge.

## No Child Labour

Business partners observe this principle when they do not employ directly or indirectly, children below the minimum age of completion of compulsory schooling as defined by law, which shall not be less than 15 years, unless the exceptions recognised by the ILO apply.

Business partners must establish robust age-verification mechanisms as part of the recruitment process, which may not be in any way degrading or disrespectful to the worker. This principle aims to protect children from any form of exploitation. Special care is to be taken on the occasion of the dismissal of children, as they can move into more hazardous employment, such as prostitution or drug trafficking. In removing children from the workplace, business partners should identify in a proactive manner, measures to ensure the protection of

affected children. When appropriate, they shall pursue the possibility to provide decent work for adult household members of the affected children's family.

## **Special Protection for Young Workers**

Business partners observe this principle when they ensure that young persons do not work at night and that they are protected against conditions of work which are prejudicial to their health, safety, morals and development, without prejudice to the specific expectations set out in this principle.

Where young workers are employed, business partners should ensure that (a) the kind of work is not likely to be harmful to their health or development; (b) their working hours do not prejudice their attendance at school, their participation in vocational orientation approved by the competent authority or their capacity to benefit from training or instruction programs.

Business partners shall set the necessary mechanisms to prevent, identify and mitigate harm to young workers; with special attention to the access young workers shall have to effective grievance mechanisms and to Occupational Health and Safety trainings schemes and programmes.

## **No Precarious Employment**

Business partners observe this principle when, without prejudice to the specific expectations set out in this chapter, (a) they ensure that their employment relationships do not cause insecurity and social or economic vulnerability for their workers; (b) work is performed on the basis of a recognised and documented employment relationship, established in compliance with national legislation, custom or practice and international labour standards, whichever provides greater protection.

Before entering into employment, business partners are to provide workers with understandable information about their rights, responsibilities and employment conditions, including working hours, remuneration and terms of payment.

Business partners should aim at providing decent working conditions that also support workers, both women and men, in their roles as parents or caregivers, especially with regard to migrant and seasonal workers whose children may be left in the migrants' home towns.

Business partners shall not use employment arrangements in a way that deliberately does not correspond to the genuine purpose of the law. This includes - but is not limited to - (a) apprenticeship schemes where there is no intent to impart skills or provide regular employment, (b) seasonality or contingency work when used to undermine workers' protection, and (c) labour-only contracting. Furthermore, the use of sub-contracting may not serve to undermine the rights of workers.

## No Bonded Labour

Business partners shall not engage in any form of servitude, forced, bonded, indentured, trafficked or non-voluntary labour.

Business partners will risk allegations of complicity if they benefit from the use of such forms of labour by their business partners.

Business partners shall act with special diligence when engaging and recruiting migrant workers both directly and indirectly.

Business partners shall allow their workers the right to leave work and freely terminate their employment provided that workers give reasonable notice to the employer.

Business partners shall ensure that workers are not subject to inhumane or degrading treatment, corporal punishment, mental or physical coercion and/or verbal abuse.

All disciplinary procedures must be established in writing, and are to be explained verbally to workers in clear and understandable terms.

## Protection of the Environment

Business partners observe this principle when they take the necessary measures to avoid environmental degradation, without prejudice to the specific expectations set out in this chapter.

Business partners should assess significant environmental impact of operations, and establish effective policies and procedures that reflect their environmental responsibility. They will see to implement adequate measures to prevent or minimise adverse effects on the community, natural resources and the overall environment.

## Ethical Business Behaviour

Business partners observe this principle when, and without prejudice to the goals and expectations set out in this chapter, they are not involved in **any act of corruption**, extortion or embezzlement, nor in any form of bribery - including but not limited to - the promising, offering, giving or accepting of any improper monetary or other incentive.

Business partners are expected to keep accurate information regarding their activities, **structure and performance**, and should disclose these in accordance with applicable regulations and industry benchmark practices.

Business partners should neither participate in falsifying such information, nor in any act of misrepresentation in the supply chain.

Furthermore, they should collect, use and otherwise process personal information (including that from workers, business partners, customers and consumers in their sphere of influence) with reasonable care. The collection, use and other processing of personal information is to comply with privacy and information security laws and regulatory requirements.



## VI. Appendices

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1. Terms of Implementation
2. BSCI Reference: Compilation of International Standards relevant for the implementation of the Code such as ILO Conventions and Recommendations.
3. BSCI Glossary

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**The Business Social Compliance Initiative is a leading business-driven initiative for companies committed to improving working conditions in factories and farms worldwide. We unite more than 1000 companies around a development-oriented system applicable to all sectors and sourcing countries.**

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