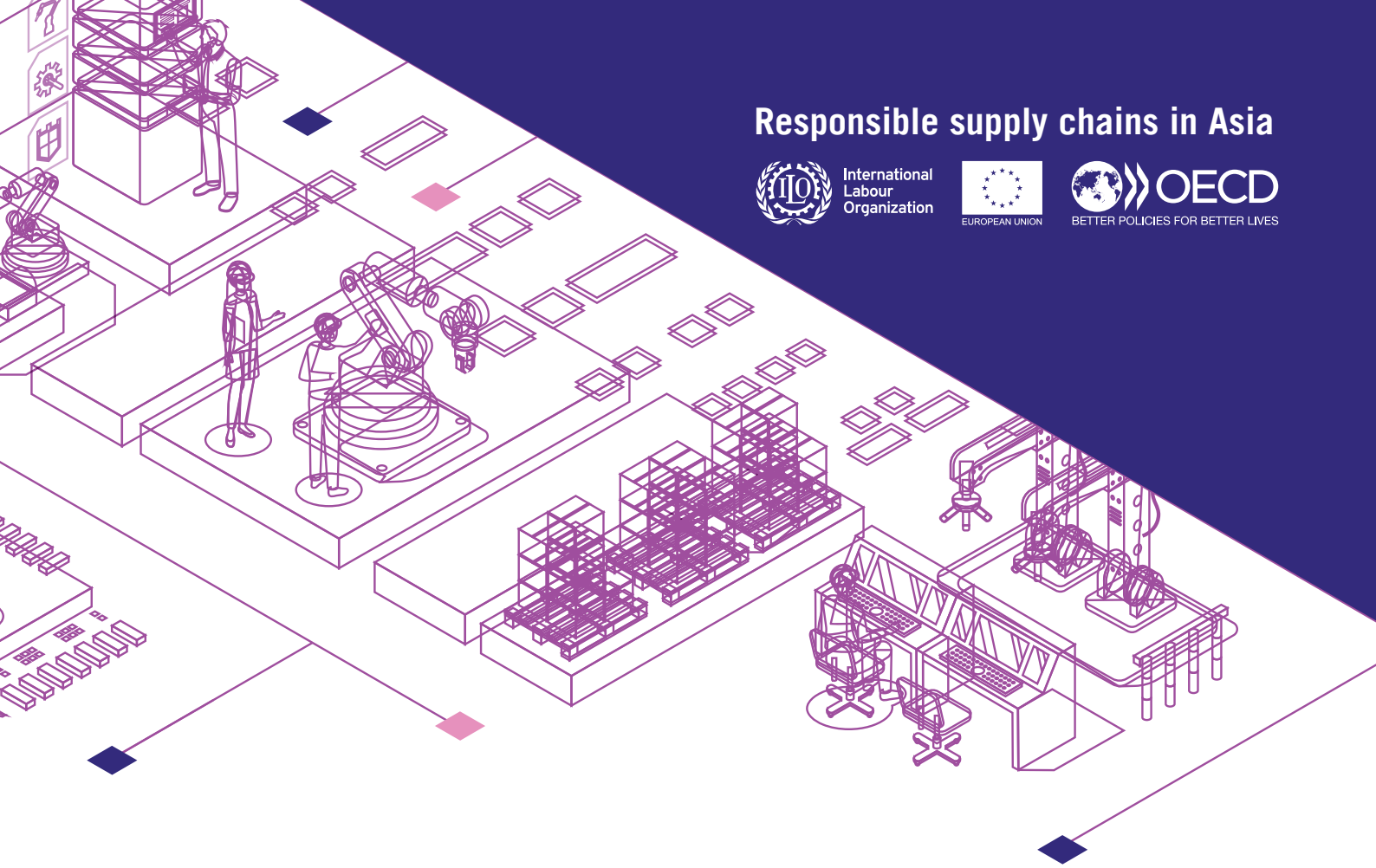
Responsible supply chains in Asia

International Labour Organization

EUROPEAN UNION

OECD
BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES



Responsible business conduct in Japan electronics supply chains

Global decent work challenges in the sector

The electronics industry is one of the largest industrial sectors in the global economy. Traditionally dominated by vertically integrated firms, the electronics sector moved towards modular industry structures sometime in the 1980s, as the components required to produce electronic goods became more standardized. Under a modular production, assembly operations can easily be separated from technology development, and basic, high-volume components can easily be substituted. This substitutability narrows profit margins in the manufacturing segments and has led to a high degree of offshoring and outsourcing throughout the value chain, as firms seek to lower costs (Duke CGGC 2016). Similarly, as the need for the lead firm to tightly control and coordinate their supply chains decreased, the relationships between market actors changed from hierarchy to modular governance.

The electronics industry is comprised of three main groups of actors: lead firms; tier 1 suppliers and contract manufacturers; and component suppliers. Lead firms globally outsource non-core activities to contract manufacturers and specialize in their core competencies (e.g., product development, consumer research, branding, and marketing), which are also the most profitable segments of the chain. Most lead firms in the electronics industry are located in developed economies, especially Europe, Japan and the United States.

Lower value-added production activities are outsourced and offshored to global subsidiaries and contract manufacturers, mainly in developing economies. Contract manufacturers produce for

different lead firms. They manage vast supply chains through the purchase and sourcing of parts and components from a large group of component suppliers. Electronics devices are typically composed of hundreds of thousands of components, and these components in turn may consist of countless parts. Complex elements of the electronics goods may be produced in countries where highly specialized hubs are located but most of the manufacturing and assembling takes place in low-cost, labour-intensive production sites in developing countries (Martin-Ortega 2018). In the ASEAN region, the labour-intensive production activities are concentrated in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. These countries manufacture electrical products such as wires, cables, switchgear and transformers, and perform tasks such as assembly and testing of electronic parts.

The global electronics industry employed 17,430,942 workers in 2021 (Ibisworld 2021). Women workers make up the bulk of the labour force in the global electronics supply chains. In the ASEAN region, the industry generates more than 2.4 million jobs annually (ASEAN-Japan Centre 2021).

Employment in electronics sector in selected ASEAN countries

Country	Employment		
	Year	Number of workers	Source
Cambodia	2017	Local workers: 12,965; 80% women Foreign workers: 203; 28% women	(Seyhah and Hing Vutha 2019)
Indonesia	2017	337,000; about 80% women	(ASEAN-Japan Centre 2021); (ILO 2019)
Malaysia	2020	575,000; significant number of migrant workers	(Hirschmann 2021)
Philippines	2017	274,000; 70% women	(ASEAN-Japan Centre 2021); (PSA 2018)
Thailand	2016	750,000	(Errighi and Bodwell 2017)
Vietnam	2018	908,000; 80% women	(ASEAN-Japan Centre 2021); (CGFED 2017)

About 80% to 85% of the workers in the electronics sector are in the assembly line processes. The majority of the assembly line workers are women. Male workers are generally assigned in fabrication and maintenance related tasks. Men generally occupy higher and better paid positions. Women earn on average 16 per cent less than their male colleagues (Villadiego 2017).

Although the industry has contributed to economic growth and employment generation in developing countries, it is faced with the following decent work challenges as identified in studies conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and organizations such as GoodElectronics Network, Electronics Watch, Verite, and IndustriAll.

a) Excessive working hours with extensive overtime to cope with shorter lead times owing to the use of just-in-time or lean production systems, seasonal demand and volatile sourcing contracts (McFalls 2016).

b) Workforces with high percentages of temporary or contract workers to accommodate flexible production demands. The requirement of a flexible workforce translates to a majority of workers without job security or predictability.

c) Limited transfer of knowledge, skill, and technology from multinational enterprises to local firms given that most of the wage employment opportunities require low skilled labour. Only on-the-job training is conducted for the assembly line workers.

d) Low wages, with a disproportionately higher percentage of women workers severely impacted. Low wages have been the driving force for the continuous shifting of production to lower cost locations (ILO 2016).

e) Forced labour, especially in relation to migrant workers. Migrant workers are exposed to exploitation by recruiters, trapped by burdensome debt owed to recruitment agents, and deprived of access to their identity documents.

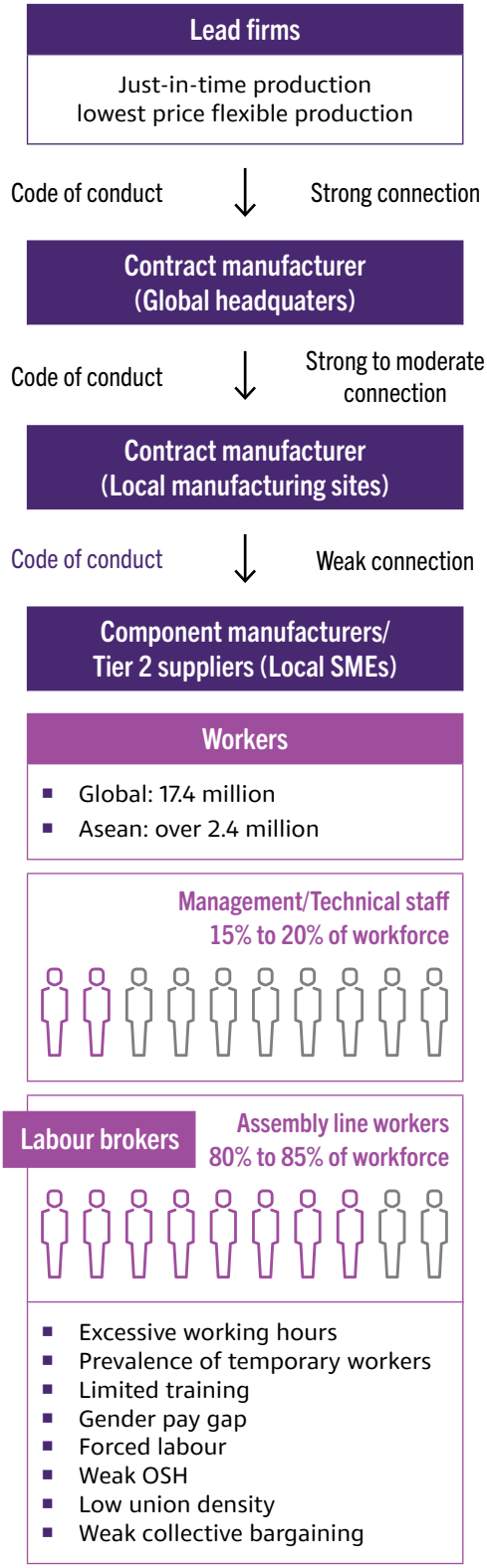
f) Occupational safety and health risks such as: (i) exposure to chemicals; (ii) uncomfortable working positions (e.g., long hours of standing with few breaks); (iii) repetitive work motion; and (iv) eyesight problems. The group of workers most vulnerable to these OSH hazards are the assembly line workers, comprised primarily of women. A common denominator across many of these cases of workers' exposure to hazardous substances is the lack or inadequacy of information provided to workers (Tuncak, González and Örnberg 2018).

g) Most workers are not able to exercise their union and collective bargaining rights. Workers also have no access to effective grievance mechanisms. In some producing countries this is due to weak enforcement of the law, while in others freedom of association is restricted by law, or the host country government has not yet ratified nor implemented the core ILO conventions on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

Decent work challenges are prevalent among lower tier suppliers (ILO 2016). Many of the decent work deficits have their root causes embedded in salient features and practices of the industry such as: (i) shorter-time-to-market/short and fluctuating production cycles; (ii) mid-stream changes to orders responding to volatile consumer demand; (iii) minimal brand inventory, resulting in production peaks and troughs; (iv) late orders; and (v) downward price pressure.

The minerals (lithium, gold, tungsten, and cobalt) used in electronic products may also be mined in conditions that violate labour and human rights, as well as cause environmental degradation (Electronics Watch 2018). At the end of the product life cycle, electronic goods become dangerous e-waste containing toxic substances that threaten both the environment and people's health if not properly disposed.

Figure 1. Global electronics supply chain: Decent work at a glance



Adapted from: (McFalls 2016)

Electronics sourcing was in a turmoil in 2020, especially at the height of lockdowns and movement restrictions to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Contract manufacturers experienced long component production lead times and shortages. On the other hand, the component manufacturers felt erratic demand, leading to erratic supply. Fundamental parts made with legacy technologies experienced shortages. These disruptions revealed the following supply chain management weaknesses: (Peterson 2021)

- The just-in-time supply chain model, which relies on predictability, was slow to adapt to sudden shocks like widespread quarantines.
- Commoditization and product complexity have made offshoring and outsourcing inevitable to remain competitive. However, these sourcing strategies also contributed to the centralization of manufacturing capacity.
- Reliance on a centralized manufacturing base (e.g., China) make it difficult for companies to procure the components they need in the event of a global supply chain disruption

Japan: generating decent work in this sector through responsible business practices

As of 2018, there were 9,093 Japanese owned establishments in the electronics industry globally, of which 5,272 or 58% were in East and Southeast Asia (Goto 2019). The top three countries in Asia with the highest number of Japanese electronic multinational enterprises (MNEs) were China, Thailand, and Hong Kong.

A distinguishing feature of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Japan is that its development has been business-led. The pioneers of social responsibility in Japan were the electronics firms, Ricoh and Sony, who in 2003, established the first corporate departments devoted solely to CSR (TKFD 2019). Research on CSR practices of Japanese electronics companies in Asia commissioned by the ILO RSCA programme in 2018 demonstrated that enterprises observe and promote social responsibility and advance decent work in global supply chains on a de-facto (self-enforcing approach embedded in day-to-day business activities) basis, because such efforts ultimately constitute a positive business case in the long term.

Breakdown of Japanese companies in the electronics industry outside of Japan

Country	Japanese companies in the electronics industry	
	Number	% Share
East and Southwest Asia	5,272	58%
China	2,045	22%
Thailand	675	7%
Hong Kong	416	5%
Singapore	388	4%
Taiwan	383	4%
Korea	361	4%
Malaysia	304	3%
Indonesia	271	3%
Vietnam	252	3%
Philippines	177	2%
Other countries	3,821	42%
Total	9,093	100%

Source: (Goto 2019)

Socially responsible labour practices in foreign direct investments

The research study identified that, in the case of foreign direct investments (FDI), the CSR of Japanese subsidiaries in Asia focused on addressing labour issues such as retention of workers and improvement of productivity and competitiveness. The following are examples of good socially responsible labour practices:

Training and skills development: In addition to the prescribed courses in the Career Ownership Program, occupational safety and health, and Responsible Business Alliance (RBA) guidelines, Fujitsu offers employees the opportunity to select the training that best suits their needs in order to assist each specific employee with their education and personal growth in accordance with their own career aspirations and strengths. These personnel development measures helped reduce staff turnover rates.

Hitachi and Seiko Epson also conduct trainings with respect to production management (such as 5S, QC and JIT systems) and on-the-job-trainings in partnership with a local university in Asia.

Objective and transparent human resources policy: Yokogawa China introduced a new evaluation system focusing on workers' skills and competencies, which were led and designed by their local workers. These changes contributed to improved staff retention rates. Seiko Epson and two other companies also improved their human resources management in similar approaches.

Improvements in general working environment: Panasonic and Seiko Epson continue to improve workplace facilities and services, such as better sanitation facilities, additional air conditioners and quality food in canteens.

Workplace dialogue: Panasonic emphasizes dialogue with employees through informal discussions at least every two months, as well as communication during lunchtime and recreation activities. Toshiba also promotes dialogue through the Labour Management Committee every month.

Socially responsible labour practices under the outsourcing model

Promotion of socially responsible practices under the outsourcing model is more complex as companies have limited control on their suppliers. The promotion of socially responsible labour practices is anchored on building collective efficiency as platform for improving competitiveness. Below are examples of CSR initiatives of companies operating under an outsourcing business model.

Capacity building of suppliers - technology transfer: Panasonic transfers technology and knowledge to its suppliers. This has helped strengthen the relationship with suppliers, as well as contributed to gaining a strong foothold in the domestic market. NEC and Seiko also invest in supplier development as platforms for promoting upgrading and building trustful relationships.

Capacity building of suppliers - management issues: One of the companies covered in the ILO research assesses suppliers' operations and identifies areas for improvement, using a customized self-checklist and self-assessment questionnaire. The results are not used to evaluate or penalise suppliers, but are provided to them as a guiding tool to help them comply with the guidelines of the company.

Standards and Partnerships: Yokogawa encourages suppliers to incorporate practices aligned to relevant standards such as ISO14001 and OHSAS (Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series). Supplier audits are conducted every three years and support to improve compliance is provided when necessary.

Social dialogue: The Japan Electronics and Information Technology Industries Association (JEITA) plays a crucial role in setting agendas for social dialogue as they front-load social responsibility issues in business discussions. JEITA serves as a vantage point to share information on global trends and good practices contributing to the achievement of decent work and the sustainability development goals, which bolsters social dialogue among industry actors.

Factors contributing to successful integration of socially responsible labour practices

From the various examples gathered by the ILO study, the following success factors have been identified as necessary to successful integration of socially responsible labour practices across all tiers in the supply chain:

- Developing trust between and among lead firms and suppliers, which includes balancing power dynamics and establishing good communication.
- The skill and competency of suppliers and workers to meet price and product standards of lead firms, as well as the ability to manage and implement socially labour practices. Japanese MNEs are more likely to transfer knowledge and technologies to their suppliers than other comparable MNEs.
- Demonstrations of the tangible benefits of socially responsible labour practices. The commercial benefits derived socially responsible practices (e.g., reduced transaction costs, enhanced business flexibility or improved risk management and safety nets) must be evident to all players involved and must outweigh the cost of CSR implementation.

Good socially responsible labour practices

Toshiba: CSR Management in the Supply Chain

The Toshiba Group procures a variety of raw materials and resources from suppliers all around the world. Energy and infrastructure account for 51% of their annual procurement expenditures. This is followed by electric devices at 29%, and the remaining 20% is for various items. Domestic suppliers in Japan account for 73% of total expenditure. The remaining 27% is from overseas suppliers.

In June 2011, Toshiba joined the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA), the electronics industry's CSR promotion organization. CSR for labour, OSH, the environment, and ethical standards throughout the supply chain are in accordance with the RBA Code of Conduct. In January 2017, Toshiba established RBA Japan Network together with RBA membership companies in Japan. The Network builds awareness and understanding of the RBA Code of Conduct through translation support and outreach meetings. It also conducts activities to resolve common issues.

Toshiba Group takes a risk-based approach to foster responsible business across its supply chains. In addition to providing copies of the CSR policy to suppliers in Chinese, Thai, English, and Japanese languages, policy briefings are conducted. Toshiba Group conducts monitoring surveys, and requests suppliers to carry out CSR self-assessments each year in accordance with the RBA Code of Conduct. Based on assessment results, Toshiba provides guidance to individual suppliers in accordance with their risk levels, and requests them to make improvements. For new procurement transactions, an assessment is conducted to check the supplier's conformity with Toshiba Group's procurement and selection policies, its manufacturing sites and management structure, and whether it complies with laws and regulations on environment, human rights, and occupational health and safety. Secondary suppliers are also encouraged to adhere to the policies.

Major survey items covered during audit of outsourced Toshiba brand manufacturers

Category	Survey items
CSR management at the companies audited	■ Labour disputes ■ Communication with employees ■ Labour agreements and working hours ■ Workplace safety ■ Employee health conditions ■ Environmental initiatives such as the acquisition of ISO 14001 certification
CSR management with regard to the supply chain of the companies audited	■ Adoption of a CSR policy that encompasses consideration for human rights, labour conditions, and the environment ■ Communication of the CSR policy to suppliers and their status of compliance with the policy ■ Regulations concerning plant wastewater and air emissions

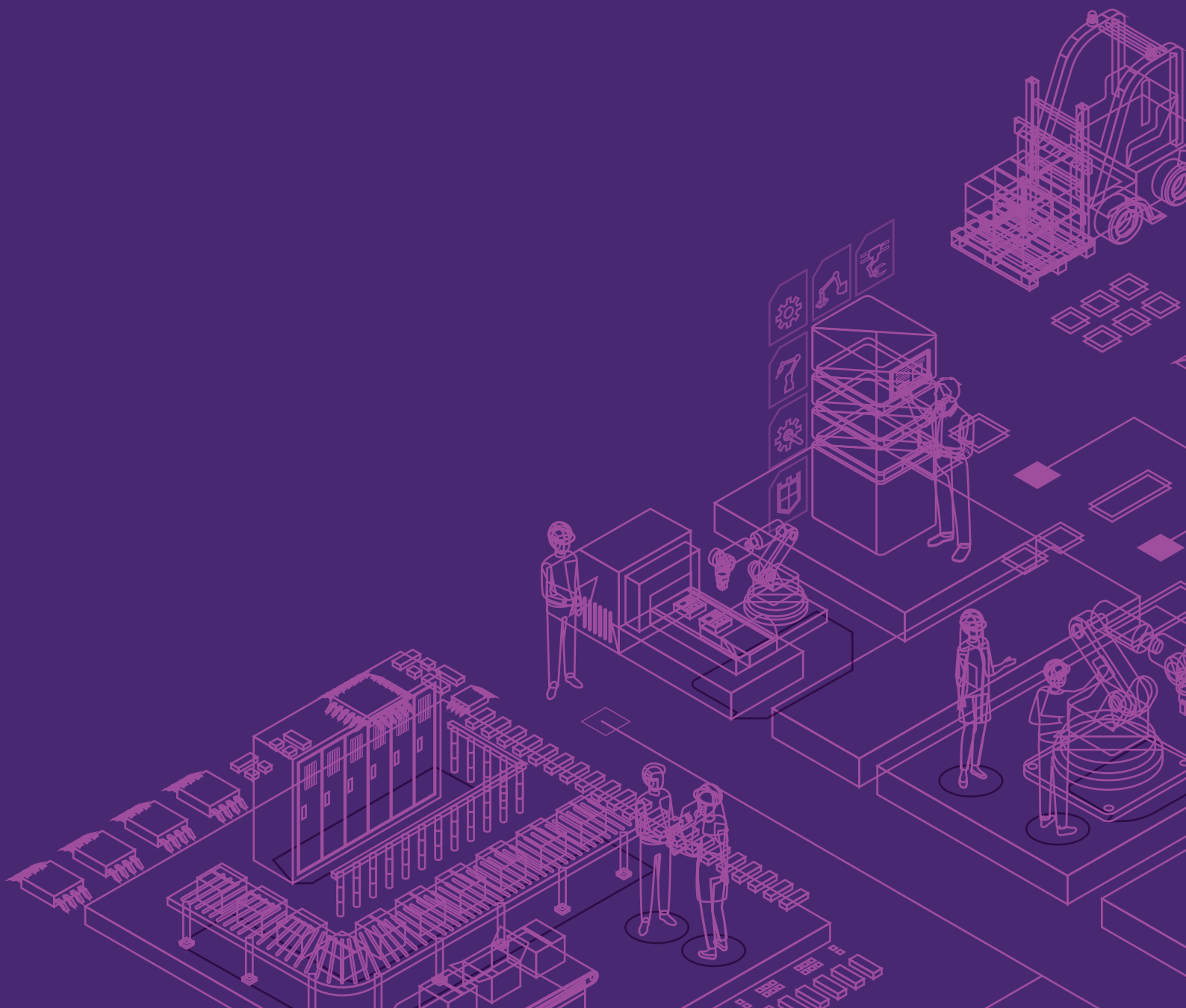
Toshiba: CSR Management in the Supply Chain

A supplier who has violated a standard is requested to implement remedial measures. The Toshiba Group provides guidance and support throughout the process. If the remedial measure is deemed to be unsatisfactory, the company suspends transactions with the supplier.

Compliance training of various types, such as training on the Standards of Conduct for Toshiba Group, the Toshiba Group Procurement Policy and CSR Management in the Supply Chain, is included in the training programs for procurement personnel of Toshiba Group at all organizational levels, including the training program for new employees and for transferees.

Toshiba Group strives to build with our suppliers' partnerships founded on mutual trust. The supplier partnership and development activities are aimed enabling suppliers to provide a reliable supply of high-quality, appropriately priced goods that give consideration to human rights, labour conditions, OSH, and the environment.

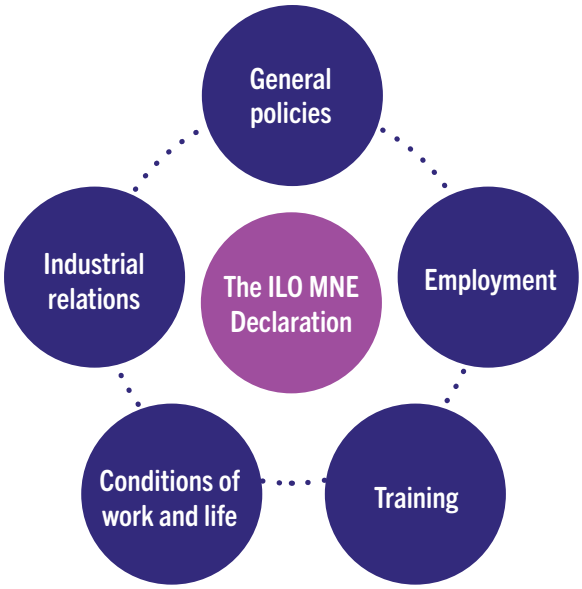
Source: (Toshiba 2021)



The way forward

The ILO MNE Declaration

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) is "a way in which enterprises give consideration to the impact of their operations on society and affirm their principles and values both in their own internal methods and processes and their interaction with other actors." The main guiding instrument regarding the labour dimension of CSR or responsible business conduct (RBC) is the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration), which was adopted in 1997 and most recently updated in 2017. The MNE Declaration sets out principles in the fields of general policies, employment, training, conditions of work and life and industrial relations which governments, employers 'and workers 'organizations and multinational and national enterprises are recommended to observe on a voluntary basis.



How a company relates with its workers, suppliers, host communities, and the marketplace can greatly contribute to the sustainability of its business success. For companies to stay productive, competitive, and relevant in the face of rapid globalization, they have to become environmentally viable and socially responsible. Labour related CSR entails companies taking responsibility for their impacts on decent work throughout their operations and with their business partners and identifying ways to enhance their positive contribution to decent work in dialogue with their workers, suppliers, host communities, and buyers. Responsible businesses create social value by addressing needs and challenges of their stakeholders while simultaneously creating their own economic value.

The RSCA programme organized various events to encourage policy discussions, as well as exchanges of experiences and good practices on promoting CSR and RBC in the supply chains of Japanese companies. Events such as multi-stakeholder dialogues and webinars were participated by high level participants and representatives from the following: (i) Government: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry; (ii) European Commission; (iii) JEITA; (iv) Japan Business Council in Europe; (v) academe and research organization: Sophia University, Waseda University and Asia Pacific Institute of Research, Kansai University; (vi) CSO Network in Japan' (vii) IDE-JETRO; and (viii) key experts on CSR and RBC. The exchange of emerging good practices of Japanese electronics MNEs, as well as proposals put forward by participants during the various dialogues and webinars identified key policy recommendations that aim to foster the integration of socially responsible business practices in the daily business operations of suppliers across all tiers of the supply chains of Japanese electronics MNEs. These policy recommendations are outlined below:

Policy recommendations	Stakeholders
a) JEITA and other industry associations, in partnership with civil society organizations (CSOs), academe, and government, should raise awareness and shared understanding of socially responsible labour practices, including appreciation of its economic value to enterprises across all functions in the Japanese electronics supply chains through intra-firm and interfirm social dialogues and forums.	■ JEITA ■ Industry association ■ CSOs ■ Academe ■ Government
b) Lead firms/multinational enterprises (MNEs), in collaboration with CSOs, should strengthen the capacity of suppliers across all tiers to conduct supply chain mapping, enhance visibility and traceability of their supply chains to facilitate the identification and assessment of human rights risks and decent work deficits.	■ MNEs ■ CSOs
c) ILO and other international development partners, in partnership with government, MNEs, and CSOs, should build the capacity of suppliers across all tiers to implement socially responsible practices in supply chain management. This can include the following interventions: ■ Supporting the development of a due diligence system, processes, and tools that can be shared across suppliers and companies to ease the burden of compliance and facilitate sharing of emerging good practices. Parallel to this, building the capacity of enterprises to integrate due diligence findings into procurement and other business decisions. An important element of the due diligence process should be the evaluation feedback to suppliers to promote harmonized understanding of the expectations of the company, provide suppliers the directions for improvement, and motivate suppliers to improve performance. (Cont. on next page)	■ ILO ■ Other international development partners ■ MNEs ■ CSOs

Policy recommendations	Stakeholders
■ Developing and/or strengthening platforms (e.g., roundtable discussions, web portals, social dialogues, etc.) to facilitate information sharing and discussions, where companies, trade unions, providers, and governments can acquire CSR/RBC knowledge such as the fundamental concepts and guidelines, practical implementation measures, outcome measurement, etc. The information sharing and discussion platforms can also provide opportunities to collectively address systemic risks present in supply chains spanning Asia. Social events and creative media may also be good ways to sensitize suppliers across all tiers on RBC/CRS, building trustful relationships, and creating a shared sense of commitment to socially responsible supply chains. Bringing together supply chain actors and stakeholders including government and trade unions can help facilitate the development of consensus-based norms aligned with International Labour Standards and reduce tension caused by differing understandings and interpretations of standards. ■ Providing training and technical assistance to suppliers and trade unions to enable them to actively participate in upgrading CSR/RBC implementation at their workplaces. It is important to identify relevant issues that market actors readily connect with (e.g., socially responsible procurement practices, OSH, conditions of work, freedom of association, etc.) as entry points for establishing dialogue on CSR upgrading, and to catalyse action. By linking the benefits of socially responsible labour practices to priority issues and developing an understanding of the impacts each actor could have on the whole supply chain, actors across the different tiers and functions of the supply chain can be encouraged and motivated to work together. ■ Developing the capacity of providers (civil organizations, academe, private providers, financial services providers) to provide services necessary for companies to upgrade CSR/RBC implementation.	
d) Government and industry associations should design and implement schemes that identify and reward companies implementing socially responsible labour practices. Parallel to this is the need for harmonized and transparent assessment and reporting instruments and standards, which will reduce the reporting burden on enterprises as well as facilitate the building of a solid business case for CSR. This may require the support of ILO, other international development partners, and CSOs specialized in labour and human rights.	■ Government ■ Industry associations ■ ILO ■ Other international development partners ■ CSOs

For more information:

MNE Declaration web portal – www.ilo.org/mnedeclaration

ILO-OECD-OHCHR responsible Supply Chains in Asia: Thailand - https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_678345/lang--en/index.htm

Labour Standards in Global Supply Chains: An ILO training module for SMEs and other enterprises
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_725761.pdf

ILO Helpdesk for Business on international labour standards (www.ilo.org/business)
How to align corporate policies and practices with International ILS and build good industrial relations

Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/--multi/documents/publication/wcms_094386.pdf
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_684935.pdf

Responsible Business: Key Messages from International Instruments
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_724747.pdf

Labour Issues in CSR: Examples from the ILO Helpdesk for Business Q & A
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_740229.pdf

ILO company-union dialogue facilitation
https://www.ilo.org/empent/areas/mne-declaration/WCMS_572115/lang--en/index.htm

Measurement for the employment and labour-related impacts of the Multinational Enterprises (MNEs)
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---multi/documents/publication/wcms_620788.pdf

The ILO MNE Declaration: What's in it for Workers?
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms_627351.pdf

Engaging multinational enterprises on more and better jobs
http://www.oit.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---multi/documents/publication/wcms_175477.pdf

Responsible business -– labour standards in global supply chains
https://www.itcilo.org/courses/responsible-business-meeting-labour-standards-global-supply-chains - rolled out together with the ILO SCORE programme, targeting SMEs in global supply chains (enhance manager-workers workplace cooperation)

Responsible Supply Chains in Asia (RSCA) Programme in Japan

www.ilo.org/rsca

The "Responsible Supply Chains in Asia" (RSCA) programme (RAS/16/13/EUR) is a programme developed by the European Union together with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The programme promotes corporate social responsibility (CSR) / responsible business conduct (RBC) with regard to the environment, decent work and the respect of human rights.

This initiative is a part of the EU's long-standing commitment to promote human rights, decent work and sustainable development, a pledge underpinned by the EU Treaties and reinforced in the European Commission's trade policy strategy of 2015 "Trade for All". It falls in particular under the Commission's commitment to identify opportunities for responsible supply chain partnerships and the EU's strategic approach to responsible business conduct, which is based on internationally agreed principles and guidelines. It will also contribute to the EU strategic approach to CSR/RBC as put forward in the Commission 2011 Communication "A renewed EU strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility."

The four-year programme (2018-2021), carried out in collaboration with Japan, China, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, has two broad objectives to:

a) Promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by ensuring that investors and businesses have a better understanding of corporate social responsibility;
b) Create policy environments conducive to promoting responsible business conduct and increased opportunities for dialogue.

The programme in Japan is making an impact in a number of areas, including through:

Engaging with industry bodies, including Keidanren and the Japan Electronics and Information Technology Industries Association (JEITA), to survey awareness and implementation of responsible business practices in the business supply chains.

Presenting the programme's aims and tools to key Japanese Union bodies and cooperatives, including workshops with the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (RENGO), and the Japanese Consumers' Cooperative Union (JCCU) as well as industry groups and research institutions.

Partnering with leading institutions for joint collaboration in Japan as well as in countries with Japanese MNEs, including with IDE –JETRO for research and outreach as well as the translation of key materials and guidance on responsible business practices into Japanese.

Working with Universities in order to influence the professional development of future leaders on responsible business practices.

Holding dialogues with groups such as the Global Compact Network Japan and the CSO Network Japan to include the perspective of business and civil society in policy formulation and training curricula.

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