

An introduction to Supply Chain Due Diligence Best Practice



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Introduction

Legislation is rapidly being introduced by countries to improve human rights and help address the environmental issues facing the planet. Organisations across the world are slowly being scooped up by a metaphorical regulatory net which requires them to assess the potential for human rights and environmental risks within their value chains and report on what they are proactively doing to address them.

Across the entire end-to-end process, from the finished product to the metals, minerals and other raw materials that are required to make them, companies must now demonstrate a clear understanding of the impact they are having on people and the planet.

In more and more of the world, ethical business and business as a force for good is now not only a way of differentiating or a way of meeting increasingly discerning

consumer expectations, it is also a regulatory issue with significant penalties for doing it wrong.

To support those goals, organisations around the world are increasingly finding themselves being swept up in a metaphorical ESG regulatory net - such as Australia's Modern Slavery Act, Canada's Bill S-211, Germany's Lieferkettengesetz, Norway's Apenhetsoven, India's BRSR Core or the EU's forthcoming Corporate

Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (EU CS DDD).

Increasingly, this regulatory net is being designed to require companies, wherever they operate, to assess the potential for human rights and environmental risks within their supply chains and report on what they are proactively doing to address them. So even if your organisation is located in a country or geographic region that doesn't yet have regulation in place, it is still likely to have an impact on your business in the short to medium term.

For example: The Lieferkettengesetz in Germany also applies to companies that import goods into Germany, regardless of where the company is based, if the imported goods are intended for sale or use in Germany and since the Act became

effective in June 2022 following approval in December 2021.

The USA's The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act has worked to prevent goods potentially made with forced labor in the Xinjiang region of China from entering the US market.

The EU Deforestation Regulations relate to derived products and are likely to impact things like sales of wind turbine blades, welding aprons/gloves and even car interiors.

This White Paper is intended to provide helpful guidance on how to implement effective Supply Chain Due Diligence and ensure you are positioned to meet the plethora of supply chain legislation – efficiently, effectively and with maximum confidence.



What is Supply Chain Due Diligence?

The purpose of Supply Chain Due Diligence is to foster sustainable and responsible corporate behaviour which anchors human rights and environmental considerations into a company's operations and corporate governance. It is aimed at ensuring that businesses address the adverse impacts of their actions, including in their value chains.

The core goals of Supply Chain Due Diligence legislation are to identify, bring to an end, prevent and account for negative human rights and environmental impacts in a company's own operations, subsidiaries and their value chains. It requires companies to go beyond their own direct operations and report on the due diligence activities they have undertaken

on their value chain. This is the basis for much of the supply chain related legislation across the world such as that introduced by Canada, Norway, France, Germany and India in recent years.

Supply Chain Due Diligence generally draws on international guidelines such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct, UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, human rights conventions defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals and is part of a growing trend towards greater corporate responsibility for human rights and the environment in global supply chains.

Why is Supply Chain Due Diligence important?

Supply Chain Due Diligence is important for several reasons:

- **Protection of Human Rights:** Supply Chain Due Diligence is designed to protect human rights by requiring companies to identify and address potential risks in their supply chains, including forced labour, child labour, and other forms of exploitation. Companies taking responsibility for human rights abuses in their supply chains helps to protect vulnerable workers and communities around the world.
- **Environmental Protection:** Supply Chain Due Diligence also helps to protect the environment by requiring companies to prevent and address environmental damage caused by their operations or their suppliers, including pollution, carbon consumption, deforestation, and the destruction of habitats. This helps to promote sustainable business practices and reduce the environmental impact of global supply chains, particularly on local communities.
- **Responsible Business Conduct:** Supply Chain Due Diligence promotes responsible business conduct by

requiring companies to comply with ethical business practices in their supply chains, including aligning processes to international guidance documents like the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct. This helps to create a level playing field for companies and promotes sustainable economic development.

- **International Norms:** Supply Chain Due Diligence is consistent with international norms on business and human rights, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and ILO Fundamental Conventions. By aligning due diligence processes with these norms, the Directive helps to extend a common understanding of the responsibilities of companies in relation to human rights and the environment across global supply chains.

Overall, Supply Chain Due Diligence is important because it helps to promote sustainable and responsible business practices, protect human rights and the environment, and create a more just and equitable global economy.





Section Four

What does Supply Chain Due Diligence encompass?

The Supply Chain Due Diligence process has been developed to align with internationally recognised human rights and environmental conventions and standards including the ILO Fundamental Conventions, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Supply Chain Due Diligence is designed to promote responsible business conduct and prevent negative impacts on both people and the environment across

global supply chains as well as helping to create sustainable economies. By taking a risk-based approach to supply chain due diligence, companies are obliged to consider the range of human rights, environmental and climate-related risks associated with their operations, particularly those that are present within their supply chains. Supply Chain Due Diligence reflects a growing recognition of the need for companies to take responsibility for their supply chains and ensure that their business practices are both sustainable and ethical.

What are the obligations for companies and directors?

There are several measures an organisation needs to take in order to effectively implement Supply Chain Due Diligence:

- Integrate due diligence into corporate policies and procedures.
- Conduct risk analysis to identify potential adverse impacts.
- Prevent and mitigate adverse impacts that have been identified.
- Establish and maintain a complaints procedure.
- Monitor the effectiveness of due diligence procedures.
- Publicly communicate the due diligence that has been undertaken.

In addition to corporate obligations, some Supply Chain Due Diligence legislation, such as the EU CS DDD in Europe, are also introducing duties for the directors of eligible companies. Duties include overseeing the implementation of due diligence processes and integrating due diligence into the corporate strategy of the organisation. Directors will also be expected to take into account the human rights, climate and environmental consequences of their business decisions on an ongoing basis.

What reporting format should be used for sharing results of Supply Chain Due Diligence activities?

Companies should outline their due diligence processes and activities within publicly available reports in addition to any regulatory reporting formats. This may be done by incorporating information within existing sustainability reports or by producing a standalone report.

Increasingly, larger organisations are being compelled by legislation to undertake Supply Chain Due Diligence. For example, legislation adopted by Germany and Norway includes trade sanctions for companies identified as not complying with legislation.

In addition, attitudes to organisations and their approach to sustainability are creating other significant implications of not taking a proactive approach to ESG supply chain risk including damage to brand reputation and the financial impact of a loss of consumer or shareholder confidence. It can take a very long time to build up positive brand recognition, however, it does not take long to seriously damage it.



What happens if a company fails to undertake effective Supply Chain Due Diligence?

What are the benefits of compliance?

Overall, taking a proactive approach to Supply Chain Due Diligence and sustainability can bring significant benefits to organisations, including improved reputation, reduced risk, increased efficiency, competitive advantage, and long-term sustainability.

- **Improved Reputation:** Demonstrating a proactive approach can help to improve an organisation's reputation as a responsible and ethical business. By taking steps to prevent human rights abuses, environment degradation and other negative impacts in their supply chains, organisations can enhance their brand image and increase customer loyalty.
- **Reduced Risk:** ESG compliance can help reduce the risk of legal action, fines, and reputational damage. By identifying and addressing potential risks in their supply chains, organisations can minimise the likelihood of human rights abuses occurring and mitigate any negative impacts.
- **Increased Efficiency:** ESG compliance can help increase the efficiency of supply chain management. By

implementing due diligence measures and monitoring suppliers, organisations can identify areas for improvement and optimise their supply chain operations.

- **Competitive Advantage:** ESG compliance can provide a competitive advantage by demonstrating a commitment to responsible business practices. This can help organisations attract and retain customers, investors, and employees who prioritise ethical business practices.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** ESG compliance can contribute to the long-term sustainability of an organisation's operations. By taking steps to prevent exploitation and ensure the health and safety of workers, organisations can promote the well-being of their employees and the communities in which they operate.



How to get started on the path to Supply Chain Due Diligence

Getting started with any Supply Chain Due Diligence requirements can be a complex process, but there are several steps that companies can take to begin their compliance journey and ensure they are as prepared as possible for legislation that is creeping up on the horizon:

- **Develop a Due Diligence Policy:** Companies should develop a due diligence policy that outlines the processes and measures they will take to mitigate risks in their supply chains. This policy should be aligned with the requirements of the law and should be endorsed at the top level of an organisation prior to being communicated to all relevant stakeholders.
- **Know Your Supply Chain:** The first step is to understand your supply chain to identify potential ESG risks. This includes identifying suppliers, subcontractors and other parties you have business relationships with and evaluating their adherence to international standards and regulations.
- **Implement Due Diligence Measures:** Companies should implement due diligence measures to identify and mitigate risks in their supply chains. This includes conducting risk assessments and audits engaging with suppliers to ensure compliance and implementing risk mitigation measures where necessary.
- **Monitor and Evaluate Performance:** Companies should monitor and evaluate the performance of their due diligence measures to ensure that they are effective in mitigating risks in their

supply chains. This includes tracking supplier performance and conducting regular risk assessments. Monitoring and performance evaluation should support continual improvement within the supply chain.

- **Publish Performance Reports:** Companies should publish reports on their compliance with the due diligence obligations. These reports should include a description of due diligence processes, identified risks, risk mitigation measures, supplier engagement, remedy measures, verification measures, grievance mechanisms, transparency, and management approach.
- **Engage with Stakeholders:** Companies should engage with stakeholders, including suppliers, customers, investors, civil society organisations, and affected communities, to understand their concerns and expectations related to supply chain due diligence.
- **Seek External Support:** Companies can seek external support from consultants, auditors, and other experts to help them comply with the requirements of the law.

In summary, getting started with Supply Chain Due Diligence requires a broad approach to be truly effective. It should include developing due diligence processes, assessing the supply chain, implementing due diligence measures, monitoring and evaluating performance, reporting on performance, engaging with stakeholders, and seeking external support where necessary. Adopting a broad approach and treating your due diligence as a supplier development programme can have tangible benefits for an organisation, going far beyond regulatory compliance.



Challenges of effective Supply Chain Due Diligence

We know from working with a wide range of organisations to support their Supply Chain Due Diligence goals that they generally face some common challenges. These include:

- **Supply Chain Complexity:** Many companies have complex and extensive supply chains, with numerous tiers of suppliers. Identifying and assessing risks throughout the entire supply chain can be challenging and resource-intensive. The complexity can also be compounded by the global nature of supply chains, some operating in hard to reach or hard to access countries.
- **Data Collection:** Data required to comply goes beyond regular operational boundaries. Data sources with questionable provenance, accuracy and interpretation often become primary sources of information which undermine the basis for the reporting. Data may also be in multiple data formats and there is often an absence of systems to record data in a methodical way that can be used to demonstrate a risk-based approach.
- **Veracity of Data:** Web-scraped or AI generated data from sources of unknown provenance lack the scrutiny necessary to fully understand the risks. Organisations rarely have the resources to undertake credible data checking or independent verification required to report with confidence.
- **Lack of Transparency:** Many suppliers may be unwilling or unable to provide full transparency into their operations, making it difficult to identify and address risks.
- **Limited Capacity:** Many buyers may lack the resources to undertake such intensive and sustained supply chain management including data collection from numerous disparate sources or sufficiently credible levels of data checking and verification of their suppliers. Likewise, suppliers may lack the capacity or resources to implement the necessary improvements to comply with the law.
- **Cost of Compliance:** Complying with the law can be expensive, especially for small and medium-sized companies. The cost of conducting due diligence, monitoring suppliers, and implementing risk mitigation measures can be significant.
- **Knowing what is enough:** Understanding what is required to satisfy the regulators and ensure compliance. For more on this read our useful Blog: [When is enough, enough?](#)
- **Legal Liability:** Non-compliance with the law can result in legal liability, including fines and legal action. This can create additional risk for companies, particularly if they are unable to identify and address potential risks in their supply chains.
- **Coordination with Suppliers:** Collaboration with suppliers is essential to implement due diligence processes effectively and as transparently as possible. However, engaging with suppliers can be challenging, especially if they are in different countries with different cultural and legal frameworks.
- **Time Constraints:** Companies may struggle to implement effective due diligence processes within the required timeframe. The law requires companies to implement due diligence processes within a specific timeframe, and non-compliance can result in legal liability.

Conclusion

Supply Chain Due Diligence legislation requires companies to implement effective processes to prevent and mitigate negative human rights, environmental and climate impacts.

Effective Supply Chain Due Diligence offers legislative, financial, efficiency and brand reputation benefits.

Supply Chain Due Diligence as an approach is aligned with moves globally to introduce supply chain related legislation to help create a more responsible global economy. As more and more countries consider harmonising their own ESG legislation, it is likely that supply chain transparency and

accountability will become increasingly important in the global marketplace. Embarking on a journey of improved supply chain due diligence now will likely reduce future disruption when other nations or industries adopt increased levels of due diligence on the supply chain.

Supply Chain Due Diligence is a positive development that has the potential to create a more sustainable supply chain ecosystem. By prioritising the well-being of workers, communities, and the environment, companies can build a stronger and more resilient global economy for the future.



About Achilles

For over 30 years, Achilles has protected organisations' business interests and reputations by providing unrivalled levels of supply chain transparency, carbon reduction and management. We are the ESG and carbon management partner of choice for the world's leading global brands.

Achilles specialises in supporting customers that require truly robust environmental, social and governance reporting to fully comply with ESG regulation, meet investor requirements and achieve their own ambitious sustainability goals. We work with market-leading financial, industrial, commercial and governmental organisations requiring the serious, detailed analysis and expert insight necessary to deliver exceptional reporting confidence and positive social and environmental impact.

Operating from 17 locations worldwide, Achilles is at the forefront of the battle against climate change, a champion for social justice and human rights, and an expert in health, safety, and risk management.

How Achilles helps companies to achieve Supply Chain Due Diligence

Achilles works on behalf of organisations that require comprehensive supply chain due diligence solutions and detailed data insight necessary to comply with international supply chain legislative obligations. Beyond compliance, our sustainability services and supplier development programmes enable organisations to demonstrate improved performance within their supply chain.

Achilles services include:

- **Supply Chain Evaluation**
We collect and assess data from a wide range of sources including (but not limited to) documentation from your suppliers, publicly accessible and historical information from the internet and investigation reports from NGOs and charities. Uniquely, our Transparency questionnaire also incorporates information captured from our extensive, global, in-person audit programme, and the voices of workers gathered over many years of interviews in similar industries and regions to paint a full picture of your supply chain risk.
- **Risk Assessment**
Detailed supply chain evaluation enables us to undertake a “broad scoping exercise” to create a high-level picture of risks that may be hidden

within the supply chain. This broad, multi-disciplined approach is integral to successful supply chain due diligence and key for organisations that need to be able to demonstrate to regulatory authorities that they understand their risks and have “done enough” to mitigate them.

- **Due Diligence**
Delivering thousands of audits (both desktop and site) every year, our teams of highly skilled audit personnel are strategically situated across the globe to interrogate documentation, physically inspect workplaces and confidentially speak with individuals who may be subject to unethical employment practices or human rights violations.
- **Remediation and Reporting**
Committed to continually improving international supply chains, Achilles drives continual improvement through the tracking of audit report findings and remediation actions within the supply chain. Analysis supported by Achilles Data Scientists gives you the comprehensive supply chain data that can be included within annual reports.

[Contact us](#) to find out how Achilles can help you meet your supply chain due diligence obligations.



The importance of Supply Chain legislation and helpful advice to companies starting out on their compliance journey

- In September 2022 the ILO estimated that there were fifty million people living in modern slavery, 10 million more compared to 2016 estimates. Of that, 86% of forced labour cases were identified in the private sector.
- Issues aren't limited to human rights, countries around the world have become dumping grounds for hazardous waste. Developed nations have received increased criticism for not acting upon the export of hazardous or contaminated waste to various parts of the world, in contravention of the Basel Convention.
- It's not possible to use one part of any due diligence toolkit and expect it to drive significant change within the supply chain. Due diligence is a holistic approach requiring collaboration, communication, education and cooperation as much as it is around the more technical elements of risk assessment and audit. Creating transparent supply chains, open to critique and willing to learn is vital.
- The most successful due diligence programmes (even where there's not been any legislation to leverage) embolden suppliers to improve.
- Technology is a vital tool to combatting supply chain issues, however, hearing the voices of those within the supply chain and seeing their working and living conditions provides far richer insight into the challenges within the supply chain than any amount of electronic data can.
- The due diligence processes that a company enacts are unlikely to identify everything in the supply chain. Anyone who suggests otherwise perhaps has not seen the very real and isolated issues that our teams have witnessed from Chile to China and everywhere between. As businesses and professionals, our due diligence activities should stand up to scrutiny. In the event of an investigation, you need to feel confident in being able to say you did as much as you could to prevent the issues and you have processes that will be enacted to resolve the ones that have been identified. It's often investigative reports or testimony from individuals that get splashed on the front pages of the national press.
- Whilst some due diligence processes may take longer to implement, whether that be risk mapping of the supply chain, utilising third party software or conducting audits there are some simple steps companies can take, starting with communication and education. The importance of speaking to the supply chain should not be underestimated. Explain what it is that you're planning on doing, why you are doing it and what you are hoping to achieve. Reassure that it is not simply a case of trying to wield a stick or punish, it's about identifying common areas of improvement. Many suppliers don't have the same resources as the organisations embarking on this legislative journey, or the knowledge required to ensure compliance. Impart that knowledge, whether that be through supplier communications, events or even visits. Share examples of best practice and lead by example.



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