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From Compliance to Commitment: Navigating Social Risk in Global Supply Chains

Fulvia Fatma Valenzano Pasta is an Italian Senior Lead Auditor and freelance consultant with over 20 years of experience in social accountability. Specializing in SA8000 management systems since 2010, she has conducted extensive assessments in Italy, as well as in European and overseas countries for major certification bodies like DNV, BVQI, SGS and BSI. Her work focuses on moving organizations beyond “tick-box” compliance toward proactive worker participation, human rights due diligence, and integrated ESG performance. She is also an expert trainer in corporate governance and sustainability with main focus on human rights and working conditions. The interview outlines the evolution of the SA8000 standard, highlighting a shift from reactive compliance to proactive, worker-centric due diligence in global supply chains. Key insights emphasize bridging the gap between ESG commitments and reality through genuine stakeholder engagement and the integration of these practices within the updated SA8000:2026 standard.

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With over 20 years of international experience in social auditing, how have you seen the role of standards like SA8000 evolve within global supply chains?

SA 8000 is the most widespread social compliance standard worldwide; since its very first edition in 1997, a steady interest has been developing mostly in Italy, India and China, in order to gain insight on suppliers' working conditions and to monitor the level of social risk in the supply chain.

Italy has always been on the top of the list of certified companies.

According to current data, nowadays there are 5.787 certified companies worldwide, with 3.251 Italian certified companies, 1.031 Chinese certified companies and 856 Indian certified companies (source: <https://sa-intl.org/sa8000-search/#stats> as to 30.04.2026).

Other international guidelines originated from SA8000 in the recent past, such as the Ethical Trade Initiative by Sedex, which is, however, not a certification scheme but a mere assessment process. From the first standard edition to the present one, recently issued on January 1st 2026, a progressive focus has been put on a proactive approach, where prevention of non-compliance is more important than correction,



engaging companies to continuous improvement, with the role of due diligence along the supply chain.

Despite growing ESG commitments and an increasing number of audits, serious health and safety issues continue to surface. Why do you think this gap between commitment and reality still exists?

Among the various possible reasons why the everlasting gap between commitment and reality still exists, I believe we should focus on the underlying motivations behind ESG investments.

When such decisions are genuinely driven by a strong commitment from Top Management, the commitment translates into coordinated actions that align with a coherent reality. Conversely, when ESG invest-





ments are primarily motivated by profit and economic convenience, the gap not only becomes apparent but also devolves into a mere façade.

Based on your international experience, which occupational health and safety risks do you see as most critical today in complex supply chains?

Fire risk is undoubtedly the most significant health and safety concern, particularly when combined with insufficient training and awareness.

In practical terms, how does SA8000 help organizations strengthen occupational health and safety beyond mere legal compliance?

The standard promotes the establishment of a continuous monitoring system operated by personnel dedicated to identifying potential risk scenarios, and subsequently defining appropriate prevention and control measures.

Worker involvement is often cited as a cornerstone of effective social auditing. How does worker participation contribute to identifying risks and improving health and safety outcomes?

Worker participation plays a crucial role in the implementation of a social management system in line with the SA8000 and ISO 45000 schemes, where a strong consultation process is crucial. Furthermore, with the recently revised standard, organizations are now required to design a management

system explicitly grounded on worker and stakeholders' involvement, engaging the people most affected by the organization, and actually using what they share to shape decisions.

From an auditor's perspective, what distinguishes a truly meaningful social audit from a compliance-driven, "tick-box" exercise—particularly in relation to health and safety?

To answer to this question, I shall reinforce the previous concept, since I firmly believe that when a company brings stakeholder input into its plans and processes, the management system becomes more grounded in real needs and risks.

Meaningful engagement only matters if it genuinely influences how the organization improves conditions moving forward. Stakeholder involvement isn't just a box to check; when it comes to health and safety, people must come first, always.

The new SA8000:26 emphasizes that workers are not just participants, but active contributors to the development and implementation of the management system.

Looking ahead, what role do you believe social auditing and standards like SA8000 will play in the future of ESG performance and supply-chain due diligence?

The new SA8000 standard strongly integrates the due diligence approach both on the supply-chain process and on human rights, requiring organizations to set clear expectations for their business partners and make sure that nothing contradicts or undermines mutual commitments.

In conclusion, looking ahead, with the progressive implementation of the new SA8000 organizations will be expected to move beyond a simple checklist approach, setting clear expectations for business partners and recognize their own responsibility for supporting those partners: SA8000 now makes it clear that responsible sourcing isn't solely about demanding compliance. It's about building a partnership that enables it.