

Guiding Principles and Operational Standards for Issara Inclusive Labor Monitoring Partners

Issara Institute is a non-profit organization, with clear human rights fundamentals underpinning our work. These Guiding Principles and Operational Standards are a public document of the guidelines for our partnerships with businesses (“Partners”) through the Issara Inclusive Labor Monitoring (ILM) Partner Programs. Examples of Partners could include global buyers, brands, retailers, importers, agents, suppliers, recruitment agencies, financial institutions, and other stakeholder businesses in supply chains.

Issara’s Inclusive Labor Monitoring (ILM) system is at the center of our Partners Program, where worker validation of labor recruitment and working conditions informs and drives remediation and iterative systems strengthening on the part of Partners. Issara Partner Programs aim to provide a framework for collaboration to eliminate labor exploitation across global supply chains, including forced labor and human trafficking, that reaffirms the need for worker voice as a central part of the solution.

The Guiding Principles outline the ethos of Issara’s worker voice-centered approach, the primacy of ethics, and the international labor standards underpinning all work. The Operational Standards highlight the expectations of Partners and our own organization.

FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. EMPOWERED WORKER VOICE.

Data to verify labor conditions must include empowered worker voice linking safeguarded worker feedback to management response, systems change, and remediation. Remediation and improvements must be verified by workers. Any suppression of workers’ ability to voice their concerns throughout recruitment and employment, through whatever channel they trust, is considered a serious violation of the spirit of Issara Inclusive Labour Monitoring (ILM).

2. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY.

Management response, systems change, and remediation are shared responsibilities across the supply chain. Downstream buyers benefit from these and so, as responsible, ethical buyers should actively promote and incentivize worker voice and improvements.

3. RIGHT TO REMEDIATION.

Workers whose rights are violated have the right to access remedy and justice. Business mechanisms for addressing violations and increasing human rights accountability may not be responsive enough within a reasonable timeframe to stop harm, and workers have the right to collectively or individually access

alternative channels for remediation. Workers should not be deterred in any way from accessing alternative channels for remediation by any party to ILM.

4. RIGHT TO PROTECTION.

Workers whose rights are violated have the right to protection. NGOs and individuals may also be subject to retaliation, for which protection may be required as well. All parties of ILM are expected to support safeguards for workers and human rights defenders as needed.

5. ETHICS AND HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE FOREFRONT.

All activities are conducted with professionalism, ethics, and support for universal human rights and labour rights principles. **The fundamental ethical principle of Do No Harm will be followed and prioritized in every instance and situation, with no exception.**

OPERATIONAL STANDARDS

AREA 1. WORKER VOICE, SAFEGUARDS, AND VALIDATION

Worker Voice: Worker voice is critical to Issara’s mission, approach, and programmatic activities. Worker voice connected to remediation and with clear safeguards must be supported by Partners. If worker voice is not supported, there is heightened risk to Issara, workers, and the Partner. Partners must therefore support Issara’s independent worker voice channels and Issara’s engagement with workers at Partners’s sites.

Worker Safeguards: Safeguards may be needed to protect workers communicating grievances against reprisals, power imbalances, and threats from supervisors, interpreters, and others. Partners must support worker safeguards and protection (and not suppression) of worker voice so that workers can raise grievances without fear of reprisal. Issara places worker safety at the forefront, and a “do no harm” philosophy must be prioritized within Partner Programs.

Worker Validation: Verification of practices and changes that Partners undertake must be verified with workers and job seekers, as appropriate. Issara does not close out reported labor issues until workers have validated the nature and quality of actions that businesses claim to have made. Worker validation not only provides greater confidence in business’ handling of labor issues, but also helps ensure that those actions have indeed been effective.

Worker Voice Integration: True worker voice-driven initiatives, such as Issara Inclusive Labour Monitoring, are very different from traditional audit compliance approaches or many worker feedback tools, and may be new to Partners. Businesses participating in Partner Programs must therefore be open to discussing with Issara how

worker voice findings and data are being integrated and elevated into their business' working conditions, recruitment practices, grievance mechanisms, and systems strengthening.

AREA 2. RESPONSIVENESS, RESPONSIBILITY, AND REMEDIATION

Progress and Solutions-Oriented: Issara Partner Programs are designed for businesses that not only seek increased transparency and accountability about labor issues in their operations and supply chains, but also seek and actively work toward ongoing improvement and solutions by addressing root cause issues and systems strengthening. Partners can view Issara as a professional, independent, technical partner whose mission centers on improving labor conditions for workers, and helping to drive better business practices more generally. And while Issara may develop tools, research, data and technology to help drive solutions, it is the duty bearers (typically buyers, suppliers, recruitment agencies, and government) who are responsible for good working conditions, more ethical recruitment, and clean supply chains. Partners commit to measurable and continuous work toward targets and timelines across three work areas: Worker Voice, Labour Recruitment, and Working Conditions.

Recognizing Engaged Businesses: Businesses that embrace worker voice and become more responsive to it will have greater transparency and visibility of risks than those that do not. Understandably, issues may surface that audits or other approaches had not previously been identified. This should be recognized and understood by Partners. Global buyers should consider providing a “safe space” for businesses in their supply chain to address issues raised by worker voice and provide opportunity for suppliers to demonstrate their openness to reforms and quality and timeliness of responses.

Supply Chain Response: Issara's general operational approach is to not “name and shame” or campaign against businesses, but rather to help businesses responsibly use worker voice, data, and technical support to improve workplace conditions and contribute to industry transformation. Partners will work within their business and industry to cultivate a greater appreciation of worker voice as a valuable tool to help improve business systems and national industry practices.

Oversight: Being solutions-oriented also includes encouraging and supporting well-functioning grievance mechanisms and remedies for workers throughout the supply chain. Partners, as duty bearers, are expected to uphold their own codes of conduct, human rights policies, and migrant worker policies at all times. There must be consequences for non-compliant businesses, which are clearly communicated and understood before issues arise.

Remedy and Timeliness: If labor violations are uncovered, remediation is expected to take place within a reasonable timeframe. Workers must be assured dignity, protection against retaliation, decent working conditions, and access to justice. Workers may pursue other channels to ensure their rights are upheld and should not be suppressed from doing so.

AREA 3. TRANSFORMING THE ECOSYSTEM

Multi-Stakeholder Participation and Collaboration: Business responsibility efforts go from being transactional to truly transformational when values-aligned businesses apply their buying power and voice collectively to make responsible supply chains a sustainable reality. All Issara Partners are expected to actively participate and collaborate in multi-stakeholder conversations to help build shared values, commitments, and vision, and transform the ethical supply chain ecosystem. Issara will aim to make participation easy and more accessible through expanding free online webinars and collaboration events, arranged at various times for the convenience of colleagues in different time zones.

Supporting Learning and Evidence-Based Advocacy: The Issara Partners Program is underpinned by Issara’s worker voice-centered programming and research, which generates considerable learning and data. Partners should take all opportunities to embrace and promote this learning, to support more thought leadership and more responsible business practices globally.

Transparency: As a non-profit organization, Issara’s focus on tackling forced labor and improving labor conditions also means sharing information about what is happening on the ground and generating public goods that help practitioners and stakeholders. While details will not be made public about a Partner’s specific supply chain without consent, ILM data and trends are anonymized and aggregated to promote public sharing of information, successes, challenges, and lessons learned through www.workervoices.org, toward the goal of broader industry and ecosystem transformation, and broader acceptance and integration of worker voice as a key tool for HRDD and ethical supply chains.

Empowerment and Civil Society Support: Issara works both at an international level through global supply chains, and at a grassroots and community level with workers and civil society partners. The support of Issara’s Partners broadly contributes to our network’s worker voice channels, ability to support harm prevention and remediation, and to more transformational systems changes, allowing us to leverage these partnerships to effectuate improvements in the Partner’s supply chain and also the broader industry and ecosystem.