



Ethical Trading Initiative

For workers' rights. For better business.

Progressing worker representation

Entry points for mapping and developing strategy

There are three key entry points to enable mapping of working representation in supply chains, supported by suggested activities to progress independent and effective worker representation.



Workers cannot voice their concerns freely and there is no worker representation

TO PROGRESS

Initiate, promote and communicate



Workers have some recourse to dialogue with employers

TO PROGRESS

Evaluate, scale and skill up



Workers' needs are represented by trade unions or democratically elected representatives

TO PROGRESS

Develop, strengthen and mature

Suggested mapping entry points and indicators

What this means

Workers cannot voice their concerns freely and there is no worker representation

The agenda for events or interactions led solely by employers is typically set without staff or elected representative input, or consultation. They are not designed to address specific workplace or industrial relations matters. There is no legal protection nor anything binding in their terms of reference. Accountability is often assigned to the event convener **and in some instances, there is little or no policy audit trail.** **Worker engagement efforts** (despite their limited nature) may be part of an umbrella policy linked to indicators on sustainability, non-financial reporting, social impact of business and transparency

Workers have some recourse to dialogue with employers

Typically, these are informal, even philanthropic in nature, with an agenda designed without staff or elected representative input or consultation. There may be legal or regulatory requirements for this to be done (for example, in relation to factory safety) but there is no binding mechanism protecting workers from reprisal. Workers may be **selected to participate** or may be asked to volunteer. Engagement takes place based on the **principle of good will.** There is little or no accountability feedback loop to prioritise worker wellbeing, pay or employment terms and conditions. There is an element that could be used as window dressing. In some instances, where fundamental worker rights are not acknowledged, companies may develop policy and mechanisms to engage formally with the workforce.

Workers' needs are represented by trade unions or democratically elected representatives

This is based on accessing globally accepted workers' rights (ILO conventions), protocols and goals (e.g. SDG 8 with particular reference to pay, terms and conditions in workplace). A newly established process will typically feature implementation of freedom of association, collective organising in a workplace with free elections of officials. Agendas will be developed and determined by workers on matters pertinent to them and formal documented meetings will be established with managers. Collective bargaining agreements may include any and/or all elements of the worker experience - ranging from pay and productivity arrangements to employment status. Agreements should apply to all workers contributing to workplace production (permanent, agency, seasonal and temporary).

Where you may find this

Stakeholder engagement, auditing and verification, self-assessment questionnaires and CR or sustainability forums.

What this could look like on site

Whether worker representatives are elected, or staff are selected to attend. The agenda for meetings is developed by managers (or higher levels). Meeting facilitation may be conducted by external experts.

Standalone grievance mechanisms, worker surveys, participation committees, workplace committees for safety, health, equalities and learning.

Whether representatives are elected, or staff are selected to attend. Little or no ownership or accountability. Little or no feedback loop. Decisions made do not change workplace practices or conditions. No evidence of pre-consultation.

Social dialogue initiatives, worker representation committee and/or trade union meetings, bargaining or safety committees.

Signed agreements between worker bodies and managers. Formal arrangements for meetings, election processes, registration of the worker group, bargaining agendas, wage consultations, decrease in staff turnover, decrease in industrial action, better health and safety performance. Effective conflict resolution.

Developing the strategy and action plan

Assess your due diligence mapping outcomes to determine country risks to workers' rights

Select sites to map:

- How workers raise concerns
- The level of engagement of managers with trade unions or collective worker bodies
- Whether the arrangement between workers and managers is formal or informal

Workers cannot voice their concerns freely and there is no worker representation, *for example CSR forums, suggestion boxes, audit interviews or worker surveys*



Workers have some recourse to dialogue with employers, *for example worker participation committees, anti-sexual harassment committees, grievance mechanisms or OSH committees*



Workers' needs are represented by trade unions or democratically elected representatives



Initiate, promote and communicate: Initiate conversations with suppliers, promoting the value of worker representation and communicating your requirements, vision and intent. Through your continuous improvement activities:

- Review onboarding processes and codes of conduct with clear communication of expectations on freedom of association, collective bargaining and worker representation
- Request specific information on how workers raise concerns, how this is remediated or fed back to workers; this could be included in self-assessment questionnaires, third party audits and factory visits
- Establish if there is worker participation in decision making or consultation on workplace issues that affect or impact workers
- Invest in education and training for suppliers

Evaluate, scale and skill up: Evaluate the **scope and depth** of engagement between workers and managers

- Capture site evidence of the positive contributions of workers to the business, including improvements in and to the business (reduced absenteeism, increased production and/or reduced health and safety incidents and accidents). Share internal evidence you gather with other sites in your supply chain
- Where there are existing forums or committees invest in worker and managers skills development such as social dialogue techniques, presentation and consultation skills or election processes
- Where there are active trade unions the above could be developed in conjunction with them

Develop, strengthen and mature: Develop an understanding of the site's consultation or negotiating processes, including when wage negotiations take place, the length and scope of collective bargaining agreements, or how workplace disputes are raised and addressed. Document through mapping, the site trade union including sector, national and global affiliations

- Strengthen the formal worker and employer relationship through investing in skills and knowledge development – for example, global framework agreements (GFA), new or changes to local labour regulation and grievance mechanisms. For larger multinational companies where there is a GFA, invest in educating and promoting the agreement among more sites or countries
- Build relationships with trade unions or labour organisations and participate in industry or country interventions on worker rights, for example the ACT initiative, suppression of worker rights or harassment of trade union or elected representatives