

Sustainability Standards

A NEW DEAL TO BUILD FORWARD BETTER



International
Trade
Centre

TRADE IMPACT FOR GOOD

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The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations.

Street address: ITC
54-56, rue de Montbrillant
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Postal address: ITC
Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Telephone: +41-22 730 0111

Fax: +41-22 733 4439

E-mail: itcreg@intracen.org

Internet: <http://www.intracen.org>

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report shows how sustainability standards can be a powerful tool for post-pandemic recovery.

It traces the origin of sustainability standards, their evolution from niche to mainstream and industry trends. Companies use them widely in their value chains. Investor choices and government policies are also being shaped by these standards.

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For more information, contact: Mathieu Lamolle at lamolle@intracen.org

For more information on Standards Map: visit www.standardsmap.org

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ITC, Palais des Nations, 1211, Geneva 10, Switzerland (www.intracen.org)

FOREWORD

This has been an awful year and a half, full of stressful headlines and constant adrenaline. COVID-19 deaths every day and lockdowns costing millions of workers their jobs; almost every aspect of normal life upended. Accelerating climate change leads to constant weather-related events, from floods and wildfires to landslides, droughts and tropical storms. We speak of resilience, but the past year-and-a-half have tested every person, country, government and organization. We cannot pass this test unless we help each other.

At the International Trade Centre (ITC), we are doing our best to improve the sustainability and resiliency of small enterprises, not only so they can improve their prospects for accessing new markets, but also so they can contribute to economic growth, environmental sustainability, decent working conditions and reduced discrimination and inequities across value chains. Our approach lifts all boats and leaves no one behind.

From the trade perspective, sustainability standards are one of the tools that has stood the test of time, apply to multiple sectors and countries, and contain relevant criteria and implementation frameworks.

For the past decade, ITC colleagues in the Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD) programme have been studying the connections between trade and sustainability, notably through the implementation of sustainability standards. This work was inspired and nurtured by two of ITC's core funding partners, the German and Swiss governments, which had the vision to develop the world's first global database on sustainability standards: Standards Map.

Back in 2011, some sceptics questioned investing resources in such a niche field, as certified trade in those days only made up a fraction of global trade. Today, the picture is dramatically different. The catchphrase 'from niche to mainstream' could not be more appropriate.

This year, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Standards Map with a brand-new online portal. It now contains data on more than 300 standards, codes of conduct and sustainability frameworks, offering fresh features and functionalities just a few clicks away and ready for use by private and public actors, researchers and academia, and consumers.

In the pages ahead, you will learn from a decade of our experience working with standards, lead firms, non-governmental organizations, small and medium-sized enterprises, and policymakers. This book discusses the origin of sustainability standards, their relevance in trade and how they are dealing with the profound climate, social and economic resilience issues facing our planet today.

This publication also carries an important message for our global economy's future: sustainability is indispensable. It takes the form of initiatives – local and global – emerging in every corner of our society, from consumers and producers to companies and policymakers.

COVID-19 has taught us that we are not as invulnerable as we believed. In the trade field, the key pandemic-inspired lesson is one we must heed: international value chains are more fragile than we thought. We need to strengthen these value chains, make them more resilient and inclusive.

I hope you find this book informative and inspiring. Sustainability is essential, the *sine qua non* for our future. We call it the Sustainability Deal, and we carry it in our DNA at ITC. We hope you will carry it, too.



Pamela Coke-Hamilton
Executive Director
International Trade Centre

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ITC's Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD) programme produced this book. T4SD is a flagship programme of ITC that is implemented in close cooperation with the German Development Ministry, the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs and the European Commission.

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