



Ethical business: protecting our planet and the people on it

A consumer's guide to the social responsibility standard – BS ISO 26000:2010

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The globalization of business has made the world seem a smaller place. And advances in media technology have made it easier to find out what's going on across the globe – from environmental disasters to child labour, dangerous working conditions and corruption.

This knowledge has made many of us think not only about what we buy but also how goods are produced and the social and environmental impact of how organizations do business.

Cost, quality and customer service are still important, but consumers are increasingly interested in a company's principles, too. During the last 10 years UK spending on ethical goods, such as fair trade food, energy-efficient household goods and ethical financial services, has trebled. This increased demand has put pressure on all organizations to become more socially responsible – respecting the planet and all the people on it by:

- Protecting human rights
- Treating workers fairly
- Avoiding discrimination
- Respecting the environment
- Protecting consumers
- Helping to improve local communities

But how does an organization begin to achieve these aims? That's where the social responsibility standard, BS ISO 26000, can help.

BS ISO 26000 – the basics

BS ISO 26000 is a standard first proposed by consumers, through the consumer policy committee (COPOLCO) of the international standards organization (ISO).

Developed together with representatives from business, government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), it gives detailed guidance for organizations of all types and sizes. It can be used by any organization, including private businesses, government agencies and departments, charities and voluntary organizations.



The standard sets out basic expectations for social and environmental performance and gives practical advice on how to achieve these. It provides common definitions, working practices and methods of evaluation.

In summary, organizations following the standard should:

- Do everything they can to contribute to sustainable development
- Be open and honest, and take responsibility for mistakes
- Act ethically at all times, for a positive impact on humanity and the environment

BS ISO 26000 – the details

The standard is voluntary, but an organization that chooses to use it should:

Clearly define social responsibility

Identify key issues and priorities within seven core subjects:

- Organizational governance
- Human rights
- Labour practices
- The environment
- Fair operating practices
- Consumer issues
- Community involvement and development

Think about the organization's impact on others

- Consider how decisions and activities affect stakeholders (those individuals or groups with an interest in the organization's decisions or activities)

Be transparent

- Give full, clear information about policies and activities, including their actual and potential impact on society and the environment
- Make this information readily available and accessible

Be accountable

The management of the organization must:

- Be answerable to people affected by decisions and activities
- Where something goes wrong, take appropriate steps to put it right and take action to prevent it from happening again

Behave ethically

- Identify and promote the organization's ethical values
- Clearly communicate these values to all staff, suppliers and others with an interest in the organization
- Have procedures to monitor, support and enforce ethical behaviour and to deal with unethical behaviour

Respect international laws and norms of behaviour

- Abide by relevant laws, such as equality laws, wherever the organization operates, even in areas where such laws are not enforced
- Respect international norms of behaviour. What is acceptable differs from country to country, but organizations should find out what is expected socially responsible behaviour in the countries they work in
- Avoid working with or supporting organizations that don't respect the law or international norms of behaviour

Respect human rights

- Respect and, where possible, promote the rights set out in the International Bill of Human Rights. This includes protecting children and the rights of people with disabilities, and eliminating racial and gender discrimination

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Frequently asked questions

Q. What is BSI?

A. BSI is the UK National Standards Body which has been developing standards for more than 100 years to make products and services safer for consumers. Standards set out good practice and guidelines for organizations to follow. BSI is the UK member of ISO, the International Organization for Standardization.

Q. Why does this standard refer to SR (social responsibility) rather than CSR (corporate social responsibility)?

A. Traditionally, CSR was seen to apply only to big businesses or corporations. SR adopts similar principles but is wider in scope and can apply to groups or organizations of any size or type, such as government and charities, as well as private companies.

Q. Do all organizations have to comply with the standard?

A. No, the standard is voluntary, so you can feel confident that those that choose to comply with this or any other British Standard take safety, customer service and, in this case, social responsibility, seriously.

Q. How do I know if an organization is signed up to the standard?

A. Organizations using the standard are likely to communicate this to the public in literature such as annual reports and social responsibility policies. You could check their website or contact them directly to make enquiries.

Q. Where can I get a copy of BS ISO 26000?

A. Your local library may be able to help you access a reference copy, or you can buy a copy from BSI at shop.bsigroup.com Some extra information is also freely available at www.iso.org

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