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ECPAT Sweden Briefing Paper

ISO 26000 Guidance Standard on Social Responsibility

What is ISO 26000?

ISO 26000 Guidance Standard on Social Responsibility is a *guidance* standard, which means it is not meant for certification. It is for voluntary use and attempts to guide users towards increased social responsibility. It is not a standard for only corporate social responsibility; it is a standard that all organizations can use. When the term “organization” is used in the text, it refers to companies and other type of stakeholders.

How was it developed?

The need to draft a standard on *corporate* social responsibility was raised in 2001, by e.g. consumer groups. The work to draft a standard on social responsibility begun in 2004, with the creation of a Working Group. Six years of drafting followed and the Working Group grew into hundreds of experts and thousands of participants. Input was provided through numerous written comments on roughly ten drafts. The standard was published in 2010. It comprises in total, including annexes, more than 100 pages.

The ISO 26000 was developed through the participation of six stakeholder groups; industry, government, consumers, labour, NGOs and others (e.g. research). There was participation from all over the world, and the participation in terms of gender was relatively well balanced. Noteworthy, it was a costly process where mostly, the participants had to find strategies to fund participation themselves (even if some support existed) including travel around the world to meeting venues. ECPAT Sweden participated since 2005, and became a representative for the global NGO-stakeholder group in the drafting team of the standard.

Strengths & Challenges of the standard

According to ECPAT Sweden, some of the main strengths of the standard include:

- **Definition of Social Responsibility** (definition 2.18). It defines SR as taking responsibility for your impact on society and environment, rather than as charity. It emphasizes sustainable aims, engaging with stakeholders and respecting international norms.
- **Emphasis on Stakeholder Engagement** (clause 5). The standard strongly emphasizes the role of stakeholder expectations and the importance of considering stakeholder interests. This provides a great opportunity to enter dialogue with organizations.
- **Chapter on Human Rights** (clause 6.3). The clause builds on elements as proposed in the Draft UN Guiding Principles for Business & Human Rights, where conducting human rights due diligence is key to respecting human rights. It specifically discusses children as a vulnerable group.

- **Principle on Respect for International Norms of Behavior** (principle 4.7). The principle states that organizations should strive to respect international norms. In effect, this means that non-state actors should respect the rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other relevant human rights treaties directed at states.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is the world's largest and leading standardization organization. The working group of ISO 26000 was the largest and most broad based (stakeholder representation) group to develop an ISO standard. The potential for using it as a tool to create change and increase social responsibility of companies and others, is large. ECPAT Sweden would like to encourage everyone, to seize this opportunity to use the standard as a tool for change and lobbying. It will during the coming years, provide the common language that stakeholders will speak in working with social responsibility.

It is both positive and negative that the standard is general in many regards, and not too specific in its guidance. It sets out to cover almost all topics relating to social responsibility, and it is to be used for any organization in the society, large, small, global, domestic, for-profit, non-profit... The scope is thus huge. Because it is not a standard for certification, it does not contain *shall-requirements*; it is worded through recommendations expressed by "should". Some question whether it would be better to have it be certifiable. But upon a second thought many agree with disadvantages. How do you create a checklist approach to every issue contained in the standard? Furthermore, some argue that since SR is rather a process than a one-time off status, using the approach of a guidance standard (rather than a certifiable standard) is more suited for social responsibility – at least at this initial phase. Nevertheless, a number of countries across the globe are developing national standards that are certifiable, e.g. Denmark, Austria and Israel. Other countries already have certifiable standards, e.g. Brazil, Mexico, Portugal and Spain.

How does the standard deal with human rights and sexual exploitation of children?

The standard contains many points of guidance that can be used to raise the bar for companies working against sexual exploitation of children. For example, it states that organizations should not be complicit in human rights abuses, defining complicity both in legal and non-legal senses. It recommends organizations and companies to have policies to prevent sexual exploitation of children. It recommends organizations and companies to respect and always take into account, the four basic principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is not just the chapter on human rights that become relevant, but many aspects in the standard that thus it should be read as a whole.

How does ISO 26000 relate to the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation?

The Code of Conduct is listed in the Annex of the standard, after decision of the Working Group. It is the only initiative mentioned in the standard dealing with children's rights specifically and also the only one dealing with sexual exploitation.

Read & Know More

You can find more information on www.iso.org/sr

There are discussions groups open for anyone to join e.g. on LinkedIn.

For further information or questions, please contact ECPAT Sweden at info@ecpat.se

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