



Leather Impact Accelerator (LIA)

Standard Assurance Benchmark Criteria 1.0

– WORKING DRAFT

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Introduction

About the Leather Impact Accelerator

The Leather Impact Accelerator (LIA) is a program that enables members of the leather value chain to work towards shared expectations in a coordinated way. It provides tools to align their actions towards meaningful global impacts.

The goal of LIA is to leverage and add value to the work that is already being done in the beef and leather industries. To that end, LIA uses benchmarks to set a minimum threshold for practices and give recognition to those who meet or exceed them. Brands can use Impact Incentives to provide direct financial support to farmers that meet LIA benchmarks. The Claims Framework provides guidance for all LIA participants to make credible claims.

LIA is global in scope and addresses:

- Cattle production, including cow-calf, raising and direct operations
 - Animal husbandry
 - Deforestation/conversion
 - Traceability
- All stages of leather production
 - Environmental impacts
 - Social impacts
 - Traceability
- All market sectors, including accessories, automotive, equine, fashion, footwear, furnishings and more

About Textile Exchange



The Leather Impact Accelerator (LIA) is owned and managed by Textile Exchange. Textile Exchange is a global non-profit that works closely with our members to drive industry transformation in preferred fibers, integrity and standards and responsible supply networks. We identify and share best practices regarding farming, materials, processing, traceability and product end-of-life in order to reduce the textile industry's impact on the world's water, soil and air, and the human population.

Benchmark Approach

The industry already has many standards in these areas, so a benchmark approach has been adopted to leverage and add value to the standards and programs that are already in use. In addition to benchmarking, LIA includes requirements for traceability systems and verification protocols.

Benchmarks set a minimum threshold for practices and gives recognition to those who meet or exceed them.

The Leather Impact Accelerator (LIA) uses benchmarks to address:

- Animal Management
- Deforestation/Conversion-Free (DCF)
- Leather Production

To learn more about LIA's benchmarking system and process, read the [LIA Benchmarking Process](#).

How to Use this Document

The following verbal forms are used and apply in both the requirements and the guidance. They are consistent with ISO/IEC 17065:

- "Shall" indicates a mandatory requirement.
- "Should" indicates a recommendation.
- "May" indicates a permission.
- "Can" indicates a possibility or a capability.

Section A – Standard Assurance Benchmark Criteria

A1. Standard Assurance Benchmark Criteria

The objective of the Standard Assurance Criteria is to ensure that all standards approved by LIA, not only conform to the specific LIA benchmark scope (Animal Welfare, Leather Production Environmental and Leather Production Social) but are also credible standards, developed, audited and maintained in a transparent fashion, including multi-stakeholder consultation and decision-making, and clear and auditable conditions in the standard itself.

For any standard to be approved by LIA, it shall meet one of the LIA benchmark scopes as well as the Standard Assurance Benchmark Criteria.

In this first version of LIA, the Standard Assurance requirements are aligned with SSCI Benchmarking Requirements, Version 1.0, PART II - Requirements for the Management of Schemes, developed by the Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative (SSCI) of The Consumer Goods Forum and launched in 2019.

Reference Documents

- SSCI, Version 1.0, Part II – Requirements for the Management of Schemes ([here](#)).
- [Sustainability Benchmarking Good Practice Guide v1](#); Annex 3: Benchmark Criteria for Evaluating Standards Systems

For more information on how the SSCI requirements was developed through a multi-stakeholder process, visit [XXX](#).

Standard Assurance Benchmark Requirements

The topics addressed in this benchmark are:

- Scheme Governance
- Scope and Objectives
- Integrity Program
- Logo Use and Claims
- Standard Setting and Maintenance
- Accreditation
- Relationship with Audit Firms
- Auditor Competence
- Audit Protocol
- Audit Reporting

- Follow-Up Action
- Data Management

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CHAPTER 1. Standard Governance	
1.01	The Standard Owner shall be an organization that is a legal entity, which could be held legally responsible for the Standards' operations.
1.02	The Standard cannot be managed or owned in whole or in part by an audit firm or group of audit firms to ensure that the Standard owner is not directly engaged in operational affairs (auditing or certification) of the program.
1.03	The Standard Owner shall have adequate arrangements to cover liabilities arising from its operations.
1.04	The Standard Owner operates to a documented set of governance policies and procedures specifying at least the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Board or governance body election or appointment process, - Board or governance body representation and Terms of Reference, - Member categories (where applicable), - Income generation or funding processes, - An organizational structure, - The decision-making processes of each governance body, - Key personnel roles (responsibility and authority), - Managing conflict of interest, and - Assurance process
1.05	The Standard Owner shall have in place a publicly available appeals and complaints resolution procedure and shall require this from approved audit firms and accreditation bodies. Each procedure shall require the respective body to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - investigate and take appropriate action regarding relevant complaints, within defined timelines; - review and take any necessary corrective actions; and - keep a record of all complaints and resulting actions.
CHAPTER 2. Scope and Objectives	
2.01	The Standard Owner shall have a defined scope for auditing under its Standard.
CHAPTER 3. Integrity Program	
3.01	The Standard Owner shall have in place a clearly defined system for the approval, suspension and withdrawal of audit services by audit firms for the scope of their Standard.
3.02	The Standard Owner shall define procedures to monitor the performance of audit firms. The procedures shall, at a minimum, include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the review of complaints - the review of audit reports - a risk-based program of office audits and witness audits of audit firms that are approved to operate under the Standard <p>The monitoring of the performance may take the form of a risk-based program, based on the region they operate, past complaints, number, size and complexity of assessments carried out by an audit firm.</p>
CHAPTER 4. Logo Use and Claims	

4.01	<p>The Standard Owner shall have a publicly available policy governing the use of symbols, logos and claims.</p> <p>The policy shall, at a minimum, include that symbols, logos and claims</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are only applied to activities that are within the scope of certification/auditing; - do not overstate or mislead users relative to the defined scope or the status of the auditee; - are relevant to that scope; and - the policy shall address copyright protection.
4.02	<p>In the case of certification Standards, the Standard Owner or its delegated authority issues written and enforceable authorizations and/or licenses to use the Standard's mark/claim/logo only when the facility and/or product has been audited as being in conformity with the relevant standard.</p>
<p>CHAPTER 5. Standard Setting and Maintenance</p>	
5.01	<p>The Standard Owner shall have a document control procedure in place to ensure that all of the Standard's normative documents are appropriately controlled and publicly available.</p>
5.02	<p>The Standard Owner shall have publicly available procedures for the process under which each standard is developed, approved and revised.</p>
5.03	<p>The Standard Owner shall ensure participation of technical experts and encourages balanced participation by stakeholders in the standard development, revision and approval process.</p>
5.04	<p>The Standard Owner shall ensure that the standard, during its development or for major revisions,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. has been subject to public stakeholder consultation and b. due consideration has been given to comments received from stakeholders during the consultation.
5.05	<p>The Standard Owner allows a period of at least 60 days for the submission of comments on the draft standard during the public consultation phase.</p>
5.06	<p>The Standard Owner reviews standards at least every five years for continued relevance and for effectiveness in meeting their stated objectives and, if necessary, revises them in a timely manner.</p>
5.07	<p>The Standard Owner shall prepare sufficient guidance on the standard to support consistent interpretation of its requirements.</p>
<p>CHAPTER 6. Accreditation</p>	
6.01	<p>The Standard Owner shall require that audit firms achieve and maintain accreditation against the current version of ISO/IEC 17021-1 or ISO/IEC 17065 for the scope of the respective standard of the Standard.</p>
6.02	<p>In the event that an audit firm is not yet accredited to ISO/IEC 17021 or ISO/IEC 17065, the Standard Owner may put procedures in place for a clearly defined transition period to allow audit firms to achieve ISO accreditation. If a transition period is granted, it shall not exceed two years.</p>

6.03	The Standard Owner has a contractual, enforceable arrangement or formal understanding that requires accreditation bodies to be compliant with the requirements of the current version of ISO/IEC 17011.
6.04	The Standard Owner specifies the requirements for audit firms that the accreditation body is required to verify.
6.05	The Standard Owner only works with accreditation bodies that have personnel with the necessary education, training, technical knowledge and experience for performing accreditation functions in social compliance.
6.06	The Standard Owner shall ensure that assessment staff within the accreditation body have knowledge of the standard and its intent, and of the Standards' assurance requirements.
6.07	The Standard Owner ensures that the accreditation process includes an on-site audit of the audit firm.
6.08	The Standard Owner shall have an agreement in place with the accreditation body to ensure that, in the event that an audit firm has its accreditation withdrawn or suspended by the accreditation body, the Standard Owner is informed of this action.
6.09	If more than one accreditation body is used, the Standard Owner shall ensure that the accreditation is implemented in a consistent manner.
CHAPTER 7. Relationship with Audit Firms	
7.01	The Standard Owner shall ensure that audit firms that are approved to operate their Standard are legal entities.
7.02	The Standard Owner shall ensure that it has contractual and enforceable arrangements with all audit firms that are approved to operate their Standard.
7.03	The Standard Owner shall have in place a system to ensure an audit firm notifies them of all executed audit activities under their Standard, as well as any withdrawal or suspension.
7.04	The Standard Owner shall ensure that the audit firm operates an effective and fully implemented quality system. The quality system shall be fully documented and used by all relevant audit firm staff.
CHAPTER 8. Auditor Competence	
8.01	The Standard Owner shall define the qualifications and competence criteria required of auditors.
8.02	The lead auditor performing audits for the audit firm shall have the following experience: - a minimum of 1-year experience in social compliance auditing and a minimum of 100 social compliance audit days OR - a minimum of 2 years' experience in any other type of auditing and 150 audit days of which a minimum of 50 are social compliance audit days. Other audit days may include management system, health and safety, labor inspections, investigations, audit components.
8.03	In the event that an audit firm is not yet meeting the requirements of B3.02, the Standard Owner may put procedures in place for a clearly defined transition period to allow audit firms to meet these requirements.

8.04	<p>The Standard Owner shall require audit firms that auditor competence is demonstrated on a recurring basis. The competence assessment of lead auditors and audit team members shall include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an assessment of knowledge of local and national labor and human rights issues and legislation; - an assessment of skills in interviewing workers on human and labor rights issues, - an assessment of knowledge of the relevant sector; - an assessment of the personal attributes of the auditor, to ensure they conduct themselves in a professional manner; - a period of supervision (witnessed audits) to cover specific audit techniques and specific category knowledge; - a documented sign off by the audit firm of the satisfactory completion of assessment requirements.
8.05	<p>The Standard Owner shall require audit firms that their auditors have successfully completed approved training in the respective Standard to the satisfaction of the Standard owner. Training shall be repeated regularly and following major revisions of the Standard.</p>
8.06	<p>The Standard Owner shall ensure that audit firms have a structure in place that assures that auditors shall keep up to date with industry best practice.</p>
8.07	<p>The Standard Owner shall require audit firms to provide specific training to auditors on a regular basis, based on the most pertinent social compliance risks in the regions they operate in and individual performance reviews. Standard owners shall require audit firms to document training attendance.</p>
8.08	<p>The Standard Owner shall require that if an audit firm sub-contracts any work to another party, a legally enforceable agreement between the audit firm and the sub-contracted party is in place to ensure the sub-contracted party adheres to the same policies, procedures and competence requirements when auditing against the Standard</p>
8.09	<p>The Standard Owner shall require all approved audit firms to implement an ongoing program for auditor calibration.</p>
CHAPTER 9. Audit Protocol	
9.01	<p>The Standard Owner shall define the methodology to assess compliance with the standard and require audit firms to apply this methodology consistently.</p>
9.02	<p>The Standard Owner shall require that the scope of the audit includes an on-site assessment of the main site and all other pertinent off-site locations, including accommodation facilities, where provided or mandated.</p>
9.03	<p>The Standard Owner shall define a procedure for audit firms to determine the number and selection of pertinent locations.</p>
9.04	<p>The Standard Owner shall have a clearly defined and documented audit frequency program. The maximum validity of an audit or certificate shall not exceed 3 years.</p> <p>The Standard Owner shall require audit firms to carry out periodic surveillance audits at sufficiently close intervals to verify compliance with the</p>

	standards' requirements. The rationale behind these intervals shall be clearly defined and transparent.
9.05	The Standard Owner shall ensure that, irrespective of the defined minimum audit frequency, the audit firm shall undertake additional surveillance audits in the event that there is evidence or suspicion of non-conformity within an organisation.
9.06	The audit shall take place during a period when the employment site is in normal operation. Resulting variations to audit frequency shall be clearly defined and documented.
9.07	The Standard Owner shall clearly define the expected duration of audits and the rationale for the determination of the duration of the audit that audit firms are required to follow during the audit. The rationale shall at a minimum include the size of the workforce and should include additional criteria that will ensure the effectiveness of the audit such as the physical size of the location to audit, number of locations, nationalities of the workforce, product lines and product categories, etc.
9.08	The Standard Owner shall have in place auditing procedures and guidance for multi-site auditing and requires audit firms to apply the methodology consistently, if allowed under the Standard.
9.09	The Standard Owner shall require that audits include worker and management interviews, the observation of processes and activities and the review of relevant documentation and records.
9.1	The Standard Owner shall define the methodology for defining the number of workers to be interviewed. Interviewed workers shall reflect a wide range of workers and include potentially vulnerable workers and those in less skilled positions.
9.11	The Standard Owner shall define requirements for the execution of worker interviews that audit firms are required to implement. The requirements include at a minimum that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workers shall be interviewed both individually and in groups - Workers shall be interviewed in a confidential setting without any supervision or management personnel present - Information provided by workers shall be processed in a non-attributable manner - Workers shall be interviewed in their own language - The selection of workers shall consider that they are representative of the factory, by characteristics such as gender, age, length of service and origin - In any event, management, supervisors or their representatives shall not act as interpreters
CHAPTER 10. Audit Reporting	
10.01	The Standard Owner shall require certificates/audit reports to include, at a minimum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the name and address of the Standard Owner; - the name and address of the audit firm; - the name and address of the audited site;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the effective date of issue of the certificate/audit report; - the substance (scope of audit) of the certificate/audit report; - in case of certification Standards: the term for which the certification is valid; - signature of the issuing officer.
10.02	Reports and grading systems shall clearly identify whether audits are announced, semi- announced or unannounced.
10.03	The Standard Owner shall require that audit reports shall contain evidence that all the relevant criteria have been checked during the audit. In the case where a non-conformity is identified by the auditor, clear and concise details of the non-conformity shall be provided in the audit report.
10.04	<p>The Standard Owner shall require audit firms to ensure that audit reports of full audits are given a thorough technical review. Surveillance audits shall, at a minimum, be reviewed according to a risk-based approach. For the review process to be effective it shall be ensured that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reviewers are impartial and technically capable of understanding the content of reports; - all applicable requirements of the standard have been fully covered, using any supporting notes made during the assessment by a suitably qualified auditor, - all areas of non-conformity have been identified and supported with clear evidence, - in the case of certification Standards, effective corrective action has been taken to resolve these non-conformities.
10.05	The Standard Owner shall define clear procedures in case non-compliances are found that pose an imminent danger to workers.
CHAPTER 11. Follow-Up Action	
11.01	The Standard Owner shall have a system for the classification of non-conformities that clearly specifies the definition of the different types of non-conformities.
11.02	The Standard Owner shall require the auditee to perform a root cause analysis of the non- conformities found.
11.03	If one or more non-conformities are found, the Standard Owner shall require the auditee to prepare a corrective action plan, including details on the corrective actions and the time frame in which corrective actions shall be undertaken.
11.04	<p>Verification of the implementation of the corrective action plan by an audit firm shall take the form of further on-site assessment OR the review of submitted documentation assessed by a technically competent member or group within the audit firm.</p> <p>Follow-up audits shall be performed for critical or major non-compliances or when corrective actions can be evaluated only through an on-site visit.</p>
11.05	The Standard Owner shall define clear procedures regarding the follow-up action when non- conformities are found. In the case of certification Standards, all evidence of corrective action shall be submitted, completed

	and verified by the audit firm, within a timescale defined by the Standard Owner.
11.06	In case of certification Standards, the Standard Owner shall provide audit firms with consistent documented procedure(s) that specify the conditions under which certification may be suspended or withdrawn, partially or in total, for all or part of the scope of certification.
11.07	The Standard Owner shall require that the audit firm has in place a clearly defined and publicly available appeals procedure.
CHAPTER 12. Data Management	
12.01	The Standard Owner shall have in place a clearly defined data management system, which will hold and maintain data for the effective management and operation of the Standard.
12.02	The Standard Owner shall ensure that the data management system incorporates as a minimum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of approved audit firms, - Number of audit reports/certificates issued - In case of certification Standards: number of delisted sites

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