TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL AUDITING

A lifelong technology enthusiast, Andrea’s work builds upon her understanding of governance, social and environmental audit, and her supply chain experience in the electronics industry. Andrea holds a Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) from Queens University, completed the Canadian Council of Innovators Innovation Governance Program (iGP) and is working to complete a graduate certificate in Technical Writing.

APSCA (Association of Professional Social Compliance Auditors) is the professional standards body for independent Social Compliance Auditors (https://www.theapsca.org/). We represent the vast majority of Social Compliance Audit Firms and more than 4600 Auditors who audit globally. Collectively, APSCA Member Auditors conducted over 160,000 Social Compliance Audits during 2021, engaging with hundreds of thousands of workers directly, and ultimately benefit millions of supply chain workers globally through the identification of labour violations, including warning signs of forced labour.

APSCA enjoys the support of the largest brands and retailers around the world and the partnership of the social compliance collaborative programs (schemes) who require professional credential for performance under their programs. The organization is a US-based Non-Profit with staff located in four countries.

WFSGI AND APSCA TOGETHER THROUGH TIME

1992
WFSGI creates an environmental committee including Social Compliance.

1995
WFSGI creates a CSR committee.

2010
WFSGI begins assessment on how to handle Corporate Responsibility topics within their organisation.

2019
APSCA President and CEO Rona Starr presents at WFSGI Annual Conference. The early approach centring on Building Credibility and Promoting Trust.

2019
Following information exchange with various industry stakeholders, WFSGI recognize APSCA’s work as their growing presence moves towards the shared goal of ensuring the credibility of Social Compliance Audits. WFSGI sign the APSCA support statement.

2021
WFSGI extends their support of APSCA into a tangible requirement within the WFSGI Pledge for the FIFA Quality Program. Step 2 of the pledge requires all social audit reports be issued by an APSCA Member Firm.
APSCA’s Beginnings
APSCA’s journey began in 2015, as a practitioner led initiative with the initial focus to develop and deliver a three-part exam process to professionally certify Social Compliance Auditors. These exams would allow Member Auditors to gain professional certification and have their auditing skills recognized by the professional standards body. APSCA’s CSCA program is a rigorous, multi-dimensional three-part examination process, available in over 90 languages. As of 30 September 2022, more than 1,670 APSCA Member Auditors who represent 35% of our total Auditor Membership, have successfully achieved the status of Certified Social Compliance Auditor (CSCA). APSCA provides Member Firms and their clients with a professional and skilled cadre of Social Compliance Auditors. This is increasingly being recognized by businesses as many enterprises are mandating that their audits be completed by APSCA Certified Auditors only.

APSCA Exams
The APSCA CSCA exam program pilot occurred late 2017 through early 2018 with the final launch in Q4 2018. When APSCA launched we partnered with a third-party proctoring service to expand opportunities for our global Member base. Part I and Part II Exams, are computer-based exams which are delivered online 24/7 in 10 languages, with an additional 85+ languages available through browser level translation. The Part III exam is a unique format, conducted through video-based conferencing, with highly specialized, trained interviewers who take auditors through three mock scenarios, assessing their foundational skills and functional knowledge identified within the APSCA Competency Framework. Initially, Part III was available in four languages and in 2022 APSCA partnered with a multinational translation service provider to expand exam support with live translators enabling exams to all Member Auditors. With expanded access to translators and translation, the completion of all three parts of the exam has increased, enabling Auditors from around the globe to achieve certification status.

“What is Social Compliance?”

• Social Compliance is generally thought of as part of ESG Compliance (Environmental Social and Risk Governance) structure which most public businesses and governments have become increasingly concerned with over the last 20 years.

• Social Compliance Audits specifically relate to the human rights, health and wellbeing and occupational health and safety of workers as well as the overall ethical conduct of the business and its management systems.

“APSCA encourages the WFSGI reader community to recognize, support, and promote effective voluntary initiatives that promote credible Social Compliance Auditing as a part of forced labour due diligence”
AN EVOLVING REALITY

• Audit now sits in a changing social measurement reality. The EU Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence Directive (eHRDD), the German Supply chain law, modern slavery legislation in various countries and recent moves to require human rights due diligence in Japan, all herald a new dynamic for the role of social auditing.

• Human rights “respect”, expected of companies, goes beyond compliance, but compliance still lies at the heart of this new human rights due diligence approach. Legal compliance also lies at the heart of “respect”. How can efforts go beyond legal compliance when we know such compliance is not to be assumed?

• As a profession, social auditing is well placed to pivot to include effective eHRDD in its’ toolbox. EHRDD will require new skills of enquiry and assessment but given the APSCA approach to ensuring a well-trained and responsive auditor community, the profession is well positioned to enhance its skills offering to business.

• At the same time, Audit Firms need to re-engage with clients. The contribution of Social Compliance Audits to enhanced due diligence, cannot be seen as a “tick the box” exercise. Companies need to better understand audit and/or EHRDD reports to identify the risks they are trying to understand, and then work on the remediation of harms found. Companies will need to be able to give better transparency to their efforts which may occasion a need to review how audits are undertaken and how the information is collated and reported.

Human rights due diligence is a process to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for how businesses address their impacts on human rights. APSCA encourages organizations to recognize that Social Compliance Audits are one of the most highly utilized, globally available processes that form part of the “identification” element of human rights due diligence and serve as a baseline for further remediation.

The Future of Social Compliance

With the exam process well in hand, APSCA has expanded our field of vision (and mission) by engaging additional stakeholders in public policy and academia, setting our sights on the future, and sustaining the profession we have worked to codify, monitor, and refine.

As stated, APSCA is seeing more focus on broader eHRDD efforts by regions and companies where social audits continue to play an important role alongside other tools and processes being developed to understand and manage wider human rights risks. Companies are looking separately, as well as collectively, to APSCA Member Firms as key partners in these developments.

As the environment around audit develops, with the support of our Stakeholder Advisory Board, APSCA has provided feedback on several pieces of developing legislation and guidance documents, including the EU Forced Labour Initiative, the EU Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence Draft Directive, and the US National Action Plan on Responsible Business Conduct (NAP RBC). Participating in these types of feedback is critical for allowing APSCA to provide real “from the ground” information to policy makers to help ensure the feasibility of final provisions.

We also continue to work daily to expand engagement and data exchange more broadly with both policymakers and collaborative programs in the Social Compliance Audit profession.