

Toward greater supply chain transparency: Public buyers and resellers

Electronics Watch and the Circular and Fair ICT Pact (CFIT) are pleased to co-host a structured dialogue between public buyers and their ICT hardware resellers on supply chain due diligence. The series recognises the need for improved coordination between these parties to achieve effective supply chain due diligence, and the unique challenges and opportunities that each party faces in that regard. The dialogue series creates space for mutual problem solving around known challenges, including the identification of good practices and proposed solutions.

Organisations linked to negative human rights impacts should exercise leverage to improve business practices and ensure that those who experience harm receive access to remedy. Unfortunately, many negative impacts on workers' rights occur further up the supply chain where individual buyers and resellers influence is limited. Understanding the relationships between different supply chain actors, their priorities, and their access to information and resources is critical to assessing leverage.

The fourth meeting in the series took place on 18 September 2025. It explored leverage derived from contractual obligations, commercial influence, reputational considerations, relationships and knowledge. Participating resellers and public buyers shared proactive steps that they can take—both respectively and jointly—to use their leverage to strengthen human rights in the supply chain. They also discussed opportunities to pursue specific improvements together with major brands.

This document provides a summary of the discussion, which was held virtually under the Chatham House Rule. Not including the organisers, 15 individuals participated. The following 13 institutions, listed in alphabetical order, were represented among the meeting participants:

Adda, Atea, City of Malmö, City of Oslo, Converge Technology Solutions, the Greater London Authority Group (GLA Group), Hanze University of Applied Sciences, the Irish Office of Government Procurement, London Universities Purchasing Consortium (LUPC), North Eastern Universities Purchasing Consortium, SCC Plc., SLTN, Southern Universities Procurement Consortium (SUPC).

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

There was considerable consensus among participants in this meeting both within and between the two groups represented (i.e., resellers and public buyers).

What are specific ways that your organisation could exercise different types of leverage to strengthen human rights due diligence in the supply chain?

Contractual leverage:

- Include minimum requirements in all contracts in high-risk categories above a certain value. For instance, this could include requiring relevant labels or certifications and/or the disclosure of tier 1 manufacturing sites, and, for organisations that don't already have one, the introduction of a supplier code of conduct. Minimum requirements increase awareness about the organisation's expectations and set a baseline to be built upon in the future.
- Identify additional requirements to include in all high-value contracts, including specific provisions on traceability, cooperation in the remedy process and meaningful stakeholder engagement. These can be included in the contractor performance conditions or the code of conduct, where compliance with the latter is obliged.
- Establish a plan to scale-up transparency and human rights due diligence-related requirements over time, being sure to give the market sufficient time to prepare to meet new standards.

- Require annual updates of disclosed supply chain data in order for contracts to be extended or renewed.

Commercial leverage:

- Include a specific tender criterion on monitoring and managing continuous improvement. For instance, requesting that the bidder explains how and which routines it uses to increase transparency in the supply chain over time or contributions to remedy. This can help to differentiate between those who are proactive and have a defined approach from those who don't plan to go beyond the minimum requirements.
- When possible, framework authorities can use dynamic scoring of award criteria throughout the duration of the framework. This creates an incentive for suppliers, whether resellers or brands, to improve over time because their score and rank on the framework impact their business with framework buyers.

Reputational leverage:

- Share information with costumers/end users about which suppliers are transparent, cooperative, and compliant with key requirements, and those which are not. It will help them make more informed purchasing decisions. It also gives visibility to suppliers who are doing good work.
- Provide forums for suppliers to discuss their human rights due diligence efforts and the results thereof with customers/end users.
- Resellers can use the reputation of high-profile public sector clients as leverage with the brands, i.e., in order to continue selling to public authority X, you need to meet these expectations.

Relationship leverage:

- In the absence of significant commercial and contractual leverage, leaning on trust-based relationships can be effective. For instance, one could frame due diligence-related requests in terms of a partnership on human rights rather than a demand.
- While non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) can demonstrate lack of trust between the parties, they can also be used to foster open exchange and build trust in the early stages of cooperation on due diligence.
- Ask suppliers with whom you have transparent dialogue how they can make use of their engagement in specific networks and forums, like the Responsible Business Alliance, to advance human rights outcomes.

How can your organisation maximise its leverage in the supply chain by collaborating with others within its respective group (i.e., other resellers or other public buyers)?

- Public buyers should harmonise their requirements as much as possible. Doing so makes it easier for the resellers to push the brands, demonstrates the business case for change.
- Conducting joint monitoring in the supply chain or following up with common suppliers jointly to address specific concerns or non-compliances. It demonstrates collective leverage, saves time, and generates cost efficiencies.
- Whenever possible, identify opportunities for those organisations not subject to Freedom of Information Requests to manage the collection and sharing of sensitive information on behalf of those who are. This puts suppliers at ease and helps to consolidate data requests.
- The group noted that, for resellers, there is a limit to collaboration with peers because performance on sustainability and supplier relationships can be a unique selling point. So, the ability of on company to get information or secure brand cooperation on remedy could be what sets it apart from its competitors.

How can your organisation maximise its leverage in the supply chain by collaborating with others within its respective group (i.e., other resellers or other public buyers)?

- Share information about the companies involved¹. Sometimes, getting information about the supply chain or securing a brand's cooperation on remedy is a question of asking the right person, i.e., the individual within that company with the mandate and expertise to assist.
- The more you understand about the company's operations, including the roles and responsibilities of key teams, their constraints and priorities, the easier it is to work collaboratively with them. Resellers can facilitate dialogue between the customers (public buyers) and the suppliers (brands).
- Together, the public buyers and resellers in this group could consider making some kind of public statement about their shared priorities and expectations. That would signal the issues that they are trying to tackle together and demonstrate a common approach.
- Jointly engaging the teams who manage the relevant ecolabels, like TCO and EPEAT. They too have a lot of leverage and shape the market through their criteria. For instance, this group could encourage the labels to make some of the optional social criteria mandatory going forward.

What steps should be taken to advance this dialogue with brands?

- The discussion is likely to be more constructive if we engage the brands individually, rather than together in a group meeting. When competitors are in the room, the conversation only goes so far.
- Engage a few brands to start, ideally those that are more transparent and have demonstrated a cooperative approach. These need to be important brands for the participating public buyers.
- We should consult participants in this dialogue on the suppliers to engage, based on their collective spend and individual business relationships.
- Focus on a one or two issues in the supply chain to narrow the scope of the dialogue. This will also make it easier to identify target improvements to work towards. Preliminarily, participants agreed to focus on working hours and wages. Working hours is a systemic issue in the electronics industry, affecting all brands and product types. Excessive overtime is often linked to low wages, with workers needing to put in more hours in order to earn a living wage. Wages also differ among vulnerable groups, with contract and migrant workers often earning less than permanent and local workers. One participant noted that insurance increases have hit a lot of companies recently, which may impact on their willingness to address wages in the supply chain. However, this was not seen as significant enough to prevent a constructive dialogue.
- In parallel, members of this group could try to influence the review of the RBA Code, since it is the primary standard against which the brands are audited for compliance. One participant noted that the RBA has a working ground on living wages. RBA members within this group could use that forum as a space to drive engagement on the question and mobilise others.
- Once the target participants (brands) are identified through consultation, Electronics Watch can prepare a template invitation for public buyers and resellers to use for outreach.
- It was noted that CFIT and Electronics Watch play a role in harmonising standards and building momentum for this work, via this forum, the Electronics Watch Code and Contract Conditions, and the forthcoming CFIT guidance on transparency, among other means. One participant suggested that the preliminary dialogue with brands could help to frame a CFIT recommendation next year.

¹ With respect for competition, the protection of sensitive information and legal constraints.