

# Action plans

In 2018, an assessment framework was set up to assess companies' action plans in a consistent manner.

Companies that sign the Agreement undertake to submit an action plan to the Secretariat within a year of signing and to update the plan annually. In an action plan, a company looks at the various elements of due diligence: drawing up IRBC policy; analysing the chain and the materials used; the risk analysis and prioritisation of risks; tackling the risks; and monitoring and communication.

By continually repeating this due diligence cycle, companies accumulate information and gain experience, enabling them to tighten up their goals and also to set new goals.

There are many challenges and risks that companies cannot deal with on their own. Companies can increase their influence by cooperating, for example in achieving a living wage. For this reason, collective projects are initiated within the Agreement in order to work together on these issues.

## **Assessment framework gives insight into progress**

In 2018, an assessment framework was set up to assess companies' action plans in a consistent manner. The Secretariat uses the framework in assessment meetings. This helps companies to tighten up and improve their action plans. Based on the assessment results, the Secretariat **reports** on the progress companies are making in due diligence.

## WE Fashion, Marijke Willemsen:

*'sustainability check at an early stage'*



***A thorough screening before you start to do business with a new factory is considerably more efficient than searching for audit reports at a later date. At WE Fashion, this is the way they have been working for years, according to sustainability manager Marijke Willemsen.***

WE Fashion only does business with a new factory once sustainability manager Marijke Willemsen has given it her blessing. This has been the case for some six years, she says. 'It happens 10 to 20 times a year that the purchasing department wants to place an order with a new factory. The buyers ask the intended supplier first to provide recent reports from recognised audit systems and submit them to our sustainability department.'

'If the information is incomplete or if it is shown that child labour or forced labour is involved, we will not work with that factory. We regularly encounter incomplete information, but we never come across child labour. Forced labour sometimes occurs, for example if workers' passports are confiscated or if the first month's salary is retained as a deposit.'

By incorporating clear conditions in its own purchasing structure at an early stage and also by carrying out local inspections, for example of subcontractors, WE Fashion has obtained a much better understanding of the production chain. Willemsen: 'We only place orders with factories that we've approved, so that we have greater certainty as to where and under what conditions production is taking place. Our department's work slows down that of the buyers, but over the last few years, they've come to understand and appreciate what we do. They're also unwilling to do business with a factory that is unable to provide sound reports.'

## G-Star RAW, Sofie Schop:

*'You gain influence through cooperation'*



***Is it possible for a relatively small player in the worldwide textile market to have any influence? Sustainability manager Sofie Schop of G-Star RAW is very positive. 'Yes, of course, if you cooperate and dare to share.'***

A denim brand can have some influence on its supplier on virtually any issue – that is the firm conviction of Sofie Schop, sustainability manager at G-Star RAW. But there are a few conditions.

'The first is that you must seek opportunities to cooperate, for example within national and international agreements or with other fashion firms that buy from the same supplier. It's very good that the industry is working on one single measuring method instead of the many different audits that exist for checking the sustainability status and progress of factories. Cooperation is also needed to ensure that workers earn a living wage.'

Good, long-lasting relationships are the second condition, according to Schop. 'As a company, we are deliberately working towards doing business with fewer suppliers. We build long-term relationships with those suppliers, so that we can increasingly deal with each other as partners. You don't have to change everything in one go; it's a process of continuous improvement. But if, after long discussion, a company does not stick to agreements or is unwilling to change, we will ultimately choose to end our collaboration.'

Another factor that is important for G-Star is: dare to share. 'Last year, we developed our most sustainable jeans ever. For the fabric, we received the Cradle to Cradle™ Gold certificate. This certified denim, made from organic cotton, has 70 per cent less chemical content. During the production process, 98 per cent of the water is recycled, while the remaining 2 per cent evaporates. We made the knowledge relating to the development of this denim fabric available to others. It's only by sharing that you can move forwards together. And to do that, you really don't have to be a big company.'