

# S.OLIVER GROUP

## Gender Equality Policy

The S.OLIVER GROUP promotes equal treatment of women, men and non-binary genders within its supply chain and will regularly review and update its policy to ensure compliance with international standards, national laws and regulations. This policy serves as a guide and precautionary measure to engage in activities to establish a safe and equitable work environment and to empower women and girls, who work in the S.OLIVER GROUP's supply chain and are individually or collectively being disadvantaged because of their gender.

This policy is developed on the basis of:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979
- ILO Convention No. 100: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951
- ILO Convention No. 111: Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958
- ILO Convention No. 156: Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1975
- ILO Convention No. 183: Maternity Protection Convention, 2000
- ILO Convention No. 190: Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, 2019

### Background

The S.OLIVER GROUP recognizes that women within the supply chain may be victimized and unfairly treated based on their gender identity. The ILO [Report on equality at work](#) from 2011 identified that even in recent decades as significant progress has been made in advancing gender equality in the world of work, women continue to suffer discrimination in terms of the jobs available to them, their remuneration, benefits, working conditions and access to decision-making positions.

[The UN Agenda 2030](#) with its sustainable development goal “Gender Equity” (SDG 5) aims to empower all women and girls. The S.OLIVER GROUP recognizes its responsibility to take action to strengthen equality throughout its supply chain and to contribute to the sustainable development goals according to the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), especially to:

- 5.1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- 5.2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
- 5.5. Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.



As identified by the ILO Report on equality at work, following risks are possible in the supply chain:

- Women may face a multitude of disadvantages and are being paid less than men.
- Due to short-term orders, female workers may work excessive hours, which may impact safe evening/night transportation.
- The lack of affordable childcare facilities and lack of adequate paid leave can also render sectors of the labour market inaccessible or unattractive for women and men with family responsibilities.
- The access of women to jobs can be restricted on the basis of their reproductive role. This may include cases, such as dismissals for pregnancy and nursing, failure to grant time for nursing, withholding of pre- and postnatal benefits, denial of promotion and refusal to allow workers to return to posts occupied before maternity leave.
- Young, financially dependent, single or divorced and migrant women may be target of sexual harassment. Also men, who are young, gay or members of ethnic or racial minorities may be subjected to sexual harassment.

## Terms and Definitions

**Discrimination against women:** According to Article 1 of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* discrimination against women means any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

**Violence and harassment:** According to Article 1 (1) a of the ILO Nr. 190 Convention, violence and harassment refer to a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment.

As defined in the UN Secretary-General’s [bulletin](#), harassment may take the form of words, gestures or actions which tend to annoy, alarm, abuse, demean, intimidate, belittle, humiliate or embarrass another or which create an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

**Gender-based violence and harassment:** According to Article 1 (1) b of the ILO Nr. 190 Convention, “gender-based violence and harassment” means violence and harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender, or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately, and includes sexual harassment.

As defined in the UN Secretary-General’s [bulletin](#), sexual harassment may be any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

## The Gender Equality Strategy of the S.OLIVER GROUP

Before onboarding a supplier, the S.OLIVER GROUP checks whether the supplier complies with the international standard for gender equality. Through audit teams the supplier is verified that all workers are treated with dignity and respect and that anti-harassment policies and committees (such as Women Participation Committee, GBVH Agreements, Gender Action Plans, etc.) are in place and functioning effectively. In addition, our audit teams collect data on the number and gender of the supplier's workers and analyze workers' compensation based on gender. Particular attention is also paid to overtime and paid vacation, social security and childcare allowance. The collection of this data enables the S.OLIVER GROUP to analyze workforce demographics, their positions, pay gaps and access to collective bargaining at the different levels. Additionally, we aim at collecting data on:

- the number of male and female workers participated in the trainings on gender equality
- the proportion (%) of women in management positions, such as e.g. line managers
- the proportion (%) of women in leadership roles in trade unions or participation committees
- the proportion (%) of male and female overtime workers
- the number of suppliers offering secure transportation of workers in case of overtime
- the number of male and female workers reporting during the audits on the secure transportation after overtime
- the percentage of female workers coming back after maternity leave

In addition, the data collected allows us to assess how purchasing practices contribute to or affect supplier gender dynamics. We monitor and evaluate the suppliers on gender equality criteria and, if necessary, make suggestions for improvement.

To combat gender-based violence and discrimination, we conduct training courses and implement projects to raise awareness of gender equality with our partners. As a member of the Fair Wear Foundation, we cooperate with multi-stakeholder initiatives as well as other brands to prevent gender-specific risks since we recognize that many of the underlying reasons for gender inequality are challenging to solve alone as a single stakeholder. We at the S.OLIVER GROUP are in constant dialogue with civil society and local NGOs on the subject of gender-based violence.

We recognize that grievance mechanisms play a crucial role in advancing gender equality by offering a systematic method of early detection of negative effects. We acknowledge that gender-based discrimination and violence could be a blind spot for the auditing teams. Gender-based discrimination and violence may not be detected by our teams alone. That is why we encourage the adoption of secure, efficient, and gender-sensitive grievance systems. For this reason, we also give workers the opportunity to complain using the Fair Wear Foundation's complaint system.

### The S.OLIVER GROUP's Remedy Action

If any form of gender-based discrimination or violence is found to be practiced in contravention of our Code of Conduct and above-mentioned measures, the S. Oliver Group will investigate the case and decide on a joint action plan with a timeline for ending and minimising the violation without undue delay.

The S.OLIVER GROUP expects its suppliers to be transparent and have effective remediation procedures in place in the event of finding a case of gender-based discrimination or violence. The S.OLIVER GROUP expects its suppliers to act with the overall best interest of the victim in mind, and within the requirements of relevant laws. To ensure a fair and independent remediation for the concerned victim, if required, a third-party organisation will be included in the remediation process. The suppliers will be responsible for making the remediation case happen. However, they should not undertake any form of remediation without previous discussions with the S.OLIVER GROUP and if required, other local organisation.

When a gender-based discrimination or violence is found, the general action plan includes but is not limited to:

- It is first necessary to assess how severe the case is. If the victim's life and health are at risk, immediate action should be taken to protect the victim.
- Ensure the victim is safe and protected.
- Documentation of the offender's identity.
- Investigation of the case in consultation local NGOs and Fair Wear Foundation if necessary.
- Consultation with local NGOs and Fair Wear Foundation on remedy action plan.
- Monitor the implementation of the remediation programme, including conducting constant dialogue with the supplier and the victim.

The S.OLIVER GROUP will hold the suppliers responsible to urge, monitor and support their production facilities to conduct and fulfil their obligations for remediation as requested in this policy. If the concerned supplier and factory fails to follow the aforesaid measures within 30 working days of identifying the violation, a warning letter will be issued, giving the business partner an additional 10 days to start the implementation. The S.OLIVER GROUP will put on hold any order with the business partner and their factory until all parties reach an agreement on the remediation plan and until all remediation costs are settled. The S.OLIVER GROUP will terminate the business relationship with the concerned supplier who fails to act in a manner consistent with this policy, and/or when the concerned business partner is unwilling to undertake the measures needed to fulfil any of the obligations set out in and/or inherent to this Policy.

## Sumangali Scheme in the Indian State of Tamil Nadu

According to reports, the Sumangali Scheme, an instance of forced labor in India, started twenty years ago. In Tamil, the term "Sumangali" describes a contented and joyful married woman. In a traditional Hindu arranged marriage, it is customary for the bride's parents to pay for the wedding as well as provide the groom's family a sizeable dowry. The bride can experience mistreatment in her new house if she doesn't live up to the expectations of the groom's family. The Sumangali Scheme is also referred to as the "marriage support system" for this reason. Around 1,600 spinning mills can be found in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where 400,000 people work. 60% of workers of spinning mills are women, coming from rural areas. Agents employed by spinning mills take advantage of the vulnerabilities of lower caste families by luring them with a lump sum payment at the conclusion of three years, which the parents can use to pay for their daughter's wedding.

- Girls and women recruited under Sumangali(-like) schemes are only allowed to visit their homes every six months during their employment. In case of the migrant workers from the North, it's once every year.
- Workers are not allowed to possess mobile phones.
- It is common for workers to work overtime.
- The mobility of workers is limited.
- The monthly wage of workers is way below the living wage
- The health and sanitation of worker dormitories is an issue.

### a) Our prevention

We consult the suppliers in Tamil Nadu emphasizing that employment under Sumangali(-like) schemes is in violation with our Code of Conduct. Our auditing teams are regularly checking our suppliers on employment of migrant workers and whether the employees stay in dormitories/hostels.

### b) Our remediation

- We inform the factory management that the practice of Sumangali(-like) schemes is illegal.
- In the case of finding Sumangali(-like) schemes we initiate dialogue to negotiate solutions which are inclusive to both management and workers
- It is our duty to provide factory managers who have employed workers under the Sumangali(-like) Scheme but wish to modify their current procedures with alternatives and examples of best practices.
- We address the problems associated with Sumangali(-like) schemes during trainings and awareness-building projects.
- We consult about remediation actions with local NGOs and Fair Wear Foundation.

Anyone who observes that this policy is violated may contact us in any language using any means of communication, including email to the following email address: [complaints@fairwear.org](mailto:complaints@fairwear.org). Hints can also be submitted via the S.OLIVER GROUP grievance procedure <https://soliver-group.hintbox.eu>.

## Legal Notice:

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