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## [Keeping track of working conditions and workers' rights in global supply chains](#)



Posted by [garrettbrown](#) on June 20, 2017

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With the whole world literally involved in global supply chains – how to keep track of working conditions and workers' rights in global supply chains? There is a comprehensive “one stop” way – and then a several-other-stops method for the more ambitious.

The one-stop shopping is to sign up for weekly notifications from the UK's [Business & Human Rights Resource Centre](#). The staff of this non-profit organization in London scours the internet every day for the latest reports from companies, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on all aspects of global business. Their concise weekly update provides the headlines for what has been released that week, and also the response of the corporations whose operations are the subject of the reports.

Not all the companies respond to the Resource Centre's invitation to comment, but the most publicity-conscious corporations often do, providing a richer understanding of impact of global supply chains and the varied efforts to improve working conditions.

Global supply chains (GSC) [now involve 20% of all jobs](#) in the global economy, according to the [International Labor Organization](#). These jobs are found in all phases of GSCs – from extraction of raw materials, to processing and manufacturing, to distribution and use, and finally waste streams of discarded products.

The ILO estimates that large percentages of the jobs in Asia (particularly China, Korea and Taiwan) are connected to GSCs, about one-third of the jobs in the European Union, and 11% of jobs in the United States, for a total of more than 450 million workers worldwide.

Virtually every industry involves one or more aspects of GSC, but the most well-known and most closely watched include apparel (garments and shoes), electronics, athletic shoes and equipment, toys, and food (agriculture and fishing).

In general, there are four sources of information about working conditions and the efforts to implement corrective actions in these supply chains: news media reports; factory reports from NGOs, factory reports from “Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives” (MSIs), and reports from the corporate social responsibility (CSR) departments of the transnational corporations themselves.

The more ambitious and time-consuming way to stay informed is to sign up for the weekly or monthly notices of the [following types of organizations](#):

- Labor rights organizations
- Multi-stakeholder initiatives
- Corporate social responsibility organizations and industry associations

If one has an interest in supply chains that involve a particular area of the world, then the [following organizations’ websites](#) can be visited regularly for news from Asia, Africa and the Americas.

If one has a particular industry in mind then the [following organizations’ websites](#) can be followed, although some these organizations focus more than just one industry’s supply chain, including apparel, electronics and toys.

Finally, just to provide a sampling of the ever-flowing river of reports about GSC that are issued every month, here are [links to key reports](#) issued in 2017 for several industries:

- Theory and practice of corporate social responsibility
- Apparel (garment and shoes)
- Electronics
- Food (agriculture and fishing)

There is a world of information on the web about GSC, and it can appear to be overwhelming. But the easiest place to start is the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. Then you can dive in anywhere in the world, and for any industry’s GSC, that is of interest.

*Garrett Brown is a certified industrial hygienist who worked for Cal/OSHA for 20 years as a field Compliance Safety and Health Officer and then served as Special Assistant to the Chief of the Division before retiring in 2014. He has also been the volunteer Coordinator of the Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network since 1993 and has coordinated projects in Bangladesh, Central America, China, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Mexico and Vietnam.*

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Global supply chains continue to be riddled with sweatshop factories where workers’ rights and their safety are put at risk daily. There are multiple sources of information that report on these conditions, but an easy way to keep on top the latest reports and In "Labor Rights"

### [Free on-line course on “decent work in global supply chains” offered by the Global Labour University](#)

A free, two-month course on global supply chains is being offered on-line by the Global Labour University starting on January 12, 2017. The course is being taught in English by Penn State University Professor Mark Anner, one the leading labor-oriented In "Global Supply Chain"

### [Bangladesh Accord extended three years – worker protections strengthened, proponents promote an “alternative to standard CSR programs”](#)

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