



Ethical  
Trading  
Initiative



# Flooding

Risks and impacts for workers  
in global supply chains

A snapshot for responsible business

# Introduction

This snapshot provides key excerpts from ETI's member briefing on flooding. It aims to:

- ▶ Explain how floods increase risks and impact workers in global supply chains.
- ▶ Stimulate collaboration and action between companies, suppliers, and worker representatives to address these risks and impacts as part of a broader HRDD approach.

It uses the [ETI Base Code](#) as a structure and highlights the importance of crosscutting principles and recurring actions. It forms part of ETI's work on [Just transitions](#).

## 1. Context

Climate change is increasing the likelihood and severity of extreme weather events, including [flooding](#). As the atmosphere warms, it holds more water vapour, leading to heavier rains and storms, and higher risks of river and surface flooding. [Rising sea levels](#) from thermal expansion and melting ice-sheets and glaciers are also increasing risks of coastal flooding.

From 2010 to 2020, floods and [extreme rainfall events rose 50%](#). In 2022, [Pakistan received nearly double its typical rainfall](#), flooding a third of the country and affecting 33 million people, with 8 million displaced. In 2024, 11 districts in [Bangladesh were affected by flooding](#): 5 million people were impacted, with almost 300,000 displaced. That same year, [torrential rain caused deadly flash floods in Spain](#). The [UN estimates](#) 1.6 billion people will be at risk of floods by 2050, up from 1.2 billion today.

**Human rights risks from flooding are rapidly increasing in saliency.** Workers are affected at multiple stages of supply chains and across diverse settings. The [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) are unequivocal: *"The responsibility to respect human rights is a global standard of expected conduct for all business enterprises wherever they operate."* These rights include those set out in the [ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#), which form the basis of the [ETI Base Code](#). As our planet warms and floods become more frequent and severe, **businesses must take every action to prevent and mitigate impacts on workers in their supply chains.**

### ETI's expectations for responsible business

ETI expects responsible businesses to:

- ▶ Adhere to the [ETI Base Code](#) and [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#),
- ▶ Implement a human rights due diligence (HRDD) approach, in line with the [HRDD Framework](#).

These expectations apply equally before, during and after climatic events such as floods.

# 2. Cross cutting principles & actions

Effectively implementing the [ETI Base Code](#) and conducting thorough HRDD before, during and after flooding requires adhering to several crosscutting principles and actions. These are explained in the key below and recur throughout the snapshot.



## Plan ahead

High rainfall and flood risks are often forecast in advance. The UN has committed to ensure [all citizens are covered by effective Early Warning Systems](#) by 2028. Advance warning of flood risk allows buyers and suppliers to proactively plan and collaborate with workers and their representatives.



## Social dialogue with workers and representatives

Workers have the deepest knowledge of how their work is impacted by floods. Collaboration with workers and their representatives before, during, and after floods is essential.



## A continuous approach

Flood impacts for workers are dynamic. Immediate risks as flooding breaks-out may reduce and be replaced by others once an area is flooded. In turn, new risks may replace these once flood waters subside and clean-up begins. Continuous re-assessment of risks is essential.



## Gender and inclusion

Gender and inclusion are crosscutting issues and relevant to all ETI Base Code clauses. Floods affect women and men differently, and can exacerbate existing inequalities. Gender and inclusion should be considered throughout planning and implementation.



## Grievance mechanisms

Accessible, confidential, and gender-responsive grievance mechanisms must be available so workers can raise concerns and access remedy before, during and after floods.



## Communicate, collaborate and learn

Flooding is not a new phenomenon: knowledge of effective risk mitigation and response actions is rapidly evolving. Sharing knowledge and coordinating collective responses is vital.

## Women workers

A high proportion of workers in global supply chains are women: women make up [43% of the global agricultural workforce](#), and [60% of garment workers](#). Women face disproportionate risks and impacts during disasters like floods. And at the same time as working, social norms around the world often mean that women undertake the majority of care work – the burden of which increases during climatic events. However, women workers are excluded from decision-making spaces and their voices are often ignored or silenced. It is therefore imperative that HRDD deliberately and systematically engages with trade unions, including with women representatives, and with specialist organisations led by and for underrepresented groups.

## Identifying at risk workers

A risk-based approach is vital to identify workers within supply chains who are most at risk to the impacts of flooding. High-risk groups may not be the largest or most visible segments of the workforce. Certain workers may face elevated risk due to the nature of their roles, such as those who work outdoors. Other groups, like subcontracted workers who are less likely to be unionised, may be more vulnerable due to their employment status and limited ability to assert their rights. Migrant workers may face language and cultural barriers that restrict access to information and support. Factors like age, disability, health conditions and pregnancy can also increase risk before, during and after flooding. These need to be considered in flood preparedness and response planning.



# 3. ETI recommendations

This section highlights [ETI Base Code](#) clauses that are directly or indirectly impacted by flooding. Find high-level recommendations for companies and their suppliers on how to mitigate and address flood-related risks and impacts for workers.



## Base Code, clause 1 Employment is freely chosen

Flood-related damage and destruction to homes and livelihoods can displace large numbers of people. Desperate for work, these individuals can face [heightened risks of forced labour](#). Even for those who are not displaced, flood damage to homes and assets may lead workers to borrow money from employers. In certain circumstances this can increase the risk of [debt bondage, a form of forced labour](#).

### Recommendations

**Heightened risk:** Brands and their supply chain partners must remain alert to the heightened risk of [forced labour](#) in the aftermath of floods.

**Freedom of association and collective bargaining** are enabling rights and help reduce the risk of forced labour ([Base Code 2](#)). Brands must communicate their commitment to these rights to all suppliers, and [support the presence of trade unions](#).



**Grievance mechanisms:** Employers must establish accessible, confidential, secure and gender-responsive grievance mechanisms in collaboration with worker representatives, especially women and other at risk groups.



## Base Code, clause 2 Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are respected

Floods can drive mass migration, creating an influx of workers desperate for employment. Transience, language barriers and cultural differences, often prevent migrant workers from joining local trade unions or accessing support. Freedom of association and collective bargaining are fundamental rights that enable workers to secure their other rights. These rights also help employers meet responsibilities, foster workplace dialogue and enable collaboration.

## Recommendations

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**Commitment:** Brands must communicate their commitment to [freedom of association and collective bargaining](#) to all suppliers.

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**Support:** Brands should support the presence of trade unions within workplaces, and facilitate social dialogue and parallel means for association and bargaining where these are absent.

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**Communication:** Brands should discuss with suppliers any potential challenges to freedom of association and collective bargaining during and after flooding – reaffirming commitments to these fundamental rights.

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### Base Code, clause 3

## Working conditions are safe and hygienic

Floods pose a multitude of occupational health and safety risks for workers. Flooding can compromise building integrity, make electrical systems and machinery unsafe, contaminate water sources, disable essential facilities like toilets, and bring contaminated flood waters into workplaces. Workers may also experience severe impacts at home and during travel to and from work. Access to potable water and sanitation may be disrupted, contributing to the spread of water and vector borne diseases. These effects disproportionately impact workers from lower socio-economic groups. Many impacts fall more heavily on women, and result in an increased burden of unpaid work, which in turn may have mental health impacts.

## Recommendations

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**Flood alerts and forecasts:** Often, but not always, flood alerts are forecast in advance by government agencies. Buyers should encourage suppliers to use these to inform preparedness.

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**Flood preparedness planning:** As part of occupational safety and health risk assessment, workplaces should develop flood preparedness plans, working with worker representatives and/or trade unions.

- ▶ Flood preparedness planning should include, but not be limited to: evacuation protocols; management of gas and electricity supply; management of electrical equipment; post-flood inspection of buildings for structural damage; post-flood inspection of fire alarms and exits; cleaning and disinfection protocols.
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**Floodwaters are hazardous:** Floodwaters can be contaminated by sewage and may hide other hazards. Every effort should be made to avoid workers walking through or operating vehicles in floodwaters.

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**Safe drinking water and sanitation:** Flooding can damage and contaminate potable water sources and toilet facilities. Workers should not be expected to work in settings which lack safe drinking water or separate, functioning and clean toilet facilities for women and men.

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**Illness and disease:** Workers should be provided with information on prevention and treatments required for high risk illnesses, such as water and vector borne diseases.

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**PPE:** Proper personal protective equipment (PPE) should be provided to any workers helping with clean up. Consulting women workers and their representatives is crucial in selecting appropriate gender-specific PPE.

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**Mental health:** Flooding can have a severe toll on workers' mental health. Workers may have lost homes, family members and friends. Businesses and supply chain partners should coordinate with local specialist agencies to support access to appropriate psychosocial care where available.

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**Coordination:** Buyers, suppliers affected by flooding, and local trade unions may be able to work collectively to: share up-to-date information, liaise with local disaster response agencies, and coordinate resources.

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## Base Code, clause 4

### Child labour shall not be used

Floods can devastate homes and assets. Often, workers lack access to insurance or social protection. These economic vulnerabilities, combined with the potential closure of schools and childcare centres may push children into the workforce during and after floods. In addition, if schools and childcare centres shut, children may need to accompany parents to work, especially in informal settings. Caregivers may have legitimate concerns about the heightened risk of children being left unsupervised.

## Recommendations

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**A continuous approach:** As flood risks increase, migration patterns may grow and shift, potentially elevating child labour risks in informal sectors reliant on seasonal or temporary workers. Continuous risk assessment by companies and their suppliers is crucial.

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**Care responsibilities:** Ensure adjustments are made to support workers with additional childcare responsibilities during and after floods. Engage with workers' representatives, especially women worker representatives, on any adjustments.

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**Responsible purchasing practices:** Ensure purchasing practices align with the [Common Framework for Responsible Purchasing Practices](#). Quotas and/or piece rates may need to be adjusted to reduce pressure on workers and mitigate risks of children being drawn in to support parents' work.

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**Children's safety and wellbeing:** Where risks of children accompanying adults to work is higher, consult and work collaboratively with stakeholders to develop solutions centred on children's safety and wellbeing.

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## Base Code, clause 5

# Living wages are paid

Floods drive up the prices of essential goods like food, disrupt transportation networks, increase healthcare needs, and force workers to replace damaged assets. In contexts lacking robust social protection schemes, workers are likely to be supporting extended family members. Paying living wages is essential for maintaining a healthy and stable workforce. Workers' inability to cover basic needs can result in higher turnover and diminished ability to adapt and develop new skills. ETI supports the [ILO's agreement](#) which puts social dialogue and collective bargaining at the centre of living wage calculation processes.

## Recommendations

**Understanding living wage levels:** Ensure ongoing dialogue between companies, suppliers, trade unions and civil society organisations to understand how living wage levels are changing in the era of climate crisis.

**Responsible purchasing practices:** Ensure purchasing practices align with the [Common Framework for Responsible Purchasing Practices](#). Prices paid should reflect living wage rates and wages protected in price setting.



**Social dialogue:** Ensure freedom of association and collective bargaining are respected and work to maintain long-term stable trading relationships.



**Gender-based violence:** Insufficient wage levels, as well as unpaid or delayed wages, can lead to increased risks of gender-based violence within households. Buyers, suppliers and worker representatives must be alert to these risks and collaborate to address root causes.



## Base Code, clause 6

# Working hours are not excessive

Floods disrupt supply chains. Even when production facilities are not directly affected, flooding can affect suppliers' ability to acquire inputs and deliver finished goods to ports. Flooding can also impact essential services, such as power supply. If these disruptions are not well managed, production schedules can become highly pressured and compressed. This increases risks of excessive working hours.

## Recommendations



**Communication:** Buyers, suppliers and workers' representatives including trade union representatives, should communicate regularly and engage in social dialogue prior to, during and after floods, sharing information on how flooding is impacting workers, logistics and production.





**Responsible purchasing practices and forward planning:** Ensure purchasing practices align with the [Common Framework for Responsible Purchasing Practices](#). Work collaboratively with supply chain partners in response to flood alerts to adapt schedules and deadlines where possible.

**Hours of work:** Flooding can result in temporary closures or workers being unable to reach work. Production deadlines may need to be adjusted. Any resultant overtime must be voluntary and compensated at a premium, with working hours not exceeding 60 hours in any seven day period.

**Absences and care responsibilities:** Ensure pay for staff absences, whether for flood-related illnesses or care responsibilities, is made in consultation with worker representatives, and complies with local laws.



## Base Code, clause 7

### No discrimination is practiced

Impacts of flooding can be highly gendered, with for example increased care work falling most heavily on women. Impacts in women's home lives may affect their working lives, for example through increased need to take leave and higher stress levels. Workers with disabilities may also be severely impacted, for example as floods make commutes more difficult and hazardous. As floods become more frequent and severe it is essential that these risks do not increase discrimination against specific groups. Commitments to equality are enshrined in laws, international agreements, and are fundamental to responsible business practice.

## Recommendations

**A risk-based approach:** Identify and provide additional support to at risk workers.



**Social dialogue:** Continuously collaborate with worker representatives to ensure an inclusive and diverse workforce; make necessary adjustments to accommodate differing needs.



**Gender and inclusion:** Collaborate with civil society groups, especially those led by and for underrepresented groups.



## Base Code, clause 8

### Regular employment is provided

Supply chain disruption, combined with temporary workplace closures and higher rates of staff absences may lead to production schedules becoming highly pressured and compressed. In this situation, temporary workers may be recruited to catch-up on production and meet deadlines.

## Recommendations

**Regular employment:** Recruitment of temporary workers should not be used to avoid or undermine regular employment relations for existing employees.

- ▶ Temporary workers should be employed based on a recognised employment relationship and in line with national laws and practices.



**Collective action:** Where flooding leads to permanent closure, brands and buyers should work collectively to ensure workers are compensated properly, collaborating with worker representatives including trade union representatives.



### Base Code, clause 9

## No harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed

During and after flooding, worker absences are likely to increase, for example due to health impacts. Logistics may be disrupted and inputs less easily available. These impacts may delay production schedules, increase pressure on suppliers, and make deadlines more difficult to meet. Higher levels of stress may increase risks of harsh treatment of workers, which is more likely to fall on at risk groups, such as women.

## Recommendations

**Responsible purchasing practices:** Ensure purchasing practices align with the [Common Framework for Responsible Purchasing Practices](#). Collaborate with supply chain partners to adapt schedules and deadlines.



**Grievance mechanisms:** Employers must establish accessible, confidential, secure and gender-responsive grievance mechanisms in collaboration with worker representatives, especially women and other at risk groups.



**Social dialogue:** Support dialogue and collaboration between management and worker representatives including trade union representatives, particularly with women worker representatives. Where appropriate, collaborate with civil society organisations led-by and for underrepresented groups



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