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# THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF SA8000: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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## Abstract

Social Accountability 8000 (SA8000) is a worldwide certification standard supporting the enhancement of working conditions, the inhibition of child labour and the safety of workplaces (Chirieleison & Rizzi, 2020; Sartor et al., 2016). Companies from all industries and countries can adopt SA8000 certification as long as all their suppliers and subcontractors are certified, given that SA8000 extends to the entire supply chain of a company (Gilbert & Rasche, 2007; Göbbels & Jonker, 2003; Mueller et al., 2009).

Companies applying for SA8000 will be subject to a third-party audit to obtain the certification (Gilbert et al., 2011). To be certified, companies must meet requirements in terms of health and safety workplace, forced and compulsory labour, child labour, discrimination of employees, freedom of association and right to bargain collectively, disciplinary practices, working hours, and remuneration (Social Accountability International [SAI], 2014).

SAI published the first version of the SA8000 standard in 1997. A review of the scientific literature published from the standard release to the end of 2022 — twenty-five years after the launch of SA8000 — is useful for summarizing the current knowledge in the field of SA8000 research. Consequently, an exhaustive summary of the research published in the area of SA8000 is offered, and significant research gaps

that future studies could fill are identified. To perform the analysis, a ten-step approach outlined by Turzo et al. (2022) is followed, which refers to the visualization of similarities technique in clustering papers (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), the bibliometric analysis routines (Marzi et al., 2021; Mura et al., 2018), and the literature review method by Tranfield et al. (2003). The usage of the AMSTAR 2 checklist (Shea et al., 2017) and the PRISMA model (Moher et al., 2009) guarantee the quality and the reproducibility of the analysis.

The final sample of scientific research eligible for the literature review corresponds to 56 papers, grouped in seven clusters: 1) standard structure and diffusion; 2) SA8000 and integrated management systems; 3) SA8000 impact on working conditions; 4) the effect of SA8000 on supply chain; 5) the relationship between SA8000 and non-financial reporting; 6) opportunities and problems with SA8000 adoption; 7) the influence of SA8000 on performance.

The results of the literature review show that since the first publication of this certification standard, researchers have not extensively investigated SA8000. Existing scientific papers are still a limited number and often consist of conceptual research. The few existing studies performing an empirical analysis use samples focused on a single industry or country, which makes it difficult to generalize results to the rest of the business world. Additionally, little research exists on the benefits and drawbacks of certification, and just a few studies analyse how SA8000 adoption affects the relationship between a company and its stakeholders.

Future studies can fill these research gaps by analysing variations in a company's labour cost before and after obtaining SA8000 certification and its influence on welfare policies and employee retention. Further studies can check whether being SA8000 certified generates competitive advantages for companies and promotes the creation of sustainable supply chains. Scholars can also investigate whether the concentration of SA8000 adopters in a given geographical area effectively enhances wage levels and reduces forced and child labour in that area.

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