

# **8 PRINCIPLES FOR DECENT WORK IN WAREHOUSING DISTRIBUTION AND LOGISTICS**



THE INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION (ITF) IS A DEMOCRATIC, AFFILIATE-LED GLOBAL FEDERATION OF OVER 730 TRADE UNIONS IN MORE THAN 150 COUNTRIES, REPRESENTING OVER 16.6 MILLION WORKING MEN AND WOMEN IN ALL TRANSPORT SECTORS. THE ITF PASSIONATELY CAMPAIGNS FOR TRANSPORT WORKERS' RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND JUSTICE.

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# FOREWORD

Warehousing is evolving at a rapid pace. Warehouses are no longer just long-term storage sites, instead they have become fast-paced environments fundamental to global commerce. Warehouses are now operating to meet the needs of clients and customers who expect their products immediately.

The warehouse workers who keep fast-paced operations moving are all too often and too easily exploited. Their work is often invisible to customers, policymakers and the general public. And this new world of e-commerce and data-driven inventory management creates pressures that put worker safety and well-being at risk.

This reality is not only dangerous for workers, but also risky for global logistics and warehouse companies, as well as their clients and even customers.

Compromised working conditions naturally lead to compromised quality of work, not to mention low worker retention rates. A stable supply chain requires dependable operations in warehouses and distribution centres.

Up until now, there have been no internationally recognised standards for working conditions in warehouses or distribution centres.

The ITF are confident that through this foundational document and its implementation, in partnership with business and government, we will effectively establish, enforce and raise standards in this vital industry.

The ITF Principles for Decent Work in Warehousing, Distribution and Logistics listed below were all sourced from existing standards across the transport sector. They are already in place in much of the supply chain, so it is only natural that they also apply to workers in warehousing, distribution and logistics.

These principles are achievable by any responsible company that understands the moral importance of respecting and protecting the rights of its workers as well as the business importance of ensuring a stable supply chain.

These principles lay down a line in the sand and make it easier for customers to know where a global logistics company stands. Responsible companies that respect their warehouse workers and protect their rights will easily meet these standards.

We at the ITF, and our affiliate unions across the globe, look forward to working in partnership with responsible global logistics and warehouse companies, their clients, governments and consumers to ensure the standards set forth in this document are achieved.

It's time to protect the people powering the supply chain by raising the standards in warehousing—together.

**Stephen Cotton**  
ITF General Secretary





# THE 8 PRINCIPLES



**01.**  
FUNDAMENTAL  
PRINCIPLES AND  
RIGHTS AT WORK

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**02.**  
SAFE JOBS

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**03.**  
SECURE AND  
DECENT JOBS

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**04.**  
HARASSMENT AND  
VIOLENCE-FREE  
WORLD OF WORK

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**05.**  
DEPLOYMENT  
AND USE OF  
TECHNOLOGY



**06.**  
JUST TRANSITION  
TOWARDS  
DECARBONISED  
AND CLIMATE-FIT  
WAREHOUSING  
OPERATIONS

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**07.**  
FREEDOM OF  
ASSOCIATION  
AND COLLECTIVE  
BARGAINING

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**08.**  
EFFECTIVE  
GRIEVANCE  
MECHANISMS

# 01.

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND RIGHTS AT WORK

All warehouse operators without distinction must respect internationally recognised human rights, including those expressed in the principles concerning fundamental rights set out in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. This must include:

- Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.
- The elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour.
- The effective abolition of child labour.
- The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.
- A safe and healthy working environment.

It's time to protect the people powering the supply chain by raising the standards in warehousing – together.

# 02.

## SAFE JOBS

Warehouse workplaces must adopt a positive safety culture that implements safety systems based on a hierarchy of controls, prioritises prevention, encourages the active reporting of safety problems by workers without fear of retribution or punishment, and guarantees all workers the right to refuse work that is unsafe.

The following represent the minimum expected standards of warehouse employers:

### 01. Identification, prevention and management of occupational hazards, including, but not limited to:

- Climate-associated risks, such as exposure to excessive temperatures, extreme weather events, vector-borne diseases and workplace air pollution.
- Deficient ventilation in confined spaces and facilities failing to provide adequate maintenance of ventilation equipment.
- Unsafe manual handling practices, including the [manual] transportation of excessive loads.
- Ergonomic risks, such as repetitive and forceful movements and unsafe postures.
- Deficient construction and building maintenance, including wet floors and fire and electricity safety risks.
- Unmanaged warehouse traffic.

- Work at height.
- Handling of dangerous and hazardous substances.
- Psychosocial risk factors, such as unsustainable work schedules, forced shift changes, productivity quotas, workplace monitoring, pressure to undertake activities perceived as unsafe and hostile workplace practices.

### 02. Adequate and timely incident investigations accompanied by interim and final corrective action measures, in full consultation with elected trade union workplace health and safety representatives.

Despite the most thorough preventative measures being implemented, from time to time, incidents that put worker health and safety at risk can happen. An inclusive process to investigate, address and mitigate contributing factors ensures accountability and prevents future incidents.



**A safe working environment requires there to be a well-trained and informed workforce.**

**03. Provision and maintenance of adequate and gender-appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and clothing at no cost to the worker.**

While personal protective equipment can never replace prevention in ensuring worker safety, access to PPE is essential. It is unacceptable for an employer to shift the financial burden for purchasing, maintaining or replacing PPE to the worker. The lack of gender-appropriate PPE can result in unsafe working conditions and create a barrier to inclusion based on the job requirements.

**04. Access to adequate, appropriate, decent, secure and clean sanitation facilities within reasonable distance from work areas and ample paid breaks, without fear of penalty.**

Access to sanitation facilities is a basic human right, protected under various international and national regulations. If facilities are not clean, safe and in close proximity to the work area, workers' rights are not fully realised.

**05. Adequate, paid rest breaks; access to decent, secure and clean rest facilities with drinking water and measures to maintain reasonable temperatures within a reasonable distance from work areas.**

Rest breaks ensure that workers can do their jobs in a manner that ensures their safety and that of their co-workers. International and often national regulations require adequate rest breaks. In practice, if the rest area is not clean, safe and in close proximity to the work area, workers are not able to fully benefit from the needed rest.

**06. Paid time off for comprehensive and accessible OSH training and information and consultation meetings during regular working hours, for example, by ensuring materials and trainings are offered in relevant languages.**

A safe working environment requires there to be a well-trained and informed workforce. Training that happens outside of regular working hours or includes a financial cost to workers creates a dangerous barrier. Training offered in the appropriate languages for the workforce will ensure a better understanding and adherence to OSH protocols.

**07. Adequate staffing levels and sustainable scheduling to safely meet production standards.**

With the time-sensitive nature of warehousing, distribution and logistics work, a stable workforce is necessary to keep operations running reliably and safely.

**08. Provision of adequate and appropriate safe commuting measures, including secure access to public transport and measures such as shuttles and secure parking lots.**

According to ILO Convention 190, the responsibility of an employer to keep their workers safe at the workplace extends to include their journey to work. Warehouses are rarely easily accessible by public transport, and with warehousing, distribution and logistics operations often running 24-hours a day, workers often commute to work during off-peak hours and at night. Women feel particularly unsafe when they must make these journeys alone and in the dark.



**09. Adequate facility time for elected workplace trade union health and safety representatives to fulfil their functions, including engaging in reviews, work plans and policies to address workplace hazards.**

Unions play a vital role in supporting safe working environments with the help of representatives to ensure safety standards are met. Access to the workplace and the workers ensures that union representatives can offer vital perspective to planning and response to OSH issues.

**10. Joint workplace health and safety committees which:**

- Are composed of an equal number of worker and employer representatives to identify and help resolve health and safety issues in the workplace.
- Meet regularly, and on an emergency basis in the event of any serious actual or potential health and safety incident.

A collaborative approach to workplace safety, based on mutual-respect and open lines of communication helps to ensure standards are being met. Regularly scheduled meetings create an opportunity for that needed cooperation between employers and the workers, including their union representatives.

# 03.

## SECURE AND DECENT JOBS

All warehouse workers have the right to a secure and decent job that delivers, among other things, a living wage, security in the workplace, sustainable working time, prospects for development, social protection, and equality of opportunity and treatment.

Warehouse employers should ensure:

01. Job security through permanent, stable and full-time work based on a legally-established and contractual relationship.
02. Transparency and limits in the use of non-standard forms of employment, abusive sub-contracting, and informal labour.
03. Working hours and rest time comply with national law, relevant ILO Conventions or applicable collective agreements, whichever affords the greater protection to workers.
04. Fair scheduling systems that include rules on advance notification of schedules, schedule changes and break times.
05. Voluntary overtime that is compensated at a premium rate in line with national law, relevant ILO Conventions or applicable collective agreements, whichever affords the greater protection to workers.
06. A living wage that is sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for the worker and their family and provide adequate discretionary income.
07. A floor of basic social protection for all workers.
08. No recruitment fees or related costs to be borne by workers.
09. Workers at all levels to be provided with relevant lifelong training opportunities, skills upgrading, and career progression.
10. Equality of opportunity and treatment in employment with particular attention paid to the rights of workers most at risk of discrimination, including women, youth, and migrants.
11. Right to information, consultation and participation concerning employment-related matters, without derogating from the rights to freedom of association collective bargaining.

Workers at all levels to be provided with relevant lifelong training opportunities, skills upgrading, and career progression.

# 04.

## HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE-FREE WORLD OF WORK

Warehouse workers have a fundamental right to a safe and healthy working environment, which includes a workplace free from harassment and violence. By adopting and promoting a culture that is intolerant of such behaviours, and collaborating with workers to establish and implement policies that create accountability, this right can be realised.

Warehouse employers/operators have an obligation to prevent and protect workers from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment, in line with ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work and its accompanying Recommendation 206.

01. Adopt and implement, in consultation with trade unions, a workplace policy on violence and harassment covering, among other things:
  - measures to ensure safe commuting to and from work;
  - protection from third party violence and harassment;
  - adequate, safe and secure sanitation facilities, rest areas and accommodation as applicable; and
  - recognition of domestic violence as a workplace issue.
02. Accessible education and awareness as part of prevention of violence and harassment in the world of work for workers and management.
03. Accessible, effective and gender-responsive redressal mechanisms to address workplace harassment and violence.
04. Proactive measures to support women's recruitment and retention through safety, equal opportunities, support and representation in union spaces for all including women workers.

Accessible, effective and gender-responsive redressal mechanisms to address workplace harassment and violence.



# 05.

## DEPLOYMENT AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY

**Warehouse employers must ensure technology supports and promotes decent work and safety, privacy, sanitation, non-discrimination and other rights at work, through engagement with trade unions. The following represent the minimum expected standards of warehouse employers:**

01. A commitment to start-to-end engagement with trade unions:
  - prior information and consultation of technology deployments in warehousing with realistic notification periods;
  - technology risk and post-implementation impact assessments carried out in cooperation with the trade union with details shared with tech providers, if other than employer, with a commitment to remedy;
  - commitment to trial periods for tech.
02. A commitment to algorithmic transparency and negotiation of parameters:
  - negotiated performance quotas and parameters with a clear and easily explicable relationship to business needs;
  - negotiated validity periods for productivity criteria;
  - human point of contact with power to implement remedy for concerns and issues regarding use of algorithms in workplace;
  - no fully automated decision-making on recruitment, training and promotion, disciplinary measures, dismissals, pay and bonuses.
03. A recognition of the existence of “workers’ data” which would not exist without the workers’ interaction with people, tools, machines or vehicles.
04. Recognition of the right of workers and their unions to data transparency and privacy:
  - workers must be informed of, and able to access all data held about them by an employer upon request, including recordings and communications;
  - union access to workers’ data and agreement with the union on which forms of data can and cannot be used in assessment of workplace performance.
05. A commitment to the minimisation of surveillance and monitoring to those areas with a clear business rationale (entrance and exits, high value or dangerous goods).
06. Effective enjoyment of the right to disconnect.
07. Commitment to effective training.
08. The establishment of workplace technology committees to help manage the introduction, deployment and ongoing assessment of technologies being used in the workplace.

# 06.

## JUST TRANSITION TOWARDS DECARBONISED AND CLIMATE-FIT WAREHOUSING OPERATIONS

**The warehousing sector has to play its part in curbing greenhouse gas emissions if the world is to limit global warming to the 1.5°C goal and achieve zero carbon by 2050.**

Without serious change, the warehousing, logistics, distribution and the wider freight sector is expected to be the world’s biggest emitter by 2050. At the same time, action is needed to ensure warehousing operations are fit for new climate realities, with appropriate worker safeguards. Global just transition standards should be integrated into mitigation and adaptation plans, measures and financing to ensure a cohesive and coordinated approach which safeguards decent jobs and working conditions.

The following represent the minimum expected standards of warehouse employers:

01. Development of mitigation plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in dialogue with workers, with explicit consideration of impacts on jobs (both changes in job numbers and in quality of jobs) and support for workers to transition in line with the International Labour Organization’s just transition standards with processes for monitoring and review. Clear agreement on how emissions are calculated and proposed timelines and changes to reduce emissions, with consideration of impact on workers and

provisions for monitoring and review, must be reached in dialogue with workers. In the transportation and logistics sector, often the role of warehousing in the rise of emissions can be overlooked. A collaborative effort between companies and workers can establish effective strategies to reduce emissions without sacrificing worker safety and job security.

02. Identification, prevention and management of current and potential future climate-related impacts on warehousing operations and working conditions (see also principle 2, ‘Safe Jobs’) through adaptation and resilience plans produced in dialogue with workers which are in line with the International Labour Organization’s just transition standards and which include processes for monitoring and review.

Workers are already feeling the negative impacts, which are expected to increase in intensity. The focus should be on implementing real-time changes to warehouse operations which address existing issues and are fit for future climate realities, with appropriate





protections for working conditions and emergency protocols for potential natural disasters and climate extremes. Consideration should also be given to remedies for workers who have suffered harm due to the failure to put in place reasonable protections against climate-related impacts in warehousing operations.

03. Just transition committees which are composed of an equal number of worker and employer representatives (including women and young worker representatives) and which meet regularly to work on mitigation and adaptation/resilience plans and engage in ongoing monitoring and review. The committee will engage with third parties as appropriate, including climate experts and government bodies, to develop understanding on potential climate-related impacts on warehousing

and ramifications for workers, and to feed experiences into sectoral and national climate planning and financing. The committee will be equipped to meet on an emergency basis in the event of a serious actual or potential climate-related incident.

As global logistics companies consider both the role they play in the causes of climate change, and its effects, their efforts to reduce emissions too often are set apart from worker rights and well-being. This can lead to an approach that comes at the cost of the workers. A collaborative approach to climate planning based on mutual respect and open lines of communication is essential to achieving action which genuinely progresses climate goals while complying with international just transition frameworks.

# 07.

## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

**All warehouse workers must be free to exercise their right to join trade unions and to bargain collectively.**

To ensure these fundamental rights are fully upheld, the following must be guaranteed by employers and governments:

01. All workers shall have the right to join and be represented by a trade union of their choosing without fear of retaliation, detriment, or discrimination.
02. Warehouse employers shall not oppose efforts towards trade union organising and shall ensure that managers and supervisors shall in no way interfere with a worker's decision to unionise.
03. An enabling environment for mature industrial relations in order to enable freedom of association to be exercised in an environment free of fear and hostility where conflict can be minimised.
04. Recognition of legitimate trade unions for the purpose of collective bargaining using the most reasonably expeditious process.
05. Good faith collective bargaining with collective agreements concluded and implemented without unjustified delays.
06. Workers representatives to be granted adequate time and facilities during working hours in order to enable them to carry out their functions promptly and efficiently.
07. Warehouse employers agree to facilitate the process of trade union access to workers, including for the purposes of organising, education and training.
08. Where the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining are restricted under local law, allow for the development of parallel means for independent and free association and bargaining in consultation with the ITF.
09. Respect a worker's right to strike and to honour a picket line without fear of discipline.

**All workers shall have the right to join and be represented by a trade of union of their choosing without fear of retaliation, detriment, or discrimination.**



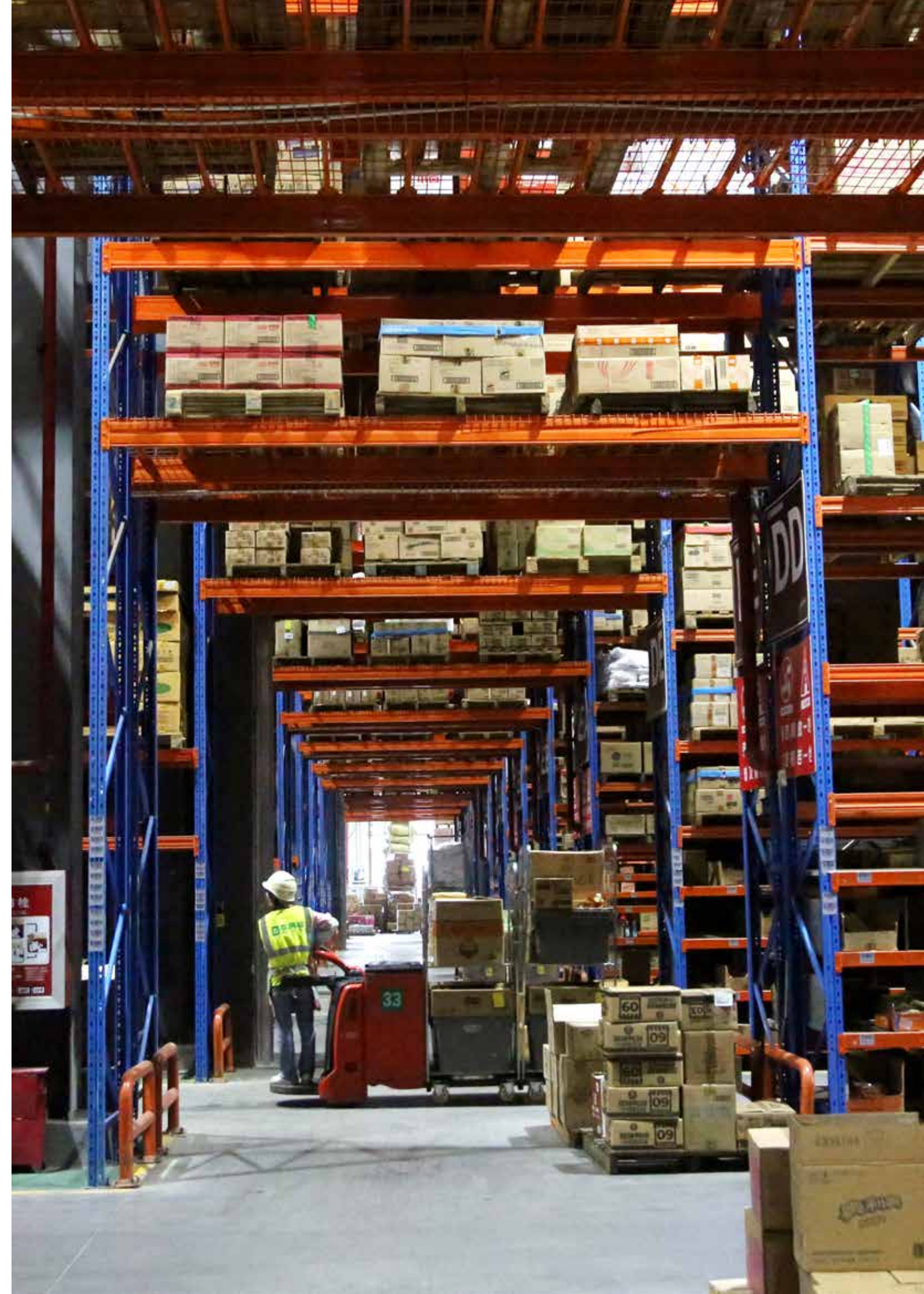
# 08.

## EFFECTIVE GRIEVANCE MECHANISMS

**All warehouse workers must have access to grievance mechanisms with fair procedures and remedies.**

Warehouse employers shall ensure that workplace grievance mechanisms are:

- 01. Legitimate:** enabling trust from workers for whose use they are intended, and being accountable for the fair conduct of grievance processes, including respect for due process and the right to representation.
- 02. Accessible:** being known to workers, trade unions, and all other stakeholder groups for whose use they are intended, and providing adequate assistance for those who may face particular barriers to access.
- 03. Predictable:** providing a clear and known procedure with an indicative time frame for each stage, and clarity on the types of process and outcome available and means of monitoring implementation.
- 04. Equitable:** aggrieved parties to have reasonable access to sources of information, advice and expertise necessary to engage in a grievance process on fair, informed and respectful terms.
- 05. Transparent:** keeping parties to a grievance informed about its progress, and providing sufficient information about the mechanism's performance to build confidence in its effectiveness and to meet any public interest at stake.
- 06. Rights-compatible:** ensuring that outcomes and remedies accord with the rights set out in these Principles.
- 07. Source of continuous learning:** identify lessons for improving the mechanism and preventing future grievances and harms.
- 08. Engagement and dialogue:** consulting workers and trade union on the design and performance of grievance mechanism and focusing on dialogue as the means to address and resolve grievances.





# BACKGROUND

This document brings together internationally recognised standards based on existing international and national regulations, policies of leading warehousing and logistics companies and guidance provided by industry experts and academics. As many of these standards come directly from international and national laws, it is the minimum expectation that warehousing and logistics companies adhere to those laws.<sup>1</sup>

These principles apply to all warehouse, distribution and logistics workers. There are also associated workers whose job responsibilities require them to operate in and around warehouse facilities to whom these standards/principles are also relevant.

While this document may serve to create a floor for labour standards in warehousing globally, it should not be misunderstood to be setting a ceiling. While meeting minimum standards will ensure that warehouse workers are free from abuse and exploitation, it is the assertion of the ITF that a successful business model is based on an approach that prioritise safety and well-being of the workers as a necessary foundation for operational stability.

Especially with the vital role that warehouses play in global supply chains, the need for stability is critical. This can be assured through a commitment to and investment in the workers, leading to improved workplace safety and better quality of life for workers which promotes lower employee turnover and less need for recruitment and training. Retention will always offer a better ROI, both financially and in the quality and reliability of service that a logistics company can offer.

Critically, the value of this document is less about the words on the page and more about the partnership between workers, their union, employers, clients and government to make a shared commitment to establishing, raising and enforcing standards across the industry.

This document lays out standards across eight principal areas with specific issues to be considered and addressed.

1. See annex for applicable international standards and relevant ITF and trade union policies.





# ANNEX

## APPLICABLE INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICE INSTRUMENTS

### INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Labour Standards:

C087 – Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)

C098 – Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)

C135 – Workers' Representatives Convention, 1971 (No. 135)

C154 – Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154)

R113 – Consultation (Industrial and National Levels) Recommendation, 1960 (No. 113)

C029 – Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)

P029 – Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930

C105 – Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)

C138 – Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)

C182 – Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)

C100 – Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)

C111 – Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)

C156 – Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)

C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)

C158 – Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158)

C095 – Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95)

C131 – Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131)

C001 – Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1)

C030 – Hours of Work (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1930 (No. 30)

C155 – Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)

C187 – Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187)

P155 – Protocol of 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981

C102 – Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)

R202 – Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)

C183 – Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)

C097 – Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)

C143 – Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143)

C127 – Maximum Weight Convention, 1967 (No. 127)

### ILO DECLARATIONS

- ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, adopted at the 86th Session of the International Labour Conference (1998) and amended at the 110th Session (2022)
- ILO declaration on social justice for a fair globalization (2008), as amended in 2022
- ILO centenary declaration for the future of work (2019)

### ILO GUIDELINES AND CODES OF CONDUCT

- ILO code of practice on the protection of workers' personal data (1997)
- ILO *general principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and definition of recruitment fees and related costs* (2019)
- ILO *guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all* (2015)

### BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

- UN guiding principles on business and human rights (2011)
- ILO tripartite declaration of principles concerning multinational enterprises and social policy, sixth edition (2022)
- OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises (2023)

### TRADE UNION GUIDANCE

- ITUC legal guide for setting up an operational-level grievance mechanism for the world of work in the context of business and human rights (2022)



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