

The Implementation of the SA8000 Standard by Contemporary Enterprises

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One of the first social standards aimed at promoting labour rights for employees throughout the world is the SA8000 standard, referred to as social accountability 8000. The standard has been introduced to promote decent working conditions and to encourage enterprises to develop, sustain and apply socially accepted practices in the workplace. The aim of the paper is to present SA8000, along with its practical application by enterprises in different parts of the world. The article discusses reasons for applying SA8000 by selected companies and its benefits. In addition to theoretical aspects of the SA8000 certification process, SAAS data is presented, according to which, by the end of December 2018, the total number of enterprises that apply the social responsibility management system based on SA 8000 was 3,232. They operate in 56 sectors of 64 countries and employ 2,047,066 workers.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, CSR, SA8000.

Implementacja normy SA 8000 przez współczesne przedsiębiorstwa

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Jednym z pierwszych społecznych standardów mających na celu promowanie praw pracowniczych dla pracowników na całym świecie jest norma SA 8000, określana jako odpowiedzialność społeczna 8000. Konceptem normy było zapewnienie godnych warunków pracy, a także zachęcanie przedsiębiorstw do rozwijania, utrzymywania i stosowania akceptowanych społecznie praktyk w miejscu pracy. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie SA 8000, wraz z praktycznym jej zastosowaniem wśród przedsiębiorstw na całym świecie. Uzupełnieniem powyższego celu jest przedstawienie motywów i korzyści z zastosowania SA 8000 wśród wybranych firm. W opracowaniu oprócz teoretycznych aspektów procesu certyfikacji normy SA 8000, przedstawiono dane SAAS, według których na koniec grudnia 2018 roku liczba przedsiębiorstw prowadzących swoją działalność w oparciu o system zarządzania odpowiedzialnością społeczną zgodnie z SA 8000 to: 3232 certyfikowane firmy, działające w 64 krajach, w 56 sektorach i zatrudniające 2 047 066 pracowników.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczna odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorstw, CSR, SA8000.

JEL: J83, M14

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1. Introduction

As both competition and public awareness grow, accountability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are becoming increasingly important aspects of management. One may say that, over the past decade, corporate social responsibility has become the dominant paradigm in the corporate world (Ding, Ferreira & Wongchoti, 2016, p. 86), since it is commonly believed that in order to ensure sustainable development and competitive advantage, companies' operations should be driven by CSR. Therefore, contemporary organizations, wishing to achieve success, must balance economic, environmental and social objectives, simultaneously integrating social concerns with basic operating structures and business strategies (Chang & Yeh, 2017, p. 38). In practice, this is reflected in the mission of the enterprise, its strategic objectives, functional action programs or marketing strategies aimed at socially responsible operations. For many enterprises, CSR has become primarily:

- a tool to improve the image and identity of the enterprise while contributing to an improvement in the relationship between the enterprise, community and stakeholders (González-Rodríguez, Díaz-Fernández & Simonetti, 2015, p. 836);
- a factor affecting the evaluation of the company, the choice of the brand, its recommendation and, consequently, the satisfaction and loyalty of customers and even customers' intention to purchase (Bhardwaja et al., 2018, pp. 207-208);
- an instrument creating a (positive or negative) value for shareholders (Lu et al., 2014 pp. 195-206);
- a factor influencing the development of organizational culture, which is reflected in the implementation of CSR practices by all of the company's employees (Yu & Choi, 2016, p. 227);
- a tool for better communication with a wide range of stakeholders (Sidhoum Serra, 2017, p. 1).

As claimed by Arminen et al., growing interest in social responsibility has also led to increased attention being paid to operations aimed at employees (Arminen et al., 2018). According to F. Murmur, L. Bravi, F. Palazz, this is particularly apparent among companies manufacturing labour-intensive, branded consumer products, which are manufactured in low-wage countries (Murmura, Bravi & Palazz 2017, p. 1407). Admittedly, enterprises make attempts to improve working conditions through the development of codes of conduct or the adoption of global standards, thus fulfilling the function of a national law enforcement framework; still, many of them do not respect basic human rights in the workplace (Stigzelius & Mark-Herbert, 2009, p. 46). As stated by M. Żemigala, in practice, social responsibility comes with a broad range of tools both in the form of programs (initiatives) and standards, including labour conditions and other issues related to it (Żemigala, 2018,

p. 36). One of such tools encouraging different organizations to develop, sustain and apply socially accepted practices in the workplace is the international SA8000 standard.

The idea behind the standard is to promote the rights of employees and provide them with decent working conditions. Nowadays, it is no longer enough to pay workers properly and timely, and to ensure a clean and safe working environment. It has become necessary to regularly verify and, most of all, improve procedures taking into account human rights and labour rights. For this standard is based on the assumption that guaranteeing labour rights must be regarded as an investment in human resources and not as an additional cost for the company. Although academic literature provides a range of publications relating to CSR, the number of articles analysing the SA8000 standard remains limited. Therefore, it seems justified to further explore it. The aim of this study is to present SA8000 and its practical application among enterprises throughout the world. In addition, the reasons for applying SA8000 by selected companies and benefits they derive from it shall be discusses.

2. The SA8000 standard and the certification process

A number of CSR standards and instruments relating to economic, environmental and ethical operations of enterprises have been created to help organisations improve their social responsibility. Both the theory and practice of management indicate that standards, codes of conduct or CSR management systems abound. Let us name just a few: Account Ability 1000, Global Compact, Global Reporting Initiative, ISO 26000, FLA Workplace Code, CSC9000T or Social Accountability 8000.

SA8000¹, which is the first standard involving for an audit of social responsibility, deserves special attention. In the opinion of Sartor et al., it is unique for several reasons:

- it is controlled by an independent organization;
- it is a universal standard designed for application in a system of independent verification;
- it is associated with the development and auditing of management systems promoting socially acceptable labour practices;
- it can be applied in all countries of the world and in enterprises operating in any industry;
- it covers the entire supply chain of certified companies;
- it encompasses the most widely accepted standards relating to social issues (Sartor et al. 2016, p. 164).

SA8000 is considered as a standard defining working conditions on the basis of international legal instruments concerning human rights included in conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations' Convention. Moreover, the SA8000 standard is compatible with the structure ISO9001, ISO14000, OHSAS18001, as it uses audit techniques, specifies corrective and preventive actions and encourages continuous improvement in accordance with these three standards (Olejniczak, 2013, p. 39). The standard covers eight parameters (conditions) which, when integrated, form a management system which is the basis for socially responsible actions (Figure 1). Therefore, SA8000 is considered as a management system standard. As claimed by Tsai et al., SA8000 is the "first standard of materializing social responsibility, the aim of which is to impose humanism on the market economy" (Tsai et al., 2011, p. 2).

At this point, it should be pointed out that the SA8000 certification allows the company to:

- in terms of its relationships with the environment: show its commitment to ethical business practices and social responsibility, protect its brand, improve its reputation of a responsible company, build consumer trust and enhance its positive image by emphasizing its difference in relation to competitors;
- in terms of relationships with employees: improve the morale of employees, continuously enhance management systems, develop a safe, fair and honest working environment;
- in terms of risk management: prevent adverse incidents (Fernandes de Andrade & Bizzo, 2019, p. 1022).

As stated by M. Kwietniewska-Sobstyl and A. Żelazna-Blicharz, in addition to a range of benefits, SA8000 implementation and certification allows organisations to anticipate the promote corporate responsibility measures championed by the EU. One may say that it testifies to the compliance of the company's activities with ethical and social standards, while increasing consumer trust in the company, its products and services, which may facilitate conquering new markets (Kwietniewska-Sobstyl & Żelazna-Blicharz, 2014, p. 250).

SA8000 seems a versatile, global standard that can be applied both by SMEs and large corporations, since its essence is the assumption that an enterprise must be managed in such a way that guaranteed the respect of fundamental human rights. Moreover, the standard assumption is that, owing to the above, managers should assume their responsibility. In this respect, SA8000 focuses on operations that improve working conditions.

2.1. The SA8000² implementation process

A responsible approach to management, in particular in terms of safe and fair working conditions, is evidenced by the implementation of the SA8000 standard within the company's structures.

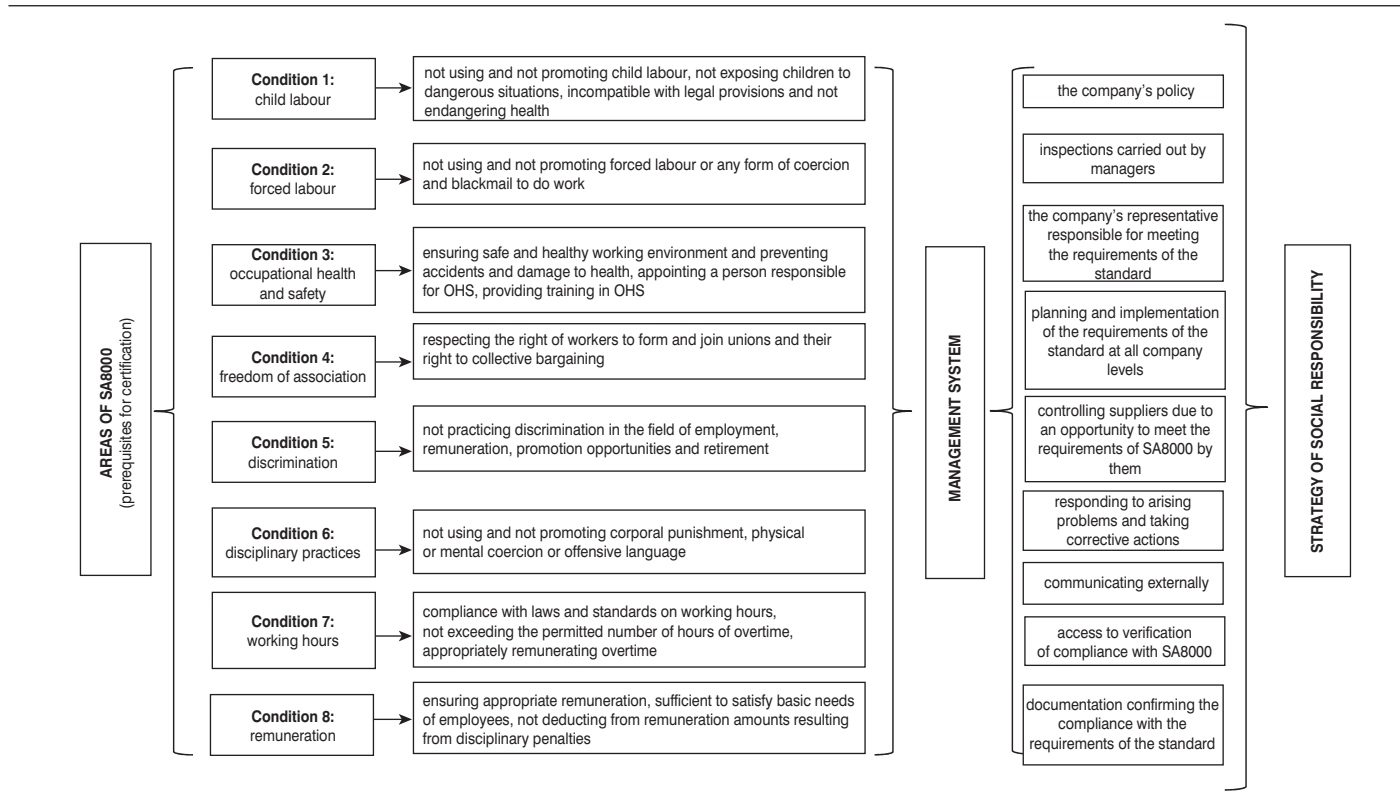


Fig. 1. Areas of the SA 8000 standard. Source: Own research based on SAI data.

The multi-stage certification course (Figure 2) includes six general steps in three main processes:

1. preliminary SA8000 certification;
2. SA8000 surveillance audit;
3. re-certification process.

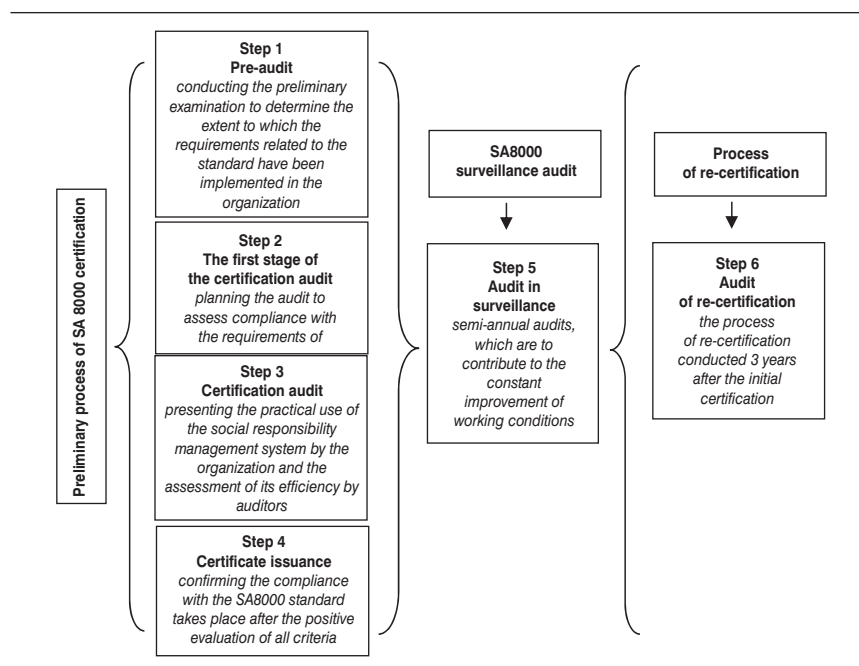


Fig. 2. General course of the SA8000 standard certification. Source: Own research base on SAI data.

The implementation of the SA8000 standard is a long and costly process. Its positive outcome largely depends on the preliminary accreditation process, including its evaluation in terms of meeting criteria defined in SAAS procedures and ISO requirements. Managers can use an on-line tool, the so-called “Social Fingerprint®”, to carry out self-evaluation in terms of a range of CSR issues. This, in turn, provides an opportunity for assessment the level of maturity of the management system in areas related to the requirements of SA8000. It is difficult to specify the cost of this certification process, as it depends on the size of the company, the scope of its business activity, its location, the duration of the certification process, the number of auditors involved in the certification, etc. As reported by SAAS, the cost includes both self-evaluation carried out by the company (USD 300) and the process of certification itself, which between USD 400 and 1,500 per day. In addition to direct certification costs, the

entities interested in the implementation of SA8000 bear direct costs that precede the process of certification itself, due to improvements in the OHS infrastructure or additional costs of training or consulting. Therefore, in the opinion of I. Stigzelius and C. Mark-Herbert, the implementation of SA8000 requires large investments, which can be an obstacle to its implementation, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises (Stigzelius & Mark-Herbert, 2009, p. 49).

A standard contract for the SA8000 certification is concluded for a period of three years. During that period, six follow-up audits take place, including at least one unannounced (Figure 3).

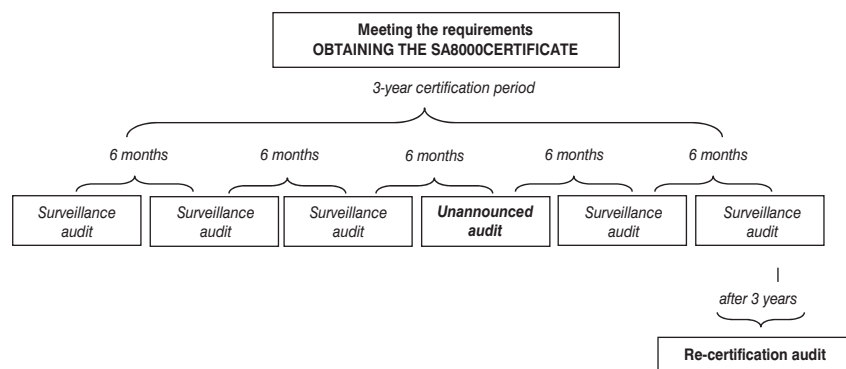


Fig. 3. Audit periodicity. Source: Own research based on SAI data.

If the company fails to meet the standards and principles of SA8000, the auditor evaluates whether a particular irregularity can be regarded as a case of minor negligence or serious violation. An irregularity is considered major when the company fails to employ or employs a faulty SA8000 compliance process, in the case of high risk for the safety of employees and when the company does not monitor the compliance of operations with the standard. In turn, a minor irregularity is an issue that is not a systemic problem, or one that is an exception while other requirements are met (Rózicka & Cieślak, 2014, p. 16).

3. Research methods and procedures

On the basis of literature review, the following research questions and hypotheses were formulated in the light of the objective specified in the introduction to the study. Research was conducted with the following questions in mind:

- RQ 1: How do enterprises in different regions of the world implement the SA8000 standard and what does it relate to?

- RQ 2: What are the benefits of implementing the SA8000 standard for organisations?
- RQ 3: What barriers do enterprises encounter while implementing the SA8000 standard?

In order to answer these research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. The majority of certified companies are located in developing countries where human rights are not always observed.
2. SA8000 is implemented in labour-intensive sectors.
3. A social responsibility certificate in the form of SA8000 measurably contributes to increasing the company's value.
4. The implementation of SA8000 requires the identification of factors contributing to the success of this process.

In order to verify these hypotheses in relation to RQ 1, the official SAI database was used. Analysis was performed on data relating to 9,609 entities which, over a period of 20 years, obtained the SA8000 certificate. In order to verify the hypotheses in relation to RQ 2 and 3, a diagnostic survey was carried out using a questionnaire, which was sent via Internet to 28 entities holding SA8000 certificates that operate in Poland. As only 14% of them responded, the analysis was extended to include data from the Elsevier database.

4. The implementation and use of SA8000

The first certificates were issued in 1998, and this year should be considered the reference point when it comes to the practical implementation of CSR strategies. According to the SAAS data, only 8 SA8000 certificates were issued during the first year; at present, as many 3,232 enterprises hold the certificate (Figure 4).

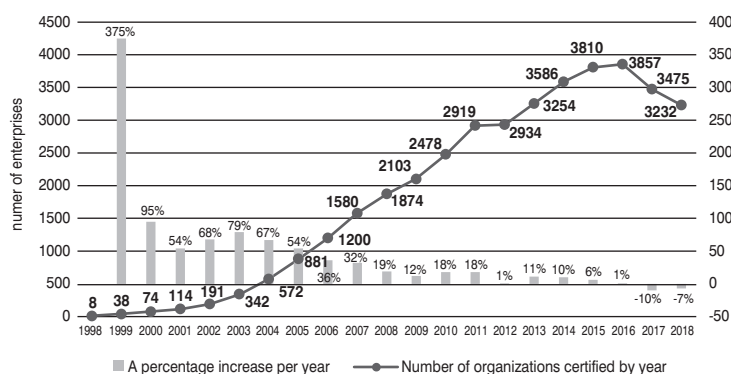
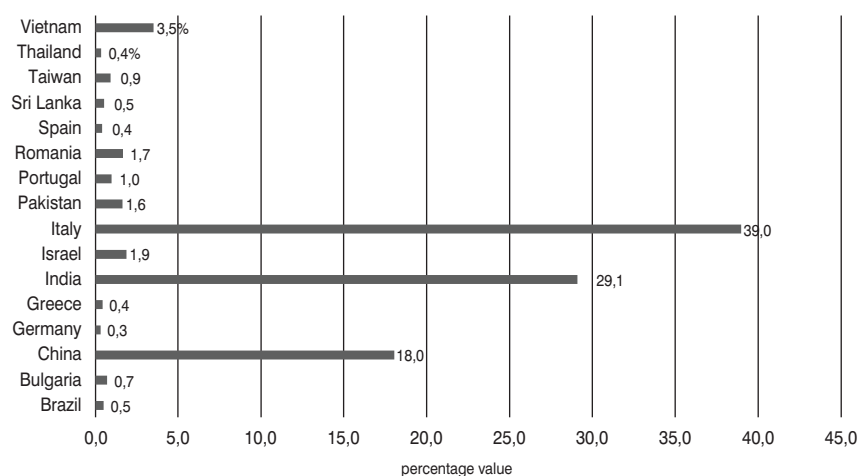


Fig. 4. Evolution of the certified implementations of SA8000 in 1998-2018. Source: Own research based on SAI data.

A clear upward trend in the number of certified implementations of SA8000 is visible throughout the world, with the exception of the last two years of the analysed period, with a 10% decline in the number of certificates recorded in 2017 and a 7% decline in 2018. However, according to M. Żemigła, past results indicate that the upward trend can be expected to continue (Żemigła, 2018, p. 38). By 30 September 2018, 205 new certificates were issued, 145 organisations were re-certified and 113 certificates expired.

With the exception of Italy, the majority of certified enterprises operate in developing countries (e.g. India 29.1%, China 18%, Vietnam 3.5%, Romania 1.7%), where a significant discrepancy is observed between the requirements of SA8000 and the respect for human rights in the workplace (Figure 5).



* figures relate only to countries where certificates are held by more than 10 organisations

Fig. 5. Countries with the largest number of SA8000 certificates in 1998-2018*. Source: Own research based on SAI data.

While analysing SAI data, it transpires that the greatest interest in SA8000 certification is observed in textile, clothing and footwear industry – 32.8% of all issued certificates. Enterprises operating in other sectors, e.g. building and landscape maintenance, food industry, manufacturing of toys, sports goods, medical goods, electrical appliances, metal appliances, paper industry, plastics and rubber industry, fuel industry, chemical industry or cosmetics industry, i.e. those with greater labour intensity, represent less than 5% of certificate holders. This is particularly important in developing countries where labour is cheap. It should be emphasized that the majority of enterprises that declare compliance with the SA8000 standard are SMEs (67% of the issued certificates).

5. Motives, benefits and barriers to the implementation of SA8000

The presented conclusions, relating to the response to RQ 2 and 3, were formulated on the basis of the results of the survey conducted between November and December 2018 among 28 enterprises operating in Poland and listed in the SAI database as holding – currently or at some point during the 20-year period – SA8000 certificates (Table 1).

Name of Certified Organisation	Current certificates	Certificate date	Industry
IL CALZIFICIO	no	2013	Manufacturing: textiles, apparel, garments, leather, footwear & related products
CaseTech Polska Sp. z o.o.	no	2014	Manufacturing: printing & reproduction of recorded media
Indorama Ventures Poland Sp. z o.o.	yes	2017	
Avon Operations Polska Sp. z o.o.	no	2002	Manufacturing: coke (fuel), refined petroleum products, chemical, & chemical products, including cosmetics
MPS International Ltd. Sp. z o.o.	no	2014	
Petrochemia Blachownia S.A.	no	2008	
C N Polska Sp. z o.o.	no	2004	Manufacturing: rubber & plastic products
Heinz Plastics Polska Sp. z o.o.	no	2005	
Aperam Stainless Services & Solutions Poland Sp. z o.o.	yes	2011	Manufacturing: metals & metal products, EXCEPT machinery & equipment
Nord	no	2001	Manufacturing: computer hardware, electronics & optical products
TCL Operations Polska Sp. z o.o.	no	2004	Manufacturing: electrical equipment
Horus Innowacyjne Materiały Pzemysłowe Sp. z o.o.	no	2014	
Thomson Multimedia Polska Sp. z o.o.	no	2004	
Poludniowy Koncern Energetyczny S.A. – Elektrownia, Łaziska	no	2003	
SANDVIK MINING AND CONSTRUCTION Sp. z o.o.	no	2008	Manufacturing: machinery & equipment

Name of Certified Organisation	Current certificates	Certificate date	Industry
Regionalne Centrum Gospodarki Wodno-Ściekowej S.A.	no	2010	Electricity, gas, steam, & air conditioning supply
Scanmed Multimedias Spółka Akcyjna	no	2014	Land, water, & air transport activities
Alcatel-Lucent Polska Sp. z o.o.	no	2014	Information technology; telecommunications
Budlex S.A.	no	2014	Real estate
Biuro Inwestycyjne Progres Anna Bielska	no	2015	Office administrative, office support & other business support activities
Black&Decker Limited BVBA Sp. z o.o. Oddział w Polsce	yes	2017	
Scanmed S.A. Szpital sw. Rafała	no	2014	Health care
Samsung Electronics Poland Manufacturing sp. z o.o.	no	2015	Repair of computers, personal & household goods
BB Serwis Sp. z o.o. Sp. K.	no	2016	Other service activities (not listed)
Masterfix Poland Ltd. Sp. z o.o.	yes	2016	
PGE Elektrownia Opole S.A.	no	2001	
Stanley Black & Decker Polska Sp. z o.o.	yes	2017	
WALL Bydgoska Drukarnia Akcydensowa Sp. z o.o.	no	2002	Manufacturing: printing & reproduction of recorded media

Tab. 1. Polish enterprises implementing the SA8000 standard. Source: Own research on the basis of SAI data.

According to the above list of enterprises operating in Poland, as of 21 December 2018, only 5 enterprises hold the SA8000 certificate, including:

- one company (*Aperam Stainless Services & Solutions Poland Sp. z o.o.*) that obtained the certificate in May 2011; in accordance with SAI data, the company has been recertified twice (in February 2014 and in March 2017),
- one company (*Masterfix Poland Ltd. Sp. z o.o.*) obtained the certificate in December 2016;
- three companies (*Black&Decker Limited BVBA Sp. z o.o. Oddział w Polsce*, *Indorama Ventures Poland Sp. z o.o.*, *Stanley Black & Decker Polska Sp. z o.o.*) were granted their certificates in May 2011.

The certificates of the remaining 23 companies have expired; eight have applied for re-certification once and six twice and one thrice. The structure of SA8000 certificates awarded to Polish companies in subsequent years is presented in Figure 6.

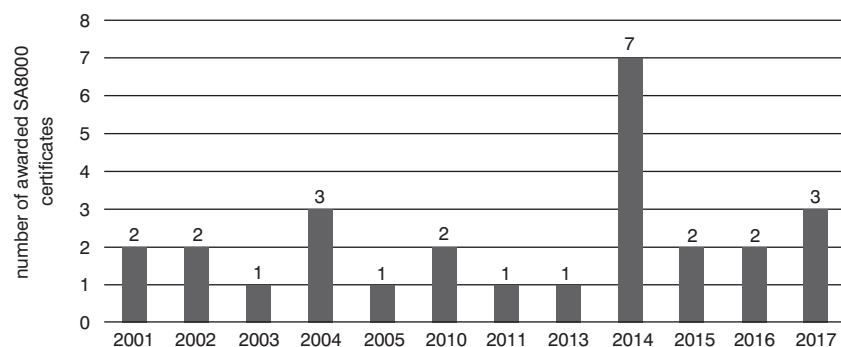


Fig. 6. SA8000 certificates awarded to Polish organisations. Source: Own research based on SAI data.

As only 14% of questionnaires sent to organisations were completed and returned, research available in the Elsevier database was used to explore the motives, benefits and barriers to the implementation of SA8000.

A total of enterprises responded to the survey, one of which currently holds the SA8000 certificate. The analysis of the collected material indicated the following as the main reasons for SA8000 implementation by the analysed companies:

- to create suitable relationships between the employer and employees;
- to prove to the stakeholders that the organization complies not only with legal regulations, but also with the principles of responsible business and ethics;
- to improve the management system in order to counteract social and professional risks.

Factors affecting benefits (Figure 7) and barriers (Figure 8) to the implementation of SA8000 by Polish enterprises were also subject to analysis.

In the light of data presented in Figure 7, it can be concluded that the adjustment of company processes to the requirements of SA8000 positively affects the image of the organisation. One might say that the SA8000 certificate somehow limits the unethical behaviour of the company, particularly in relation to its employees. It can be explained by continuous efforts aimed at improving working conditions, observing ethical principles and standards, which, in turn, positively affect the management system and relationships between the company and its employees. It also reduces the number of accidents at work, because the standard requires organisations to continuously identify potential threats and act proactively in this respect. The SA8000 standard also facilitates cooperation between the certified company and its suppliers, subcontractors and other stakeholders, which usually results in improved communication. In addition, paying more attention to the rights

of employees measurably affects their performance. This is related mainly to an increase in the efficiency of labour, greater involvement in the work performed and employees' identification of with the company and its values.

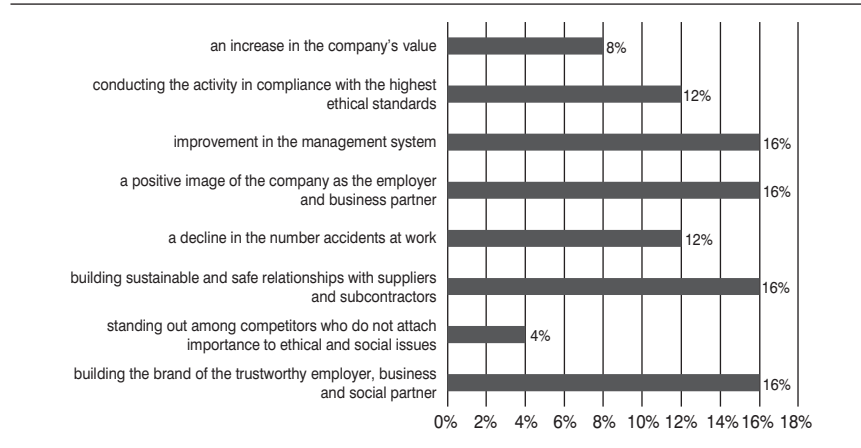


Fig. 7. Benefits of SA8000 implementation. Source: Own research.

Unfortunately, the process of SA8000 implementation is costly, not only due to the process of certification itself, but also to a range of preparatory operations. In addition, enterprises that wish to apply for the SA8000 certification, must adapt to the requirements of the standard, which is not easy. Furthermore, the rank-and-file often do not know or understand these requirements, and tend to resist the changes. The combination of these factors makes SA8000 certification a tough, time-consuming and complex process.

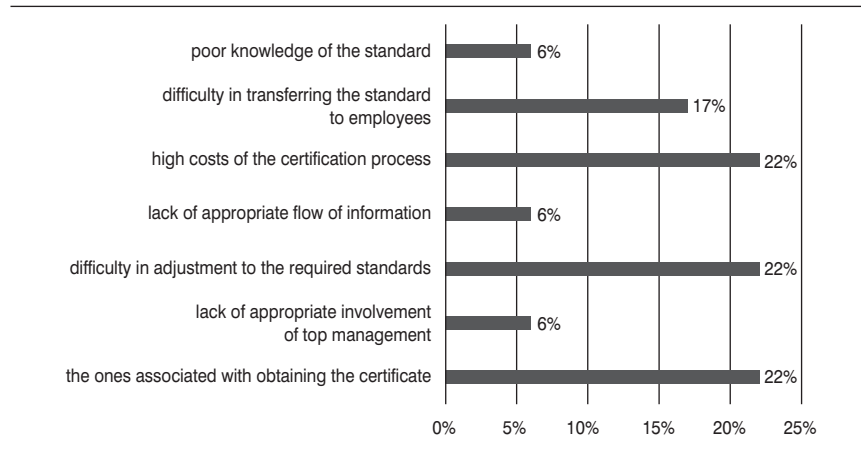


Fig. 8. Barriers to SA8000 implementation. Source: Own research.

As only 14% of questionnaires were completed and returned, the analysis of motives, benefits and barriers to the implementation of SA8000 was extended to research published in the Scandinavian Journal of Management in 2009 by I. Stigzelius, C. Mark-Herbert (2009, p. 45–56) and to research published in the Journal of Cleaner Production by F. Murmura, L. Bravi, F. Palazzi (2017, p. 1406–1418).

The authors of the first study examined seven Indian factories manufacturing clothing for several brands, including Armani, DKNY, French Connection, GAP, H&M, Lindex, Tesco, Timberland and Tommy Hilfiger. On the basis of their discussions with managers, they identified the motives, barriers and effects of the implementation of SA8000 (Table 2).

Motives	Barriers	Effects
of the implementation of SA8000		
Requirements of American and European customers, building the image of an ethical company, reducing the number of inspections, reducing costs, improving the quality of goods, building a positive image	increased labour costs associated with higher wages and reduction of overtime work, high costs of certification and audits, lack of external incentives for the implementation of labour standards, low level of education of employees and, consequently, difficulty in transmitting information	lower staff turnover, increased productivity, improved communication, higher quality of goods, reduction of inspection time, better working environment, attracting new customers, creating a positive image.

Tab. 2. Motives, barriers, effects in the process of the implementation of SA8000 in Indian factories. Source: Own research based on Stigzelius & Mark-Herbert, 2009, pp. 50–53.

In turn, the authors of the second research conducted a survey among 1,081 Italian companies holding SA8000 certificates. On the basis of survey results, F. Murmura, L. Bravi, F. Palazzi formulated the following conclusions:

- the main motivation for obtaining the certificate is the willingness to improve the company’s image and reputation, which was also recognized as an important benefit from the implementation of SA8000,
- improved labour environment, increased efficiency of enterprise management and competitive advantage are other reasons for the implementation of SA8000,
- improved relationships with employees, greater control over the supply chain, increased transparency of operations are the main benefits of the implementation of SA8000,
- the motives and the benefits of SA8000 certification outweigh potential barriers (training, promoting equal opportunities or hiring disabled workers).

The results of research in Indian and Italian factories overlap, to some extent, with the analysis of motives, benefits and barriers indicated

by enterprises operating in Poland. Therefore, it can be concluded that the primary motive for the implementation of SA8000 is to improve the management system and, consequently, to prevent inappropriate measures and behaviour in the workplace. This translates into a range of benefits for both employees and the organization, including – in the long run – certain financial benefits. Unfortunately, associated costs and lack of information seem to be the most important barriers to the implementation of SA8000.

6. Summary and conclusions

In the light of research hypotheses, the following conclusions should be drawn:

1. As stated in the first hypothesis, the majority of certified companies (with the exception of Italy – 39%) are located in developing countries, e.g. India 29.1% or China 18%, i.e. countries where human rights are often not respected in the workplace and, consequently, where higher labour standards and socially responsible measures sought to be introduced.
2. As regards the second hypothesis, it should be concluded that the largest number of SA8000 certificates are held by companies operating in labour-intensive industries, particularly in the textile, footwear and clothing sector.
3. Improved labour conditions combined with the implementation of SA8000 provides the company with a range of social benefits; in the long run, they may translate into an increased value.
4. It also seems important to determine the motives, benefits and barriers to the implementation of SA8000 in order to generate interest among other enterprises; the adoption of the SA8000 standard by the company is a strategic and modern approach to management; it is perceived as a rational and effective decision. In this perspective, the observation of labour standards may be instrumental in building competitive advantage.

It ought to be concluded that the analysed problem is particularly important and requires further research, as the process of certification, including reasons, benefits or barriers to SA8000 implementation have yet to be thoroughly explored. From the point of view of Polish enterprises, it seems justified to investigate the application of SA8000 requirements in the Polish market.

Endnotes

- ¹ The SA 8000 standard came into being in 1997 at the initiative of the Council on Economic Priorities Accreditation Agency – CEPAA (at present – Social Accountability International (SAI) – a non-profit organization dealing with the preparation, implementation and control of voluntarily accepted, verifiable standards concerning CSR.

² The implementation process is based on the verification of SAI documents <http://www.sa-intl.org>

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