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Environmental management — Principles and framework for social life cycle assessment

Management environnemental — Principes et cadre pour l'analyse sociale du cycle de vie

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Foreword

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 207, *Environmental management*, Subcommittee SC 5, *Life cycle assessment*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

There is increasing demand for the assessment of social aspects in life cycle assessment or sustainability evaluations. This has created interest in the development of frameworks to better understand and address the social impacts over the life cycle of products.

A social life cycle assessment (S-LCA) of a product can assist in:

— assessing the magnitude and significance of the potential social impacts of a product system;

— analysing current potential social impacts associated with a system or forecasting future potential social impacts.

This document provides requirements and guidance for practitioners from industries, government, universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the efficient and credible development and implementation of practices for assessing social impacts.

An S-LCA comprises the following four phases:

a) goal and scope definition;

b) social life cycle inventory analysis (S-LCI);

c) social life cycle impact assessment (S-LCIA);

d) interpretation.

Following the requirements and recommendations presented in this document, S-LCA can be implemented using different methods and assessment approaches. An S-LCA or S-LCI study can be used as part of a more comprehensive decision process that involves a variety of interested parties with different knowledge and background.

However, comparing the results of different S-LCA or S-LCI studies is only possible if the goal and scope, assumptions and context of each study are equivalent. This document is not intended to inform a ranking of the human rights performance of products. Therefore, this document contains several requirements and recommendations to support transparency on these issues.

Environmental management — Principles and framework for social life cycle assessment

1 Scope

This document establishes principles and framework, specifies requirements and gives guidance for the social life cycle assessment (S-LCA) of a product. The framework supports addressing the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and reaching the targets by identifying the enabling aspects from the inhibiting ones (with detrimental contributions).

The document provides goal and scope definition, inventory analysis, impact assessment, interpretation and reporting of the S-LCA of a product.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 14040, *Environmental management — Life cycle assessment — Principles and framework*

ISO 14044:2006, *Environmental management — Life cycle assessment — Requirements and guidelines*

ISO 14050, *Environmental management — Vocabulary*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 14040, ISO 14044, ISO 14050 and the following apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

— ISO Online browsing platform: available at https://www.iso.org/obp

— IEC Electropedia: available at https://www.electropedia.org/

3.1
social aspect
element of an *organization's* (3.31) activities or products that interacts or can interact with human well-being of any *interested party* (3.4) which can cause a *social impact* (3.12)

3.2
social life cycle assessment
S-LCA
social LCA
compilation and assessment of the socially relevant inputs and outputs and the potential *social impacts* (3.12) of a *product system* (3.6) throughout its *life cycle* (3.3)

[SOURCE: ISO 14044:2006, 3.2, modified — "social" added to the term. "assessment" replaced "evaluation", "socially relevant" added and "social" replaced "environmental" in the definition.]

3.3
life cycle
consecutive and interlinked stages, from raw material acquisition or generation from natural resources to final disposal

[SOURCE: ISO 14040:2006/Amd.1:2020, 3.1, modified — "of a product system" deleted.]

3.4
interested party
stakeholder
person or *organization* (3.31) that can affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision or activity

Note 1 to entry: To "perceive itself to be affected" means the perception has been made known to the organization.

3.5
functional unit
quantified performance of a *product system* (3.6) for use as a reference unit

Note 1 to entry: The functional unit can include a qualitative description of social functions.

[SOURCE: ISO 14040:2006, 3.20, modified — Note 1 to entry added.]

3.6
product system
collection of *unit processes* (3.7), performing one or more defined functions, and which models the *life cycle* (3.3) of a product

[SOURCE: ISO 14040:2006, 3.28, modified — "with elementary and product flows" deleted.]

3.7
unit process
smallest element considered in the life cycle inventory analysis for which input and output data are quantified

Note 1 to entry: Input and output data can be also qualitative.

[SOURCE: ISO 14040:2006, 3.34, modified — Note 1 to entry added.]

3.8
relevant product market
market comprising all products that are regarded as interchangeable or substitutable by the customers, by reason of the products' characteristics, and their intended use

Note 1 to entry: Prices and/or costs can be considered in some instances.

[SOURCE: European Commission Notice no. 97/C 372/031997, modified — "and/or services" and "their prices" deleted, and "customers" replaced "consumer" in the definition. Note 1 to entry added.]

3.9
social elementary flow
practice or condition related to the product or the *product system* (3.6), and which can lead to *social impacts* (3.12) on human well-being

3.10
elementary flow
material or energy entering the system being studied that has been drawn from the environment without previous human transformation, or material or energy leaving the system being studied that is released into the environment without subsequent human transformation

[SOURCE: ISO 14040:2006, 3.12]

3.11
value choice
subjective decision based on a judgement of what is important

[SOURCE: ISO/TS 14074:2022, 3.7]

3.12
social impact
beneficial or harmful consequences ensuing from the causal relationship between a process or activity related to the *product system* (3.6) under study and aspects relating to human well-being of *interested parties* (3.4)

Note 1 to entry: The aspects related to the human well-being of interested parties are covered by *social impact categories* (3.27).

3.13
social performance
performance of a product and an *organization* (3.31) related to its *social aspects* (3.1) and *social impacts* (3.12)

3.14
social life cycle performance assessment
S-LCPA
compilation and assessment of information on the *social performance* (3.13) of a *product system* (3.6) throughout its *life cycle* (3.3)

3.15
reference scale assessment
phase of *social life cycle assessment* (3.2) aimed at assessing the *social performance* (3.13) of the *product system* (3.6) based on specific *reference scales* (3.18)

3.16
social life cycle impact assessment
S-LCIA
phase of *social life cycle assessment* (3.2) aimed at understanding and evaluating the magnitude and significance of the potential *social impacts* (3.12) for a *product system* (3.6) throughout the *life cycle* (3.3) of the product

[SOURCE: ISO 14050:2020, 3.6.5, modified — "social" added to the term and definition. "social" replaced "environmental" in the definition.]

3.17
social hotspot
unit process (3.7) or group of unit processes that contribute significantly to a potential *social impact* (3.12) considered to be threatening human well-being or that can contribute to its further development

3.18
reference scale
ordinal scale in which data are used to define an attribute or several specific intensity levels of a given attribute

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 4.32, modified — "ordinal" added, "data" replaced "reference samples", and "several specific intensity levels" replaced "specific intensities".]

3.19
reference flow
measure of the outputs from processes in a given *product system* (3.6) required to fulfil the function expressed by the *functional unit* (3.5)

3.20
activity variable
measure of process activity which provides information on the relative importance (or intensity) of the processes in the *product system* (3.6), and can be related to a *functional unit* (3.5)

Note 1 to entry: An often-used activity variable is “worker hours”, which provides information on the number of hours worked that are necessary in each process to produce a given amount of process output.

Note 2 to entry: Activity variables, scaled by the output of each relevant process, are used to reflect the share of a given activity associated with each *unit process* (3.7).

3.21
social life cycle inventory analysis
S-LCI
phase of a *social life cycle assessment* (3.2) involving the compilation and quantification of inputs and outputs for a product throughout its *life cycle* (3.3)

[SOURCE: ISO 14040:2006, 3.3, modified — “social” added in the term and definition.]

3.22
social comparative assertion
claim regarding the social superiority or equivalence of one product versus a competing product in the *relevant product market* (3.8) that performs the same function

[SOURCE: ISO 14040:2006, 3.6, modified — “social” added in the term and definition and "in the relevant product market" added in the definition. “claim” replaced “environmental claim” in the definition.]

3.23
qualitative data
non-numerical data describing the attributes or properties that a process unit possesses

3.24
quantitative data
numerical data item that includes its unit, or context for non-dimensional data

3.25
semi-quantitative data
data representing an ordinal ranking based on defined characteristics/criteria

3.26
characterization factor
factor derived from a characterization model which is applied to convert an assigned life cycle inventory analysis result to the common unit of the category indicator

Note 1 to entry: The common unit allows calculation of the category indicator result.

[SOURCE: ISO 14040:2006, 3.37]

3.27
social impact category
class of *social impacts* (3.12) to which *social life cycle inventory analysis* (3.21) results can be assigned

3.28
social impact subcategory
subsection of a *social impact category* (3.27) that can be related to a specific *interested party* (3.4)

3.29
impact pathway
series of consecutive, causal relationships, ultimately starting at a *social aspect* (3.1) and ending at a *social impact* (3.12)

Note 1 to entry: A synonym for impact pathway is “cause-effect chain”.

Note 2 to entry: In this document, it can be considered a system of interlinked social mechanisms.

[SOURCE: ISO 14008:2019, 3.1.9, modified — "environmental" deleted in the term. "social" replaced "environmental" in the definition.]

3.30
social responsibility
responsibility of an *organization* (3.31) for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behaviour that

— contributes to sustainable development, including health and the welfare of society;

— takes into account the expectations of *interested parties* (3.4);

— is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour;

— is integrated throughout the organization and practised in its relationships

Note 1 to entry: Activities include products, services and processes.

Note 2 to entry: Relationships refer to an organization's activities within its sphere of influence.

Note 3 to entry: Sphere of influence refers to range/extent of political, contractual, economic or other relationships through which an organization has the ability to affect the decisions or activities of individuals or organizations.

[SOURCE: ISO 26000:2010, 2.18, modified — "interested parties" replaced "stakeholders". Note 3 to entry added.]

3.31
organization
person or group of people that has its own functions with responsibilities, authorities and relationships to achieve its objectives

Note 1 to entry: The concept of an organization includes, but is not limited to sole-trader, company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority, partnership, charity or institution, or part or combination thereof, whether incorporated or not, public or private.

[SOURCE: ISO 14001:2015, 3.1.4]

4 Principles of S-LCA

4.1 General

These principles are fundamental and should be used as guidance for decisions relating to both the planning and the conducting of an S-LCA.

4.2 Life cycle perspective

S-LCA considers the entire life cycle of a product, including any raw material extraction and acquisition, through energy and material production and manufacturing, to use and end-of-life treatment which includes recovery operations and final disposal. It considers interested parties relevant and/or significant throughout the product life cycle. Such a perspective can identify and possibly avoid the shifting of potential social burdens between life cycle stages, individual processes, or different interested parties, and can maximize the beneficial social impacts.

4.3 Social focus

S-LCA addresses the social aspects and impacts of a product system. Other tools may be combined with S-LCA for more extensive sustainability assessments such as life cycle costing and LCA in accordance with ISO 14040 and ISO 14044.