

# Electronics Watch

Improving working conditions in the global electronics industry

An independent organisation monitoring working conditions in the global electronics industry to enable socially responsible public purchasing in Europe

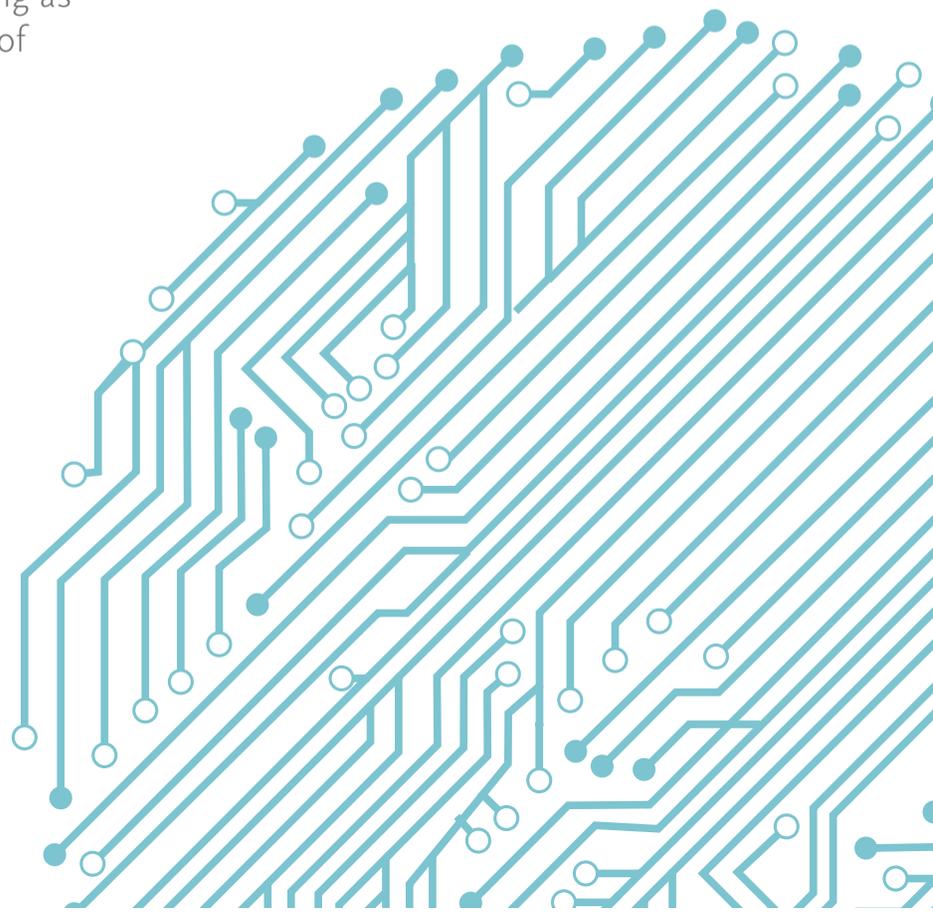
## An opportunity for the public sector

The electronics industry is one of the fastest growing global industries with an expected yearly growth of 7% between 2013-2015\*. It is widely known and accepted now that despite the modern and clean image the industry has, the working conditions are often appalling.

Local governments and universities are large-scale consumers of electronics products such as computers, laptops, mobile phones, tablets and other telecommunication equipment, not forgetting printers, copiers, servers and so on. Together public buyers have considerable buying power. If they join forces they can also create significant leverage to influence structural improvement in the industry.

A handful of public institutions from across Europe are acting as pioneers in the rethinking and promotion of a new type of Public Procurement, more sustainable and socially responsible. Not only this, but they are demonstrating responsible use of public money, bringing added value to their purchasing practices emphasising social inclusion and political coherence, and providing a leading example for both citizens and companies.

\* According to the Global Consumer Electronics Market Forecast by RNCOS  
<http://www.reportlinker.com/cio2o6o/Consumer-Electronics.html>



## Labour rights in the electronics industry

Parallel to the growth of the electronics industry and the increasing outsourcing of production to low-wage countries, unions and NGOs have been monitoring the human and labour rights situation in the sector. Several networks of civil society organisations have emerged.

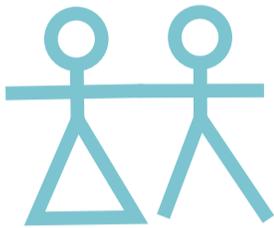
Over the last years, numerous research reports coming from these networks, as well as the bout of suicides and suicide attempts at electronics factories in China, have drawn the world's attention to gross labour violations, including:

- **Health and safety problems:** there have been many cases amongst workers of serious professional diseases such as cancer, leukemia, liver and kidney failure and miscarriages amongst workers as a result of prolonged exposed to dangerous toxic substances, not having the correct protective gear, and having to stand for long hours during their shift.
- **No living wage:** workers earn only the minimum wage for full-time work at the factory even while minimum wage levels are far too low to live on.
- **Excessive working hours:** during peak periods it is not unusual for workers to work 12 hours per day, six to seven days per week.
- **Forced overtime:** workers are not in the position to refuse overtime.
- **Punitive fines:** excessive wage deductions in the form of punitive fines for mistakes made. As corporate grievance mechanisms are few and not-effective, workers cannot get redress for afflicted wrongs.
- **Contract labour:** there is a growing trend to use labour agencies to supply workers in the electronics industry. These workers earn less than regular workers and have fewer rights, such as no paid sick leave, no vacation days, and no job security. The latter makes it impossible to defend labour rights.
- **Abuse of vulnerable worker groups:** increasingly migrant workers and student interns are put to work as regular working but with less rights and less pay.
- **Disrespect of union rights:** unions are not allowed in most electronics companies, attempts at organising can even be dangerous, making it impossible for workers to improve their conditions. Workers are not in the position to engage with factory management, let alone to collectively negotiate wages or working conditions

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### What is needed?



Existing approaches are clearly failing to combat poverty and human rights abuses in the electronics industry. Despite the guidance provided by the UN Guiding Principles of Business and Human Rights, governments are failing in their state duty to protect human rights. Companies are struggling to live up to their responsibility to protect human rights. Corporate codes of conduct and social auditing policies and practices fail in transparency and effectiveness.

Currently there is no comprehensive, credible and independent monitoring system for the electronics industry that involves workers and local civil society organisations. Public sector buyers with a will to act on labour rights issues do not have an effective way to do so as they have insufficient leverage over brands, companies and manufacturers.

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As such, there is a clear need to design a system whereby public institutions by means of their procurement decisions will have a real and considerable impact on company behaviour and on the lives of workers.

To meet this need, a number of European organisations (see below for details) are partnering, under the coordination of the NGO SETEM, to embark on the formation of a consortium called Electronics Watch, an independent organisation monitoring working conditions in the global electronics industry to enable socially responsible public purchasing in Europe.

Electronics Watch will bring together public sector buyers and local monitoring organisations. On the basis of a fee, affiliated public sector buyers are assured of up-to-date information about their suppliers, monitoring of local working conditions and structured ways of responding to detected non-compliances.

Electronics Watch is closely following the tried-and-tested model of the Workers Rights Consortium ([www.workersrights.org](http://www.workersrights.org)) for the garments sector in the US, which combines the procurement leverage of its members to incentivise sustainable and fair supply chains, by demanding compliance with international labour rights of their suppliers.

We are aiming to have Electronics Watch up and running by mid-2015, with a first group of 50 public sector buyers from across Europe. Southern NGOs and trade unions, as well as European public sector buyers and experts will have an equal say in the governance of the new consortium.



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## Get involved from the start

We would like to meet with stakeholders who are interested in getting involved, in order to explain the different possibilities for engagement, to learn more about exactly how this consortium can best serve their needs, and for them to help to sculpt the new organisation.

Here are some ways in which different stakeholders can get involved:

**Public sector buyers:** join our Advisory Group and shape the project, become an Ambassador for the project, or simply ask us questions.

**Southern NGO partners:** join our Advisory Group and shape the project, apply to be a monitoring partner, or simply ask us questions.

**Researchers:** help us in researching the electronics industry, human rights abuses, mapping supply chains, European public procurement or models for improving workers rights, join our Advisory Group and shape the project, or simply ask us questions.

**NGOs, trade unions, activists or sustainability and ethical networks:** [join our Advisory Group and shape the project, join the campaign, or simply ask us questions.](#)

## Project partners

The European organisations running the project are supported by associates including public administrations, universities, research centres and other civil society organisations and networks from across Europe, the US, China, Mexico and other key regions for the electronics industry. Together we will be undertaking new research into the ever-evolving nuances of the electronics industry and public procurement, conducting investigations of working conditions in factories around the globe, researching the latest advancements in supply chain traceability, and providing training. We will also be developing standards which members can adopt into their purchasing practices, and a Code of Conduct that procurers can legally insist on. The partnership is supported by European funding and works totally independently of the companies that we ultimately try to regulate.

Project partners in the different European countries can be contacted via the website [www.electronicswatch.org](http://www.electronicswatch.org) (live from May 2013 onwards), or at their national websites:

**Setem**

**SETEM(consortium lead)**  
Barcelona, Spain  
[www.setem.cat](http://www.setem.cat)

**SOMO**

**Centre for Research on  
Multinational Corporations (SOMO)**  
Amsterdam, the Netherlands  
[www.somo.nl](http://www.somo.nl)

 **FUNDACJA  
CENTRUMCSR.PL**

**Centrum CSR.PL**  
Warsaw, Poland  
[www.centrumcsr.pl](http://www.centrumcsr.pl)

 **DanWatch**

**Danwatch**  
Copenhague, Denmark  
[www.danwatch.dk](http://www.danwatch.dk)

**people & planet**

**People & Planet**  
Oxford, UK  
[www.peopleandplanet.org](http://www.peopleandplanet.org)

**SÜDWIND**

**Südwind Agentur**  
Vienna, Austria  
Andrea Ben Lassoued  
[www.suedwind-agentur.at](http://www.suedwind-agentur.at)



**weed**

**WEED**  
Weltwirtschaft, Ökologie & Entwicklung e.V.  
Berlin, Germany  
[www.weed-online.org](http://www.weed-online.org)  
[www.pcglobal.org](http://www.pcglobal.org)



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Contact: [info@electronicswatch.org](mailto:info@electronicswatch.org)

