



Understanding SEDEX and SMETA Audits: Everything You Need to Know About 2-Pillar and 4-Pillar Approaches



PILLARS OF SEDEX

In the modern business world, companies are under greater scrutiny than ever before. Stakeholders expect ethical practices, care for the environment, and respect to be given to workers. To ensure these practices, many companies undergo social auditing frameworks, which offer defined social compliance standards. The [Sedex SMETA Audit](#) is one of the most trusted, being a global standard for assessing and improving supply chain compliance. In this blog, we will cover everything related to the SMETA audit and SEDEX certification, including the SMETA audit process, SEDEX 2-pillar vs. 4-pillar audits, and how to achieve compliance using the seven quality improvement tools.

What is SEDEX?

SEDEX (Supplier Ethical Data Exchange) is a non-profit membership organization that assists companies with managing and improving work conditions within global supply chains. By joining, they gain access to a collaborative platform where data on health, safety, environment, business ethics, and labor is available from auditors, suppliers, and buyers.

Companies that join SEDEX not only gain visibility into their supply chains, they also demonstrate a commitment to ethical sourcing and responsible business practices.

What is the SMETA audit?

Each member of Sedex has to comply with the SMETA audits. They are done by certified consultants and take into consideration all relevant ethical business practices. SMETA audits are done in a coherent, consistent, and verifiable way across all industries.

Each business has its own specific requirements and risks. With these considerations and with the company's needs and its estimated risk level, SMETA audits are divided into 2 Sedex Pillars and 4 Sedex Pillars.

Sedex 2 Pillar Audit

The 2-pillar audit is divided into 2 sections with more focus on labor management policies: Health and Safety: Deals with workplace safety measures and emergency preparedness.

Sedex 4 Pillar Audit

These audits take everything into account from the 2 [Sedex Pillar Audits](#) and add on a management module where environmental issues are reviewed. The additional areas include:

Business Ethics: Evaluation of policies dealing with bribery, corrupt practices, fair trade and transparency.

While some sectors are fine with just Sedex 2 Pillar, businesses that face high public or regulatory scrutiny are better off with 4 Pillar. 4 Pillar is also more effective for businesses with intricate supply chains that need comprehensive oversight.

The SMETA Audit Process Explained

The SMETA audit process consists of the following steps:

Pre-Audit Preparation: Assigning tasks, performing internal audits, and preparing documentation are all part of this step.

On-site Audit: Document reviews, employee interviews, facility inspections, and compliance assessments are all conducted by certified auditors in this step.

Audit Reporting: Findings, corrective actions, and compliance levels are detailed in a report, which is then uploaded to the SEDEX platform.

Corrective Action Plan (CAPR): If non-compliance is identified, the supplier must devise a strategy to resolve the issues in the specified timeframe.

Continuous Improvement: Follow-up audits guarantee the actions taken will be maintained long-term.

Why SEDEX Certification Matters

Pursuing SMETA Audit and SEDEX Certification comes with these perks:

Builds Brand Reputation: Winning customers, partners, and investors is now easier as brand image will be enhanced through proven ethical practices.

- Reduces Supply Chain Risk: Labor and environmental safety risks are identified and mitigated.
- Legal and Regulatory Compliance: Global workforce and environmental compliance is ensured.
- Enhances Operational Efficiency: Streamlining of processes and waste reduction improves business efficiency.
- Drives Transparency: Trust is heightened through the disclosure of supply chain practices.
- Gives Your Business an Edge: Helps you win bids and compete in international markets.

The Role of the Seven Quality Improvement Tools

Within their SEDEX framework, many organizations practice continuous improvement in social compliance by using the Seven Quality Improvement Tools. These include:

Cause-and-Effect Diagram (Fishbone/Ishikawa)

Check Sheets

Control Charts
Histograms
Pareto Charts
Scatter Diagrams
Flowcharts

These tools, when combined with SMETA corrective action planning, ensure effective diagnosis of root cause, progress tracking, and measurement of improvements.

Other Social Auditing Standards to Know

Apart from SEDEX, companies might look into other social compliance frameworks such as:

SA8000: Global social certification standard for decent work environments and workplaces.

WRAP (Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production): Most common in apparel manufacturing.

RBA (Responsible Business Alliance): Standards for a specific industry, electronics and tech.

BSCI (Business Social Compliance Initiative): European-led initiative, widely adopted in textiles and consumer goods.

While each has tailored sector-specific advantages and elaborate guidelines, the Sedex Smeta Audit still stands as one of the most adaptable and recognized in the world.

How 4C Helps You Get a SEDEX Certification

At [4C Consulting](#), we assist businesses with the SMETA audit process and help them achieve SEDEX certification with minimal impact on day-to-day operations. We have over 40 client certifications and have provided more than 800 hours of training. Our consultants help your company achieve adequate ethical certifications in your business processes.

We help you prepare for a Sedex 2-pillar or 4-pillar audit by designing systems that comply with industry standards and build your brand reputation as a responsible market leader.

Get SEDEX Certified with Confidence

Want to move forward? Work with 4C to ensure Sedex compliance with confidence. We offer comprehensive solutions enabling our clients to navigate audit challenges, make necessary changes, and enhance their supply chain reputation.

Contact us today so we can start working on your SEDEX certification and turn your ethical practices into a business advantage.