

A person wearing a green long-sleeved shirt and a light-colored cap is leaning over a metal railing on a rooftop, looking down at solar panels. A dog is visible in the background on the right side of the frame. The background is a blurred view of a city or town.

**Solar
Energy
UK**



**Solar
Stewardship
Initiative**

Driving a more responsible, transparent, and sustainable solar value chain.



The solar industry is fully committed to accelerating the transition to clean, green energy and will be instrumental in reducing carbon emissions and reaching the UK's net zero and climate targets.

Over the last decade, solar installations (at all scales) have increased considerably as solar costs continue to decline. As of mid-2023, the UK solar market had a total installed capacity of 16GW, a fifth of what is needed to reach the Government's ambition to reach 70GW by 2035 and keep the UK on its trajectory to reach net zero by 2050.

The UK solar industry has been involved in developing a comprehensive due diligence platform (the Solar Stewardship Initiative) designed to tackle environmental sustainability and human rights challenges within the global solar supply chain.

The purpose of this briefing is to help members of the public, Government, industry and others interested in sustainability to understand better how the industry is working to drive transparency and sustainability in the global solar supply chain. This briefing provides an overview of the Solar Stewardship Initiative, its foundations and objectives.

Solar Stewardship Initiative

The Solar Stewardship Initiative (SSI), launched by SolarPower Europe (SPE) and Solar Energy UK (SEUK), is a solar-specific supply chain assurance scheme designed to develop further confidence in how, where, and by whom solar products are manufactured. The SSI ESG Standard and associated assurance scheme provide a checklist of environmental, social and governance (ESG) requirements, against which manufacturers can be independently audited to demonstrate that they are not involved in unethical practices.

Building on a foundation of international standards and guidelines, the Solar Stewardship Initiative recognises existing credible and equivalent third-party standards systems to avoid redundancy, audit fatigue, and promote the use of such programmes specifically tailored to the complexity of the solar sector.

The development of the initiative has been supported by more than 70 organisations across the value chain.¹ The SSI is also acknowledged by the UK Government, the IFC (World Bank Group) and the European Investment Bank.

Core Objectives of the SSI

1. Ensure the energy transition is just, inclusive, respects the environment, communities and human rights
2. Establish mechanisms to create supply-chain transparency, ensuring integrity in the global solar industry
3. Enable continuous improvement of ESG performance
4. Prepare the solar industry for relevant upcoming laws and regulations on responsible supply chains
5. Build the confidence of regulators, customers and business partners in the sustainability of the solar value chain

SSI ESG Standard (Manufacturing)

A core instrument of the initiative is the SSI ESG Standard, a comprehensive corporate sustainability code which is, at the current stage, targeted at manufacturing sites in the silicon supply chain. The standard is divided into three sections: the environment, human and labour rights, governance, and business ethics.

The standard has gone through a rigorous process of development and most recently has undergone a public consultation, which has seen representatives from academia, NGOs, Government, and industry feed into its development.

Entities that adopt the standard demonstrate their commitment to delivering ethical and transparent practices in these ESG areas. By joining the SSI, PV manufacturers commit to submitting their sites for certification within 12 months and continuously increasing the number of certified sites over time. The certification assessment is performed by independent SSI-approved assessment bodies.

Timeframe of delivery

Work towards the Solar Stewardship Initiative began in July 2021 when SPE and SEUK engaged with industry experts to deliver greater sustainability and transparency in global solar supply chains. Following an extensive international engagement period with industry experts, the Solar Stewardship Initiative, comprised of a draft code of conduct (now the SSI ESG Standard) and draft assurance protocol, was launched in October 2022.

Between October 2022 and July 2023, the draft standard and assurance protocol were tested through pilot audits of manufacturing sites across Europe and China. In parallel with this process, in May 2023, a multi-stakeholder public consultation was launched, which invited individuals to review and provide feedback on the draft standard. This process ran until July 2023. The feedback from the pilot audits and multi-stakeholder consultation is being reviewed and will inform the final version of the SSI standard and associated publications, due to be launched in December 2023. The SSI will be operational by the end of December 2023.

To complement the SSI ESG Standard, from January 2024, the SSI will start working on a product traceability standard, which will go through a pilot audit and public consultation process.

On implementation of the SSI, an SSI Board will be formed to oversee the initiative's governance. The Board will be comprised of 8 industry members. The Board will be accompanied by a non-industry stakeholder advisory group and will oversee the Initiative between December 2023 and 2025.

By the end of 2025, the SSI will have become a truly multi-stakeholder initiative overseen by an SSI Board comprised of industry members and other non-industry stakeholders, such as civil society, academia, think tanks and public institutions.

Full details of the SSI can be found on the: solarstewardshipinitiative.org





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