Solar Stewardship Initiative

Assurance Manual

v.2.0 | March 2025

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The Solar Stewardship Initiative

The Solar Stewardship Initiative (SSI) works with manufacturers, developers, installers, and purchasers across the global solar value chain to collaboratively foster responsible production, sourcing, and stewardship of materials. The SSI's mission is to enhance end-to-end transparency, sustainability, and ESG performance across the solar supply chain. Businesses actively involved in the solar value chain can apply to join the SSI and get certified against the SSI Standards.

The SSI's core objectives are to:

→ Ensure the energy transition is just, inclusive, and respects people's human rights.
→ Establish mechanisms to enhance supply-chain integrity in the global solar industry.
→ Enable continuous improvement of ESG performance.
→ Build confidence of regulators, customers, business partners and other stakeholders in the sustainability of the solar value chain.

About this document

The SSI Assurance Manual has been primarily written for Assessment Bodies (ABs) and Assessors conducting assessment activities against the SSI ESG and Supply Chain Traceability Standards (the Standards). It describes the roles and responsibilities of all

parties involved in the SSI assurance system. It aims to provide the transparency needed for stakeholders to understand the SSI certification process.

SSI members should use this document to understand the assurance process.

This document specifies the processes that apply when:

→ Preparing for an assessment against the SSI Standards.

→ Verifying conformance of a site against the requirements of the SSI Standards.

→ Taking certification decisions and issuing certificates based on assessment reports from independent and approved third-party Assessment Bodies.

→ Determining the certification cycle.

This document is aligned with relevant requirements outlined in the ISEAL Assurance Standard Setting Code v2.0.

Version history

Version	Date	Description
1.0	November 2023	First version issued as approved by the SolarPower Europe and SEUK Board.
2.0	March 2025	Second version issued, reflecting the addition of the SSI Supply Chain Traceability Standard as approved by the SSI Board.

Table of Contents

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1. Roles and responsibilities

1.1. SSI Manufacturing Members

The SSI Manufacturing Members undergoing assessment have the following roles and responsibilities:

→ Sign and abide by the SSI Principles.

→ Adjust internal systems to meet the Standard(s) requirements.

→ Communicate and train relevant personnel on the SSI Principles and Standards.

→ Complete the self-assessment questionnaires against the SSI Standards requirements in at least two (2) of their sites within (6) months of signing the SSI Principles and prepare relevant documents and other evidence in preparation for the assessments.

→ Provide the selected SSI-approved assurance body (AB) and its assessors access to relevant documentation records and any other relevant information requested.

→ Complete the assessment of both SSI Standards in at least two (2) of their sites by an SSI-approved AB within twelve (12) months of signing the SSI Principles (for new members) or twelve (12) months from the publication of a new Standard (for existing members)

→ Provide access to the SSI Secretariat or externally appointed agent to relevant documentation records and any other relevant information requested to witness assessments.

→ Inform the chosen SSI-approved AB and SSI Secretariat or externally appointed agent of any health, safety, security or other relevant information whilst on-site.

→ Facilitate interviews with site management, workers and other stakeholders.

→ Support the assessors with stakeholder identification.

→ Identify the root causes of identified non-conformances by defining and implementing corrections and Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) to address the non-conformances.

→ Implement CAPs, as appropriate, to achieve and maintain conformance with the requirements of the SSI Standards.

→ Inform the SSI Secretariat and AB of any changes to their business activities and incidents that might impact their governance, social or environmental performance.

→ Cooperate in the resolution of concerns, complaints and appeals, as requested.

1.2.   SSI Secretariat

The SSI Secretariat have the following roles and responsibilities regarding assessments:

→ Develop and regularly review and update the SSI Standards and related assurance documents to ensure they remain relevant and fit for purpose.

→ Develop and maintain cost-effective and user-friendly tools and guidance for the SSI certification process.

→ Oversee the quality, integrity and credibility of the SSI certification process.

→ Approving decisions on awarding certifications and authorising SSI claims.

→ Maintain and update the recognition of external standards and schemes deemed as equivalent.

→ Approve independent third-party ABs and assessors to conduct SSI assessments against the SSI Standards.

→ Provide member and assessor training and support.

→ Review AB assessment reports and request (when necessary and justified) additional information and adjustments to the conformance findings.

→ Issue SSI certificates and maintain up-to-date information on members' certification status on the SSI website.

→ Administer or outsource the SSI Complaints Mechanism to third parties and carry out disciplinary proceedings where required.

→ Publicly report the impact of the SSI certification program.

→ Engage industry and other stakeholders to build awareness of the value of the SSI certification.

1.3.   SSI-Approved Assessment Bodies and Assessors

The SSI-approved ABs and assessors have the following roles and responsibilities regarding assessments:

→ Conduct independent SSI assessments against the SSI Standards.

→ Verify all information included in the self-assessment questionnaire, including the certification scope.

→ Identify any non-conformances which require corrective action by the member.

→ Immediately report any critical breach identified to the member and the SSI Secretariat.

→ Recognise when assessment objectives are unattainable and report the reasons to the member under assessment and the SSI Secretariat.

→ Prepare assessment reports for the member and the SSI Secretariat in the agreed format.

→ Review members' progress on Corrective Action Plan (CAP) after completing an SSI assessment.

→ Inform the SSI of any changes organisational changes that may affect the scope, capacity and competence to conduct independent audits.

2. Assessment Bodies appointment

The Assessment Body and Assessor Approval Procedure outlines the process for approving and maintaining ABs and assessors.

2.1. Assessment Body selection

When required to conduct a member's assessment, the SSI Secretariat will launch a tender process among all SSI-approved ABs.

The SSI Secretariat will assess the proposals received based on the following:

→ Technical Proposal:
  o Qualification and competence of the lead assessor and the assessment team
  o Capacity and expertise of the assessment team working in the country/region of the assessment
  o Approach and methodology
  o Availability and flexibility
→ Commercial Proposal:
  o Fees for the assessment
  o The SSI Member's preference (if any)

If the AB, the member, or the SSI Secretariat identifies a conflict of interest, the SSI Secretariat will select the proposal that scored second highest in the selection process.

Once the decision is made, the SSI Secretariat will notify all ABs that submitted a proposal and the relevant members of the outcome.

It is not compulsory for the same AB to conduct both SSI ESG and Supply Chain Traceability Standard assessments.

ABs must verify that sites belonging to companies with a valid SSI membership are eligible to proceed with the assessment. In exceptional cases, sites that do not belong to

SSI members can be eligible for assessment. In case of doubt, ABs should contact the SSI Secretariat for confirmation.

2.2. Assessment Team selection

Assessment team members must:

→ Be free of conflict of interest.

→ Be comparable to that of the member in terms of gender composition and strive towards cultural diversity.

→ Include at least two assessors, including the lead assessor.

→ Not have audited the same company for a maximum of three (3) consecutive assessments.

→ Have the required language skills.

3. Assessment Scope

3.1. Manufacturing Members

At least two (2) SSI Manufacturing members' sites and associated activities that are directly related to the purchasing of raw materials and manufacturing of polysilicon, ingots, wafers, cells and modules, and other component manufacturing, and which are under the control of the member, must be included in the scope of the assessment and evaluated.

'Control' is understood as direct or indirect ownership, direct or indirect power to remove, nominate or appoint at least 50% of the members of the board or management, day-to-day executive management, or any legally recognised concept analogous to these. When certain activities are subcontracted, the AB must evaluate the risks associated with these activities and whether an on-site visit should be included as part of the assessment.

The SSI Manufacturing member site seeking the assessment of the SSI Supply Chain Traceability Standard shall be a current SSI member, certified against the SSI ESG Standard or in the process of obtaining the SSI ESG certification in parallel with the SSI Supply Chain Traceability certification.

In exceptional cases, sites not belonging to SSI members can be eligible for assessment. In case of doubt, ABs should contact the SSI Secretariat for confirmation.

3.2.   Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ)

The SSI Manufacturing member must complete the self-assessment questionnaire in the format provided in at least two (2) of their sites within six (6) months of signing the SSI Principles to prepare for the assessments.

Once the SSI Secretariat has appointed an AB, the AB should use the information and documentation obtained about the member in the self-assessment questionnaire to evaluate their readiness for the assessment. The AB must refrain from advising the member on adapting its systems in areas where deficiencies might have been identified.

3.3.   External standards and schemes recognition

The SSI acknowledges that SSI members may have undergone third-party audits or assessments as part of their involvement in other sustainability standards or certification systems, including operating areas and practices like those covered by the SSI Standard.

The SSI recognises as 'equivalent' other sustainability systems, certifications, and externally assured management systems where they match and meet the requirements of the SSI Standards. The list of SSI-recognised standards and assurance frameworks is provided in a separate document and updated regularly.

The SSI reserves all rights to recognise all or parts of any other standard and assurance system as equivalent to the SSI Standards.

During an SSI assessment, where there is evidence that a credible independent assessment or third-party certification has identified and documented a level of conformance that is equivalent to the expectations of an SSI Standard criterion, that criterion will be considered met and will not require further verification by the AB.

4. Assurance Process

Graphic 1: Assurance Process

4.1. Pre-assessment activities

The AB should collect sufficient information about the site through the tender application process and the member self-assessment questionnaire to plan the assessment technique, duration, management and stakeholders' interviews and to draft a contract with the member. An AB-member contract must be in place before the assessment activities can begin. The contract must specify that:

→ The member must make all documents and records within the scope of the assessment, including contractors, available.

→ The member consents to the SSI Secretariat or an externally appointed agent third party observing assessments conducted by the AB.

4.2. Assessment technique determination

All assessments must be conducted on-site. However, certain activities may be conducted off-site (remotely) if deemed appropriate and in line with Table 1.

Table 1: Guidance on remote assessment activities

Assessment Activity	Remote assessment eligibility check
Opening meetings: The purpose is to provide an explanation of how the audit activities will be undertaken.	Eligible
Closing meetings: The purpose is to present the assessment preliminary findings	Eligible
Site tour: The purpose is to observe the physical conditions and current practices in all areas of the Site.	Not eligible
Document review: The purpose is to review of documents, such as policies, procedures, records, payslips, employment contracts, etc.	Eligible
Management interviews: The purpose is to conduct interviews with senior management and management.	Eligible
Worker interviews: The purpose is to conduct confidential interviews with a representative sample of the member's workforce, both individually and in groups.	Not eligible
Stakeholder input: The purpose is to conduct written or in-person feedback from individual(s) or group(s) that have an interest in any activity of the site.	Eligible

4.3.   Assessment duration determination

4.3.1.   SSI ESG Standard

There are factors to consider when determining an SSI ESG Standard assessment duration, including:

→ Number of individual and group stakeholders' interviews to be conducted (see Table 3).

→ Existing site certifications and any external equivalent recognition standards (see section 3.3 External Standards and Schemes Recognition).

→ Assessment scope (see section 4. Assessment Scope).

→ Assessment technique.

The estimated assessment durations are provided as guidelines in Table 3.

Should the assessment duration fall below the guidance, an explanation/rationale must be given by the AB to the SSI Secretariat for the discrepancy.

Table 2: Guidance on SSI ESG Standard Assessment duration

Number of workers on site	Estimated assessment duration
1-100	2.5-3
101-500	3-4.5
501-1000	5-6.5
1001-2000	7-8.5
2001-5000	9-11
>5001	11+

4.3.2. SSI Supply Chain Traceability Standard

There are factors to consider when determining an SSI Supply Chain Traceability Standard assessment duration, including:

→ The position in the supply chain: for example, module manufacturer, cell manufacturer, etc.
→ The complexity of the supply chain.
→ The number of active suppliers during the assessment period.
→ The number of high-risk suppliers.
→ The number of transactions during the assessment period.

The SSI Secretariat will determine the recommended number of assessor days based on the factors listed above and include it in the tender documentation.

If the AB disagrees with the recommended number of assessor days, the AB can suggest the SSI Secretariat a different number of days with a reasonable explanation.

4.4. Sample size determination

4.4.1. SSI ESG Standard

Table 3: Interview sample size for initial and recertification-assessment (*)

Number of workers excluding management	Individual interviews	Group interviews	Total workers interviews	Workers files, time and wage records	Effective time spent on interviews
1-100	6 or total workers if <5	1 group of 4	10	10	2.5 hours
101-500	6	4 groups of 5	26	26	6 hours
501-1000	12	6 groups of 5	42	42	8.5 hours
1001-2000	20	8 groups of 4	52	52	12.5 hours
2001+	22	8 groups of 5	62	62	14 hours

Source: Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA) Best Practice Guidance

In addition to the direct workers' interviews as per guidelines listed in Table 3 above, the assessors should also interview an adequate number of contracted workers.

Should the interview sample size be lower, the lead assessor must provide an explanation/rationale in the assessment report.

4.4.2.   SSI Supply Chain Traceability Standard

4.4.2.1.   Interview guidance

Assessors are expected to conduct management, worker and other relevant stakeholder interviews to evaluate the development and implementation of the traceability management system. The interviewees should include but not be limited to:

→ Senior manager responsible for the development and implementation of the traceability management system
→ Other management staff involved in the implementation of the traceability system. e.g. compliance, procurement, document control.
→ Workers, e.g. warehouse workers involved in material receipt, inventory management, production.

The sample size is up to the assessor's discretion to collect all necessary information to verify conformance with the Supply Chain Traceability Standard.

4.4.2.2.   Documentation sampling guidance

The assessors should apply sampling when selecting material transactions and supplier files. Supplier files chosen for review should correspond to the transaction sample. The

sample should include both low-risk and high-risk suppliers and transactions. The assessor should select the sample size as per guidelines listed in Table 4 and Table 5, not the site.

Table 4: Documentation Sampling Guidance Low-Risk Transactions

Number of low-risk transactions	Sample size
1-100	10
101-500	11-30
501-1000	31-50
1001+	51-100

Table 5: Documentation Sampling Guidance High-Risk Transactions

Number of high-risk transactions	Sample size
1-100	All transactions
101-500	101-150
501-1000	151-200
1001+	201-250

4.5.   Stakeholder identification and input plan

In anticipation of the assessment, the AB, in consultation with the member, must establish a mechanism for stakeholder comments to be submitted at any time during the assessment and the validity of a certificate. It must also describe how comments received will be considered. Stakeholders should be invited to provide input during interviews or in writing.

4.6.   Conflicts of interest

Lead assessors and assessors must be independent and free of conflicts of interest regarding the evaluated member. The main conflict of interest categories are self-interest, self-review, advocacy, familiarity and intimidation.

When assessors perceive or suspect a conflict of interest, they must disclose it before accepting an assessment. If there is any uncertainty about a potential conflict of interest,

the assessor or AB should promptly initiate disclosure and discussion with the SSI Secretariat at the earliest opportunity.

4.7. Technical experts and interpreters

Technical experts and interpreters/translators must be independent from the members. When they are used, the member must agree to this in advance.

The AB must ensure that the technical expert's role is limited to advising the assessment team on issues related to the expert's area of expertise. Technical experts and interpreters/translators must not participate actively in the assessment unless the AB specifically qualifies them as assessors for that purpose.

4.8. Confirmation of the assessment plan

The assessment plan should be drafted and shared with the member before the start of the assessment and must include:

→ Assessment objectives.
→ Assessment methodology/technique.
→ Dates, places and times of the on-site visit.
→ Meetings to be held with the management.
→ Number and types of workers' interviews to be held.
→ Dates, places and times of interviews with external stakeholders (if applicable).
→ Time for document review.
→ Dates and times for opening and closing meetings.

The AB must provide the SSI Secretariat and member with the name and, when requested, background information on each assessment team member, with sufficient time for the member to object to the appointment of any particular assessor, interpreter/translator or technical expert.

5. Site assessment process

5.1. Opening meeting

All assessments must begin with an opening meeting during which the assessment team must confirm with the site:

→ Participants and roles.
→ The purpose of the assessment.

→ The assessment plan, including how the assessment activities will be undertaken.

→ The access required and the type of information needed.

→ Confidentiality of the information shared during the assessment.

5.2.   Evaluation of the site

Auditors are required to evaluate sites in accordance with ISO 19011:2018 Guidelines for auditing management systems, considering the significance as well as the quality and quantity of the evidence available.

5.3.   Gathering objective evidence

The objective of the assessment is to evaluate the extent to which the site meets SSI Standard requirements and expectations on ESG performance and/or Supply Chain Traceability.

The assessor should use a risk-based assessment approach for sample selection and include document reviews, interviews, and a site tour to crosscheck information and evidence received.

Assessors are also expected to take an evidence-based approach to determining conformance with the requirements of the SSI Standards and must not advise the site on how to meet the requirements.

5.4.   Documents and records revision

The document review aims to obtain evidence and determine whether key documents, such as procedures, guidelines, and handbooks, are available and adequate, given the size of the site.

Records reviewed may include:

→ For the SSI ESG Standard: timecards, payrolls, wage slips, job descriptions, environmental disclosures, waste records etc.

→ For the SSI Supply Chain Traceability Standard: supplier contracts, purchase orders, invoices, shipping and delivery records, batch or lot records, inventory logs, etc.

5.5.   Interviews

The purpose of the interviews is to cross-check information collected during document and record reviews, management interviews, visual observations, and stakeholder input review.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of individual and group interviews to be conducted based on the site size.

The assessment team must select workers for interviews and should be representative of the workforce regarding shift patterns, worker types and gender. The interview selection should consider shift patterns to minimise disruption at the site. Workers' interviews should include direct employees as well as contracted workers.

Interviews must be conducted in a setting that promotes comfort, confidentiality and trust. Management must not be present during interviews (both in individual and group settings).

All information obtained must remain confidential to the workers involved, and any findings should only be discussed with management in a general manner.

5.6.   Site tour:

The assessor and assessment team should be able to walk through the entire site and conduct interviews. Photographs can be taken if agreed in advance.

5.6.1.   SSI ESG Standard

The site tour aims to observe the physical conditions and current practices in all site areas, verify on-the-ground adherence to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments and identify gaps.

5.6.2.   SSI Supply Chain Traceability Standard

The site tour aims to verify the practical implementation of traceability systems, processes and current practices in all site areas, check the movement of materials and products through the site, confirm that data and labels align with actual products and processes and identify gaps.

5.7.   Closing meeting

The assessment team must conduct a closing meeting after the site assessment with the member's /site's representative(s) to:

→ Highlight positive practices.

→ Confirm actions the site may have to complete and the relevant timeframes before certification can be granted.

→ Preliminary confirm non-conformances identified during the assessment (if any) and their likely categorisation (subject to approval by the SSI Secretariat), timeframes to address these non-conformances, and the process for verifying their closure.

→ Confirm that the site/member must inform the SSI of any significant future changes that could affect its status as a certified member.

→ Refrain from confirming any likely overall score, as this is subject to the SSI Secretariat analysis and recommendation for the SSI Board decision.

→ Remind the member that no claims can be made concerning certification until the certification decision has been made by the SSI Secretariat and communicated by the SSI Secretariat.

6. Assessment conclusions

6.1.   Conformance ratings

Upon completion of the assessment, the assessment team must compile the list of preliminary non-conformances and highlight positive practices and conformances with the site during the closing meeting.

Note: Any attempt to prevent the assessment from proceeding through fraud, coercion, deception, or interference will be considered a critical breach and must be immediately reported to the SSI Secretariat. In this case, the assessment must be suspended pending an investigation.

Table 6: Conformance Ratings & Description

Conformance Ratings	Description
Conformance	• Systems, policies, procedures and processes performed in a manner that is in line with the intent of the SSI Standards.
Observation	• A Conformance that meets the fundamental requirements of the SSI Standard(s) but needs improvement.

	• If this improvement is not adequately addressed, the Observation could escalate to a Non-Conformance during the next Assessment.
Minor Non-Conformance	• An isolated lapse of performance or control. • A breach which represents low risk to workers/those on site. • A policy issue where there is no evidence of material breach,
Major Non-Conformance	• A systemic failure or total lack of required controls by the site, • A total absence of implementation of the requirement, • A breach of law. • A group of related, repetitive or persistent minor non-conformances indicating inadequate implementation.
Not Applicable	• A requirement which cannot be implemented by a site due to the nature of its operations.

6.2. Corrective action plans

All non-conformances require the site to prepare and implement appropriate CAPs. Appropriately qualified and experienced staff should be involved in developing CAPs commensurate with the nature and severity of the non-conformance.

The AB and assessors cannot assist in developing a site's CAPs but should evaluate them to determine whether the CAP will likely address the non-conformance.

Within 4 weeks of receiving the assessment report, the site, with the support of the AB, must develop and submit a CAP to the SSI Secretariat for approval, detailing how and when they will address the non-conformances.

6.3. Assessment report

The site assessment report consists of the Summary of Findings and completed Checklist drafted by the AB. Together, they should give a complete, balanced, and accurate description of the site, its current systems in place and the evidence examined during the assessment.

The AB should write the Summary Report and Checklist in British English, in clear and unambiguous language. If agreed upon with the site, these materials may also be written in another language.

The SSI Secretariat will review the Summary Report and Checklist and may request further information or clarification from the assessment team, in which case these should be promptly responded to.

The Summary Report and completed Checklist should be sent to the SSI within four (4) weeks of the closing meeting unless major non-conformances still need to be addressed by the site, in which case the SSI Secretariat must be informed of the expected timeline.

After the AB and SSI Secretariat approve the report, they will share it with the member for their sign-off. At this point, the report is considered final, and the SSI Secretariat can proceed to issue the certification.

6.4.   Post assessment activities

6.4.1.   Certification decision

Once the Summary Report and Audit Checklist is final, the SSI Secretariat will issue a certification decision to the member if:

→   Major non-conformances have been addressed/closed or downgraded to minor non-conformances.

→   For the SSI ESG Standard assessment: No more than ten (10) minor non-conformances have been raised, and adequate CAPs have been implemented.

→   For the SSI Supply Chain Traceability Standard assessment: No more than five (5) minor non-conformances have been raised, and adequate CAPs have been put in place.

Table 7: SSI ESG Standard CAP, Timeline, Outcome and Score

Conformance Ratings	Corrective Action Plan	Timeline	Outcome and Score
Conformance	None	None	No Non-Conformances – Certification: Gold
Observation	Needs to be addressed before the next Assessment.	Implementation and effectiveness of the Observation at subsequent Assessment.	Does not affect the outcome Gold / Silver / Bronze

Minor Non-Conformance	CAP to be developed by the member and sent to the AB.	CAP received and approved by the AB. Verification. Implementation and effectiveness of the corrective actions at subsequent Assessment.	5 or less Minor NC – Certification: Silver Between 6 to 10 Minor NC – Certification: Bronze
Major Non-Conformance	Root Cause Analysis and CAP to be developed by the member and sent to the AB.	CAP received and approved by the AB. A follow-up onsite (or remote depending on the nature of the NC) assessment will usually be required to verify implementation and effectiveness of the corrective actions.	No certification until Major NC are closed or downgraded to Minor NC.

Table 8: SSI Supply Chain Traceability Standard CAP, Timeline, Outcome and Score

Level of Traceability	Conformance Ratings		Corrective Action Plan	Timeline	Outcome and Score
Quartzite	Major NC	0	None	None	Gold (No certification awarded until all Minor NC are closed.
	Minor NC	<5	Root Cause Analysis and CAP to be developed by the member and sent to the AB	CAP sent to AB within four (4) weeks of receiving the final report. CAP reviewed and approved by the AB within four (4) weeks of receiving it. A follow-up onsite (or remote depending on the nature of the NC) assessment will usually be required to verify implementation and effectiveness of the corrective actions.	

Metallurgical-grade silicon (MG-Si)	Major NC	0	None	None	Silver
	Minor NC	<5	Root Cause Analysis and CAP to be developed by the member and sent to the AB	CAP sent to AB within four (4) weeks of receiving the final report. CAP reviewed and approved by the AB within four (4) weeks of receiving it. Implementation and effectiveness of the corrective actions at subsequent Assessment.	
Polysilicon	Major NC	0	None	None	Bronze
	Minor NC	<5	Root Cause Analysis and CAP to be developed by the member and sent to the AB	CAP sent to AB within four (4) weeks of receiving the final report. CAP reviewed and approved by the AB within four (4) weeks of receiving it. Implementation and effectiveness of the corrective actions at subsequent Assessment.	

Within ten (10) working days after the final version of the Assessment Reports has been submitted, the SSI Secretariat will issue a certificate to the site with a grade assigned and update its status to Certified Site on the SSI website.

The site will also be informed of its Surveillance Frequency (see section 6.6 below) based on the grade (see Graphic 2), and information will be shared on Claims and Labelling requirements related to their new status as a certified member.

6.5. Public Summary Report

The SSI Secretariat will prepare a Public Summary Report (see Annex 8.2) based on basic information about the certified site/member, which will be published on the SSI website.

The Public Summary Report will contain a summary of the site and the assessment outcome, including grade.

The draft version of the Public Summary Report and Certificate will be shared with the member for approval before publication.

6.6. Surveillance frequency and recertification

The SSI Secretariat will determine the surveillance frequency based on the assessment outcome and assigned grade.

The SSI Secretariat will notify certified members three (3) months before an assessment is due so that arrangements can be made to schedule surveillance and recertification assessments.

Surveillance assessments should focus on actions taken by the site and progress made towards addressing non-conformances.

The year 1 surveillance assessment may result in a grade change and should also sample SSI Standards requirements randomly selected by the lead assessor. The randomly chosen requirements should verify that no regression in performance has taken place over the course of the year. The scope of the surveillance assessment is determined using a risk-based approach that considers the following factors:

→ Level of performance at the initial assessment.
→ Type and complexity of operations.
→ Conditions within the sector (e.g. if issues have arisen at other sites in the same region).
→ Regional context (e.g. if regulations change).
→ Whether interested parties or affected stakeholders have raised any concerns since the last assessment.
→ Any material changes in the site's structure or operations.

Regardless of the grade, a recertification assessment is required at the end of the three-year cycle. The recertification assessment should follow the same procedures as the initial assessment.

Graphic 2: Assessment Cycle
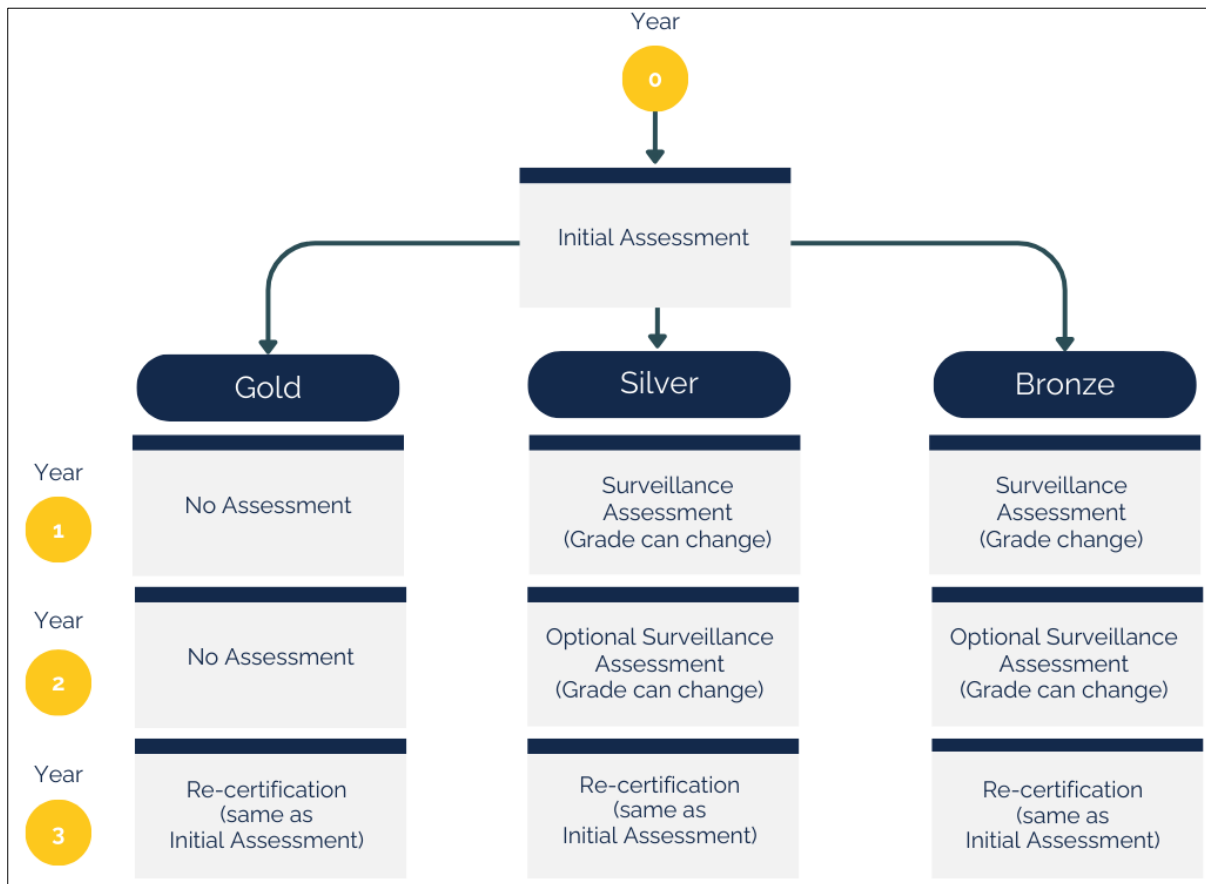
6.7. Unsuccessful SSI Standard(s) assessment:

Unsuccessful SSI Standard(s) assessment requires a plan to address the identified issues. The following steps describe the roles and responsibilities of SSI, the site, and the AB in this scenario.

→ Non-Conformity Report:

After the assessment, the AB will submit a report to the SSI Secretariat detailing the areas where the site does not meet SSI Standard(s). Once approved, the AB will share the report with the site.

→ Action Plan Development:

Within 4 weeks of receiving the assessment report, the site, with the support of the AB, must develop and submit a CAP to the SSI Secretariat for approval, detailing how and when they will address the non-conformities. The AB must provide in the CAP the means

of verification for evaluation of the implemented actions, namely, if the verification could be done via desktop review or if onsite verification is needed.

→ Action Plan Implementation:

Once the SSI Secretariat has approved the CAP, the site must address the corrective actions. The timeline depends on several factors, including the nature of the non-conformities identified and the site's readiness to implement changes. Minor non-conformances must be resolved within 30-120 days. Major non-conformances require immediate attention and must be resolved within 30-90 days, depending on the severity and potential risks involved. The approved version of the CAP will contain the suggested timelines for addressing non-conformances the site should follow. The CAP will also contain the means of verification (desktop or onsite) required for each non-conformance

→ Verification after Corrective Actions:

Once the site has addressed all non-conformities, they must submit evidence to the AB (e.g., documents, photos, or other verifiable records). The AB must review and determine if the corrective actions fully address the non-conformities and issue a recommendation for the SSI Secretariat's consideration.

→ Follow-Up Assessment (if needed):

If evidence alone is insufficient or the issues require onsite confirmation, the site may need to schedule a follow-up assessment to verify compliance.

- Scenarios requiring an onsite follow-up assessment:
    - Major Non-Conformities: If the non-conformities are significant or systemic.
    - Critical Supply Chain Issues: If the non-conformities involve high-risk areas (e.g., ethical sourcing or human rights violations).
    - Extensive Changes to Policies or Processes: If the corrective actions involve implementing new systems, workflows, or processes.
- Scenarios where an online follow-up assessment might be sufficient:
    - Minor Non-Conformities: For smaller issues (e.g., incomplete documentation, minor policy gaps, updated policies, training records, or process documentation).
    - Rapidly Addressed Issues: If you resolve the non-conformities quickly and provide satisfactory evidence.

→ Certification Decision:

Once the AB has concluded the reassessment and provided a report, the SSI Secretariat will decide on certification.

→ Costs for Follow-Up Audits:

Follow-up online and onsite assessments can incur additional costs, which depend on:

- o The scope of the follow-up (onsite vs. online)
- o The time required to reassess compliance
- o The travel and administrative expenses involved

6.8. Reporting changes

Certified members must inform the SSI Secretariat if and when there are changes to the site's business, such as:

→ Organisational restructuring.

→ Divestments, acquisitions, or changes to the equity shares of the business.

→ Changes to the site's activities, products and processes.

→ Changes to the locations and distribution of the site's facilities.

→ External influences, such as changes in the statutory environment, regulations and other stakeholder expectations and commitments, affect the site.

The SSI Secretariat decide on any necessary action(s).

6.9. Suspension and withdrawal

The SSI Board will suspend a site's certification if:

→ There is inadequate progress towards closing identified non-conformances within the deadlines specified.

→ The member does not agree to a surveillance assessment or does not provide the requested information to allow verification.

The suspension period will usually be for a maximum period of six (6) months, during which the member cannot promote nor claim to be certified. The SSI Secretariat may publicize the suspension to interested parties.

The SSI Board will withdraw a site's certification if:

→ It is concluded through an investigation that the SSI-certified member has breached the SSI Principles.

→ Further to a suspension period, no progress has been made to address the issue.

7. Enquiries, Complaints and Appeals Mechanism

The SSI welcomes comments and feedback from all stakeholders on this document, which can be submitted at any time to contact@solarstewardshipinitiative.org.

The SSI has an independent Complaints & Appeals Mechanism to process concerns that may arise from SSI members, SSI-approved ABs and assessors, stakeholders and the public regarding the initiative, the SSI Assurance Process, ABs and assessors, or SSI claims and logo use. The mechanism is designed to be aligned with the criteria laid out in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights for the effectiveness of non-judicial grievance mechanisms. The SSI aims to investigate Complaints & Appeals fairly, balanced and transparently and to resolve the issues efficiently and effectively.

8. Annexes

8.1. Glossary

Terms	Definitions
Assessor	An individual (third party) that is approved by SSI and associated with an approved Assessment Body to assess and verify conformance with the SSI Standards at the site.
Assessment	Systematic, independent, and documented process for obtaining audit evidence (interviews, photos, records, policies, statements of fact or other information which are relevant and verifiable) and evaluating the evidence objectively to determine the extent to which the audit criteria (a set of policies, procedures or requirements) are fulfilled by the member against the relevant standards. Refers to all audit activities carried out to assess conformity of SSI members against relevant SSI standards.
Assessment Body	An independent service provider that is approved by SSI to conduct assessments of members' sites against the SSI Standards and following the SSI Assurance Manual.
Assessment Duration	The time allocated for completing an assessment, influenced by factors such as the scope, stakeholder interviews, and complexity of the site operations.
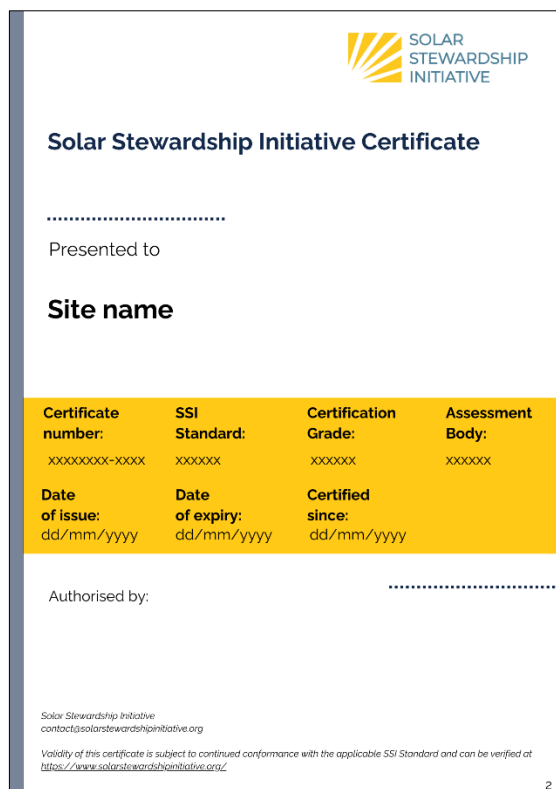
Assessment Plan	The proposed activities and their timing to be carried out by the Assessor to determine the extent to which the standard criteria are fulfilled.
Assessment Team	Two (2) or more assessors conducting an SSI assessment, supported, if needed, by technical experts.
Assessment Technique	The methodology applied to conduct an SSI assessment. The Assessment techniques are on-site and remote using digital tools (e.g., screen sharing.) to share assessment details and documentation.
Commercial Proposal	A document outlining the costs associated with conducting the assessment, including fees, and considering any preferences stated by the member.
Conformance	Fulfilment of a requirement.
Conformance Rating	A categorisation system used to assess the extent to which a site complies with the SSI Standards, typically graded (e.g., Gold, Silver, Bronze).
Contracted Workers	Individuals working on behalf of a contractor or subcontractor, directly or indirectly involved in the site's operations.
Corrective Action	An action to eliminate the cause of a non-conformance and to prevent recurrence. There can be more than one cause for a non-conformance (Source ISO 9000:2015).
Corrective Action Plan	A proposal which outlines the actions to be taken to eliminate the cause of a non-conformance and to prevent recurrence. (Source ISO 9000:2015).
Critical Breach	Any attempt to prevent the course of the assessment through fraud, coercion, deception or interference and which must be immediately reported to the SSI Secretariat.
Finding	Results of the evaluation of the collected assessment evidence against the standard or requirements against which the member is being assessed. Note: Assessment findings can indicate conformity or non-conformity or opportunities for improvement.
Grade	Further to an initial assessment, a category assigned to the SSI certified site based on the number of non-conformances issued. Grades are either Gold, Silver or Bronze.
High-Risk Supplier	A supplier identified as having a greater potential for non-conformance or a higher likelihood of environmental, social, or governance risks.
High-Risk Transaction	A transaction involving a high-risk supplier, with an increased potential for non-conformance or heightened ESG and Traceability risks, requiring enhanced due diligence and monitoring.

Lead Assessor	The primary individual responsible for managing the assessment process, ensuring compliance with SSI standards, and leading the assessment team.
Low-Risk Transaction	A low-risk transaction is a transaction involving a low-risk supplier, with minimal potential for non-conformance or ESG/Traceability risks, requiring standard due diligence and monitoring.
Member	Refers to a legal entity that has a valid membership of the Solar Stewardship Initiative.
Management System	A set of policies, procedures and practices an organisation needs to follow to meet its own objectives. A Management System can address a single discipline or several disciplines, e.g. quality management, financial management or environmental management (Source ISO 9000:2015)
Minor Non-Conformance	• An isolated lapse of performance, or control. • A breach which represents low risk to workers/those on Site. • A policy issue where there is no evidence of material breach.
Major Non-Conformance	• A systemic failure or total lack of required controls by the Site. • A total absence of implementation of the requirement • A breach of law. • A group of related, repetitive or persistent minor non-conformances indicating inadequate implementation.
Non-Conformance	Non-fulfilment of a requirement. In the SSI system a non-conformance can be graded as a major non-conformance or a minor non-conformance.
Objective Evidence	Verifiable information or records pertaining to the quality of an item or service or to the existence and implementation of a quality system element, which is based on visual observation, measurement or test. Data supporting the existence or verity of something (Source ISO 9000:2015 & ISO 19011:2018).
Observation	A Conformance that meets the fundamental requirements of the SSI Standard(s) but needs improvement. If this improvement is not adequately addressed, the Observation may escalate to a Non-Conformance during the next Assessment.
On-site Assessment	Assessment activities performed physically at the site to collect evidence and conduct interviews.
Public Summary Report	A high-level report made available to the public that outlines basic information about the certified site/member and the outcome of the assessment, including its certification grade.
Recognition	The acceptance of an external set of requirements, their implementation and their verification in lieu of the SSI's own requirements.

Remote Assessment	Assessment activities conducted offsite using digital tools (e.g., video conferencing, file sharing platforms) to collect and review evidence.
Root Cause Analysis	Analysis tool used to determine the root cause of a Non-conformance including an evaluation of the extent and scale of the problem identified to determine if it has occurred elsewhere. NOTE: RCA is one of the methods of analysis that can be used to determine the causes and extent of a Non-conformance and to help determine appropriate Corrective Action.
Scope of Assessment	Extent and boundaries of an Assessment. All sites and associated activities that are directly related to the purchasing of raw materials and manufacturing of polysilicon, ingots, wafers, cells and modules, and other component manufacturing, and which are under the control of the Member.
Self-Assessment	Process during which the Member compiles documents to demonstrate fulfilment of requirement of the SSI Standard before engaging an Approved Assessor for a formal assessment.
Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ)	A structured document provided by the SSI Secretariat that members must complete to demonstrate initial compliance with the SSI Standards. This questionnaire is a preparatory step before the formal assessment by the Assessment Body.
Site	Physical location that is in the scope of Assessment. The definition of a site is based on activities, product, geographical scope, and management control.
SSI ESG Standard	Environmental, social, and governance requirements that sites must adhere to as part of the SSI certification process.
SSI Traceability Standard	SSI Standards relating to the traceability of materials throughout the supply chain, ensuring ethical and sustainable practices.
Stakeholder	Any person, group or organization that may affect, or be affected by, a certification decision, or has expressed an interest in the Site being considered for certification and/or in other potentially affected resources or has or may have information relevant to the certification assessment of the Site.
Surveillance Assessment	Set of activities, except re-assessment, to monitor the continued fulfilment by certified SSI Sites of requirements for certification.
Suspension	Process of temporarily making SSI certification invalid, by removing the Site's certified status pending corrective action(s).
Technical Expert	Person who provides specific knowledge or expertise to the assessment team. NOTE: A technical expert is not required to be an auditor.

Technical proposal	A detailed document submitted by an Assessment Body outlining the qualifications, capacity, methodology, and approach to conducting an assessment.
Tender application process	A formal process through which the Assessment Body applies to provide assessment services, including details such as assessment techniques, timelines, and resources.
Tender process	A formal process initiated by the SSI Secretariat to solicit proposals from SSI-approved Assessment Bodies for conducting a member's assessment.
Traceability Management System	A systematic approach implemented by a site to track materials and products through the supply chain, ensuring compliance with traceability standards.
Withdrawal	Process of terminating the certified status of an SSI site; or
	Process of terminating approval of an assessment body or Assessor

8.2.   Public Summary Report Template

Slide 3:

Solar Stewardship Initiative:
Section 1:
Site Information

Disclaimer: *This report is a summary of the SSI Assessment. This is a live document and the latest version can be found on https://www.solarstewardshipinitiative.org/*

3

Slide 4:

SOLAR STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

Public Summary Report
Solar Stewardship Initiative
xxxx Standard
....

Overview:

Member name	
Site name	
Location	
Supply Chain Activities	
Assessment type	
Assessment date (s)	
Next Assessment Type	
Next Assessment Due Date	
Claims	

4

Slide 5:

Solar Stewardship Initiative:
Section 2:
Executive Summary

Disclaimer: *This report is a summary of the SSI Assessment. This is a live document and the latest version can be found on https://www.solarstewardshipinitiative.org/*

5

Slide 6:

SOLAR STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

Summary			
Topic	**Conformance**	**Minor non-conformance**	**Major non-conformance**
Governance and Business Ethics			
Environment			
Human and Labour Rights			
Total count			

Conformance Ratings

Conformance (C):
• Systems, policies, procedures and processes performed in a manner that aligns with the Standard's intent.
Minor Non-Conformance (MiNC):
• An isolated lapse of performance or control.
• A breach which represents low risk to workers/those on site.
• A policy issue where there is no evidence of material breach.
Major Non-Conformance (MaNC):
• A systemic failure or total lack of required controls by the site.
• A total absence of implementation of the requirement.
• A breach of law.
• A group of related, repetitive or persistent minor non-conformances indicating inadequate implementation.
Observation (O):
• A Conformance that meets the fundamental requirements of the SSI Standard(s) but needs improvement. If this improvement is not adequately addressed, the Observation may escalate to a Non-Conformance during the next Assessment.
Not Applicable (N/A):
• A requirement which cannot be implemented by a site due to the nature of its operations.

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Solar Stewardship Initiative:
Section 3:
Findings Breakdown

7

Governance and Business Ethics

Topic	C	MiNC	MaNC	O	N/A
1. Business Integrity					
2. Policy and Management					
3. Stakeholders and Communities					
4. Transparency					
5. Responsible Sourcing					
Total no. of findings					

Environment

Topic	C	MiNC	MaNC	O	N/A
1. Business Integrity					
2. Policy and Management					
3. Stakeholders and Communities					
4. Transparency					
5. Responsible Sourcing					
Total no. of findings					

Human and Labour Rights

Topic	C	MiNC	MaNC	O	N/A
1. Business Integrity					
2. Policy and Management					
3. Stakeholders and Communities					
4. Transparency					
5. Responsible Sourcing					
Total no. of findings					