

AIM-Progress Statement on Mutual Recognition of Virtual Assessments

Evolution of the supply chain assessment landscape

With Covid-19 disrupting AIM-Progress members' responsible sourcing on-site audit activities, companies are looking to new technological capabilities to safely continue to monitor supplier compliance and drive engagement practices.

In particular, **virtual remote assessments**, coupled with direct worker engagement practices, are replacing many traditional on-site supplier audits where markets are restricted to auditors or sites are not allowing access to outside individuals. Today this is mainly for follow-up audits and closing non-compliance gaps, but we anticipate more frequent use for initial and periodic full audits in the future.

As virtual assessments are not suitable for all types of situations, AIM-Progress is also looking into the potential of **hybrid approaches** where parts of the assessment are taking place on-site whilst others are led remotely.

AIM-Progress members believe that **disruption of supply chains will continue well into the future, and that both virtual assessments and hybrid approaches will play a role in the “toolbox” of supplier assurance approaches**. As we have seen with on-site audits, **there is a risk of diverging protocols and standards for virtual assessments**, leading to potential duplication of supplier assurance efforts.

Enabling mutual recognition of virtual assessments

AIM-Progress has already adopted a [framework for mutual recognition of on-site audits](#).

We will extend this approach to virtual assessments. This means that **our members agree, in principle, to recognize supplier virtual remote assessments completed on behalf of another company, and will review assessment reports to confirm whether they meet member's own internal company requirements**.

Just like for on-site audits, suppliers are therefore encouraged to share their assessment reports directly with AIM-Progress member companies upon request, or upload them via the relevant data sharing platform.

AIM-Progress members shall encourage and promote suppliers' sharing of virtual assessment results while retaining the following rights¹:

¹ The decision on whether to fully accept a virtual assessment or require additional elements or request a new virtual assessment will largely depend on the local situation regarding accessibility of supplier sites. In certain cases a “hybrid approach”, involving on-site worker interviews carried out by the auditor or one-day site visits may be an appropriate solution and provide additional level of assurance.

1. To accept or not accept any part of an assessment.
2. To require additional follow-up or a full virtual assessment at a timing of their choosing.
3. To require additional on-site assessment/auditing at a timing of their choosing.

Our common baseline for virtual assessments

Our common baseline for what we deem to be a good standard for virtual assessments is the [Sedex Virtual Assessment \(SVA\)](#). A large majority of AIM-Progress members are members of Sedex. They have contributed to establishing the SVA standard and are using this new protocol for virtual assessments. **We therefore recommend the SVA as a good standard of practice against which to compare any other virtual assessments** which suppliers may have undergone, or benchmark against any own-company assessment standards that they may have developed.

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