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Navigating Corporate Responsibility in Global Supply Chains using Codes of Conduct

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In today's interconnected world, the clothes we wear and gadgets we use are produced through complex supply chains, stretching across countries and involving multiple entities. This system of global production reveals profound social injustices, including forced labor, child exploitation, discrimination, and limited access to collective bargaining. Tragedies like the Rana Plaza disaster highlight the urgent need for fair and sustainable working conditions in supply chains. In response, civil society and consumers increasingly demand that multinational corporations act responsibly by integrating human rights into their practices.

To meet societal expectations, businesses have adopted corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies, including codes of conduct, to set ethical benchmarks for labor standards. By drafting codes, multinationals accept to endorse a social responsibility for their supply chains – at least on paper. But what are companies really saying in codes of conduct, and what happens beyond the labor standards set in codes?

This socio-legal dissertation examines the promises of multinationals, exploring the gap between commitments on paper and actions in practice. The quantitative and qualitative methods analyze the content of codes of conduct, their enforcement mechanisms, and the shortcomings of corporate self-regulation. These insights are timely as the European Union introduces new regulations to ensure sustainable and ethical supply chains.

This is a volume in the series of the Meijers Research Institute and Graduate School of the Leiden Law School of Leiden University. This study is part of the Law School's research programme 'Coherent privaatrecht'.