Human Rights
Frequently Asked Questions

This document is intended to provide answers to frequently asked questions about Human Rights at the UN Global Compact. For more information about the UN Global Compact’s human rights work, see here.

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1. What are Human Rights?

Human Rights are universal and minimum standards aimed at securing dignity and equality for all human beings. These rights encompass such topics as freedom of speech, privacy, health, life, liberty and security, as well as an adequate standard of living.

The first two principles of the UN Global Compact focus on human rights and are derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The publication Human Rights Translated contextualizes human rights and its relevance to business through practical examples.

2. What does Respect and Support for Human Rights mean?

The focus on corporate sustainability contains both responsibilities (respect) and opportunities (support). The first two principles of the UN Global Compact calls on companies to respect and support internationally proclaimed human rights and ensure they are not complicit in human rights abuses. Respecting human rights means that business should act with due diligence to avoid infringing the rights of others and to address negative impacts with which their business is involved. It also includes abiding by international standards and avoiding causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through company activities and business relationships. While respect represents the minimum standard, companies that are part of the UN Global Compact are also encouraged to support human rights. Supporting human rights means making voluntary, positive contributions in support of human rights through for example, core business activities, strategic social investment and philanthropy, advocacy and public policy engagement, and partnership and other forms of collective action.

In the context of human rights, examples of respecting human rights include, guaranteeing freedom of association and ensuring non-discrimination in personnel practices. Examples of supporting human rights include, having an affirmative action programme to hire victims of
domestic violence and integrating entrepreneurs from vulnerable groups in the value chain.

The responsibility to respect human rights is a baseline expectation, and actions to support human rights are a welcome complement but not substitute for respecting human rights. While respect and support are explicitly stated in the human rights principles, they apply to every workstream of the UN Global Compact.

3. How do the UN Global Compact commitments relate to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights?

In June 2011, the UN Human Rights Council unanimously endorsed the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (Guiding Principles), which provides a global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse impacts on human rights linked to business activity. The Guiding Principles consist of three pillars, including the ‘Responsibility to Respect Human Rights.’ The corporate responsibility to respect human rights found in the Guiding Principles is the same corporate responsibility to respect human rights in the UN Global Compact’s principles.

Recognizing the positive role that business can play to help drive sustainable development, the UN Global Compact reinforces this minimum requirement of respect for human rights, while also going beyond the Guiding Principles in encouraging business to explore opportunities to take additional voluntary actions to support human rights. As previously mentioned, this support for human rights is a voluntary complement and not substitute or trade off for the requirement of respect for human rights elaborated in the Guiding Principles, which applies to all businesses whether or not they are in the UN Global Compact.

4. Why is Human Rights important to business?

Business leaders are increasingly recognizing the legal, moral and commercial imperative to address human rights in their activities and business relationships. Businesses which prioritize human rights generally have increased productivity, higher employee morale and retention, brand differentiation, access to new customers and markets, improved stakeholder relations helping to secure the company’s social license to operate, and greater stability and contribution to peace. Alternatively, when business fails to prioritize human rights in its operations and those of its suppliers, this often results in reputational risk (e.g. unwanted media and NGO attention, risk to intangible value or brand), legal risk (e.g. violating national or international law), and/or operational risk (e.g. work stoppages and revenue lost from protests and strikes).

It is evident that business and human rights is rising on the agenda. For example, consultancies and law firms are advising businesses how to improve their human rights performance, and multinational corporations are increasingly assessing their human rights impacts, or introducing human rights policies and training programs. Further, approximately 60% of companies in the FTSE 100 reference human rights either as a separate policy, in a code of conduct, or as part of another CSR policy.

5. How do other UN Global Compact social sustainability initiatives relate to Human Rights (e.g. Women’s Empowerment Principles, the Children’s Rights and Business Principles, and workstreams on Indigenous Peoples, Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Poverty and Inclusive Business and Business for the Rule of Law)?

Over the years the UN Global Compact has developed special initiatives in collaboration with UN entities to further explore how business impacts the human rights of specific groups, such as women (Women’s Empowerment Principles), children (Children’s Rights and Business Principles), indigenous peoples (Business Reference Guide to the UN Declaration on the Rights
of Indigenous Peoples), persons with disabilities, and those living in poverty. Underpinning all of these initiatives and workstreams are the dimensions of respect and support for human rights and an understanding of the unique role different stakeholders can play as value creators for business.

6. **What is the Human Rights and Labour Working Group?**

The Human Rights and Labour Working Group (HRLWG) is an expert group comprising representatives from business, civil society, trade unions, academia, UN agencies, and Global Compact Local Networks working on business and human rights. The Secretariat for the HRLWG is the UN Global Compact, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Labour Organization.

The HRLWG provides guidance on respect and support for the UN Global Compact’s human rights and labour principles by identifying, developing and disseminating good practices. The HRLWG also reviews new and existing tools and resources to ensure alignment with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and supports the human rights activities of Global Compact Local Networks.

7. **Where can I get information on good practices related to human rights?**

The UN Global Compact promotes good practices on a range of business and human rights topics through resources such as Good Practice Notes, Case Studies, and a Webinar series, available [here](#). The Human Rights and Business Dilemmas Forum (HRBDF) also provides guidance for business on 26 different dilemmas business may encounter in their efforts to respect and support human rights. Topics include Conflict Minerals, Freedom of Speech, Human Trafficking, Living Wage and Privacy. The HRBDF also has an online discussion forum where all stakeholders are invited to discuss the dilemmas, share insights and suggest good practices. Learn about the dilemmas [here](#) and join the conversation on the online forum [here](#). HRBDF is co-hosted by the UN Global Compact and Maplecroft, with the support of the GE Foundation.

8. **What resources have been developed by the UN Global Compact and others to help companies implement their human rights commitments under the UN Global Compact?**

The UN Global Compact has developed a number of resources to help companies meet their human rights commitments under the UN Global Compact and the Guiding Principles. These resources range from guidance on developing a human rights policy to how to conduct a human rights impact assessment. The publication, *Key Business and Human Rights Resources and How to Use Them* contains a summary of the key human rights guidance material produced by the UN Global Compact and others, which aims to deepen one’s understanding of the first two Global Compact principles and the concepts of due diligence, sphere of influence and complicity. The document is available [here](#).

9. **How can companies and Global Compact Local Networks engage with the UN Global Compact on human rights?**

There are a number of ways companies and Global Compact Local Networks can engage with the UN Global Compact on human rights. They include:

- serving as a peer reviewer for a Good Practice Note or case study
- being the subject of a case study about your organization’s efforts to respect and support human rights and the lessons learned
- signing the [Open Letter](#) to academic institutions to encourage integration of business and human rights in curriculum
- contributing to the Human Rights and Business Dilemmas Forum
• suggesting a topic for a webinar
• contributing to a webinar on a human rights and business or labour topic
• supporting a Global Compact Local Network in its human rights/labour activity
• joining the Child Labour Platform

Additional Questions

If you have additional questions, please contact Shubha Chandra (chandra@unglobalcompact.org) and Michelle Lau (lau@unglobalcompact.org).