



United Nations Global Compact



The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights:

Relationship to UN Global Compact Commitments

July 2011 (*Updated June 2014*)

On 16 June 2011, the UN Human Rights Council unanimously endorsed a set of Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights for implementing the UN ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework (hereafter the UN Guiding Principles).

The UN Guiding Principles provide an authoritative global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse impacts on human rights linked to business activity. They also provide civil society, investors and others with the tools to measure progress by business in meeting their responsibility to respect human rights.

The UN Guiding Principles are the product of six years of research and consultations led by the former UN Special Representative on Business and Human Rights, Professor John Ruggie of Harvard University, involving governments, companies, business associations, civil society, affected individuals and groups, investors and others around the world.

The UN Guiding Principles contain three pillars, clarifying the respective duties and responsibilities of States and business. The first pillar, the ‘State Duty to Protect,’ clarifies the implications of States’ existing obligations to protect the human rights of people living in their territory or jurisdiction against adverse impacts by third parties, including business enterprises. This requires enacting and enforcing effective policies, legislation, regulations and adjudication.

The second pillar of the UN Guiding Principles, the ‘Responsibility to Respect,’ establishes the responsibility to respect human rights as the minimum global standard of expected conduct for all business enterprises wherever they operate. It requires business enterprises to avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities. Business enterprises should furthermore seek to prevent or mitigate impacts that are directly linked to their operations, products or services by their business relationships.

In order to be able to know and show that they meet their responsibility to respect human rights, business enterprises should have in place appropriate policies and procedures. This includes making a policy commitment to meet the responsibility to respect human rights, to conduct on-going human rights due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their impacts on human rights, and engage in processes to enable the remediation of any adverse human rights impacts they cause or contribute to. The UN Guiding Principles outline the elements of these policies and processes. The tools and processes companies employ will vary with circumstances, including company size and sector of

operations but should be appropriate to the enterprise's level of risk and the severity of its actual or potential impacts. The responsibility to respect human rights exists independently of States' capacity or willingness to fulfil their own human rights duties.

The third pillar, 'Access to Remedy,' outlines that where people are harmed by business activities, there is both adequate accountability and effective redress, judicial and non-judicial, including through effective operational-level grievance mechanisms.

The principles relating to the responsibility of business enterprises to respect human rights are of direct relevance to the commitment undertaken by Global Compact participants. Principle 1 of the Global Compact calls upon companies to respect and support the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and Principle 2 calls upon them to ensure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

As a global standard applicable to all business enterprises, the UN Guiding Principles provide further conceptual and operational clarity for the two human rights principles championed by the Global Compact. They reinforce the Global Compact and provide an authoritative framework for participants on the policies and processes they should implement in order to ensure that they meet their responsibility to respect human rights.

In addition to respect for human rights, participants in the Global Compact have committed to support the promotion of human rights, that is, to make a positive contribution to the realization of human rights especially in ways that are relevant for their business. Such efforts can be through core business activities, social investment and philanthropy, public policy engagement and advocacy, and partnerships and collective action. See the UN Global Compact Blueprint for Corporate Sustainability Leadership:

http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues_doc/lead/Blueprint_english.pdf. Documents elaborating on what business respect and support for human rights mean in the context of women, children and indigenous peoples' rights have also been developed.¹

Guidance materials that can help with the implementation of the responsibility to respect (and the voluntary commitment to support) human rights can be found at:

http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Issues/human_rights/Tools_and_Guidance_Materials.html.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has also published an interpretive guide on the corporate responsibility to respect human rights as set out in the Guiding Principles:

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Business/RtRInterpretativeGuide.pdf>

Management actions business can take to respect and support human rights are further illustrated in the UN Global Compact Management Model available on the Global Compact website at:

<http://www.unglobalcompact.org/resources/231>.

¹ See the Women's Empowerment Principles - www.weprinciples.org, the Children's Rights and Business Principles - www.childrenandbusiness.org, and the Business Reference Guide to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Issues/human_rights/indigenous_peoples_rights.html.