

# INTRODUCING THE BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS HELPDESK

## Business and Human Rights

**Businesses are a major source of investment, innovation, and development, and have been a key driver of progress for the Sustainable Development Goals and positive human rights impact. Despite these benefits, business practices can also pose significant risks to human rights. Cases abound of abuse, gender- and racial-related discrimination, forced labour, invasions of privacy, environmental destruction, and more.**

Even beyond the confines of the workplace, the nature of globalization means that responsible businesses are still exposed to human rights risks beyond their control. Operating environments can quickly deteriorate in response to shocks like climate events, civil unrest, or the passage of repressive laws. Modern value chains rely on external suppliers throughout the world, many of whom have varying degrees of respect for human rights. As a result, respect for human rights requires more effective policies and broad-reaching collaboration between actors, across the public and private sectors.

## What we do: Principled Pragmatism

Recognizing the complex dynamics between business and human rights and the challenges in mitigating human rights risks, the international community developed a principled and pragmatic approach to address them in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights ([UNGPs](#)).

Finalized in 2011 in close consultation with governments, businesses, communities directly affected by business activities, and legal and policy experts from around the world, the UNGPs are based on international human rights standards and the practices of governments and businesses. They consist of 31 principles that provide a comprehensive and practical blueprint for governments and businesses to effectively prevent, mitigate, and remedy human rights harms connected to business activity, and are deliberately flexible to ensure broad

application by States and business enterprises, regardless of their size, sector, location, ownership, or structure. Today, the UNGPs serve as an internationally accepted framework and continue to shape national and international initiatives to foster responsible business. These principles form the basis of national and regional laws, policies, judicial decisions, and standards and are endorsed by international and regional organisations, business associations and enterprises, civil society organizations, trade unions, national institutions, and multi-stakeholder initiatives. UN Human Rights serves as guardian of the UNGPs, providing interpretation and technical advice to ensure that laws align with the Guiding Principles, businesses understand how to avoid and address human rights risks, and civil society and others can help strengthen respect for human rights in the context of business activity. As the UNGPs grow in popularity, though, so does the risk of misinterpretation and misalignment across industries. As such, there is an unmet need for an authoritative and far-reaching voice to ensure correct interpretation and consistent execution.

## CASE STUDY GOOGLE

This Helpdesk will be a significant step in scaling the past success of UN Human Rights' BHR team, which regularly provides various businesses and industries with practical support via a diverse offering of workstreams. For example, the B-Tech project has engaged directly with tech companies (along with governments, academia, and civil society) to provide timely and relevant guidance since its launch in 2019. As a key player in the generative AI field, Google has worked with B-Tech to identify specific challenges linked to generative AI products. The essential guidance and feedback provided by UN Human Rights has helped Google to understand the potential and actual adverse impacts of AI, as well as appropriate prevention and mitigation efforts. With this support, Google will be better equipped to adopt a rights-based approach to current and future products or services that will utilize this emerging technology.

UN Human Rights' Business and Human Rights team has seen the growing demand for this kind of tailored and timely support and is eager to improve and broaden its offering to businesses and other critical actors through the launch of this new Helpdesk.

# How can partners support this work?



In recent years, UN Human Rights has seen unprecedented growth in the number of requests from businesses, States, civil society and other actors for support implementing the UNGPs. This trend is a promising indicator of the rising demand for responsible business practices. To best address this need – and also respond to the recommendations of the independent Working Group on Business and Human Rights – UN Human Rights seeks to establish a dedicated **Helpdesk on Business and Human Rights (BHR Helpdesk)**. This new workstream will host a new digital and open-source platform where pre-existing and new resources will be readily available to the public, as well as a dedicated inbox so stakeholders can make requests directly to business and human rights experts. This work will also fund additional UN Human Rights staff capacity, providing more time and resources to adequately respond to the growing demand, ensuring the UNGPs are implemented more consistently and responsibly across geographies and industries, and contributing to a more level playing field by mainstreaming responsible practices.

**To accomplish these ambitions, UN Human Rights endeavours to raise \$15 million in funding over the next three years. More specifically, the Helpdesk will:**

- Provide **interpretative advice** for businesses, States, civil society and other actors on the meaning and implications of the UNGPs;
- Ensure **coherence and alignment** of laws and policies with the UNGPs;
- Offer **technical advice and capacity building** regarding the implementation of the UNGPs;
- Develop **tools and resources** on business and human rights, available in a variety of languages; and
- Act as a **platform for collaboration** for other relevant initiatives.

**A CALL TO ACTION** There is a growing realization that respect for human rights is good for business. It can reinforce a brand's values and reputation, position them as industry leaders, build trust and loyalty from customers and employees alike, and avoid costly disruptions to operations. UN Human Rights is eager to partner with sector leaders to ensure that their respective industries enjoy the enabling environment and tools needed to grow responsibly.