

## **EU Framework on Business and Human Rights: towards implementation**

In recent years, the EU has adopted a range of policies that contribute to advancing the business and human rights agenda as part of the EU broader set of initiatives on sustainability and Responsible Business Conduct. As the EU progresses in adopting and implementing such policies, there is a strong expectation that they will translate into positive, measurable impacts for people and the planet, and underpin business competitiveness.

The following EU Framework on business and human rights aims to support the implementation of relevant EU policies and to enhance their coherence and impact, notwithstanding differences in national competences, capacities and approaches. The areas identified in the Framework are intended to be further operationalised as appropriate, in line with a human rights-based approach as well as available resources, and coherently with other EU policy priorities. They may serve as a catalyst for the creation of an EU community of practice for the implementation of business and human rights policies, within the EU and internationally.

### **Over a decade of business and human rights in the EU**

Harnessing the positive contribution by business enterprises to societies and economies, and ensuring they respect people and the planet in their operations and global value chains, are priorities for the EU as part of its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

As part of policies and actions in support of Corporate Social Responsibility and Responsible Business Conduct, the EU has embraced the business and human rights agenda anchored in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)<sup>1</sup> unanimously endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011.

The EU's commitment to business and human rights was first announced in 2011 as part of the renewed EU Strategy for Corporate Social Responsibility<sup>2</sup>, and reiterated subsequently in different Council Conclusions<sup>3</sup> and in the European Commission's Communication on decent work worldwide<sup>4</sup>. Since 2015, business and human rights are a priority area highlighted in the EU Human Rights and Democracy Action Plans<sup>5</sup>.

In line with the three pillars of the UNGPs, the EU strives to uphold the duty of states to protect against business-related abuses of human rights, to ensure businesses meet their responsibility to respect human rights, and to guarantee effective access to remedy for victims, via a "smart mix" of voluntary and mandatory measures.

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1 [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework](#).

2 [Communication "A renewed EU strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility"](#) (COM/2011/0681 final).

3 Including: [Council Conclusions on Business and Human Rights](#) (2016), [Council Conclusions on the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#) (2020), [Council Conclusions on Human Rights and Decent Work in Global Supply Chains](#) (2020), [Council Conclusions on human rights-based recovery](#) (2021), yearly [Conclusions on EU priorities in United Nations human rights fora](#).

4 [Communication "Decent work worldwide for a global just transition and a sustainable recovery"](#) (COM/2022/66 final)

5 [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027](#).

Most EU Member States implement National Action Plans on business and human rights, and some are in the process of adopting and updating them. The EU supports the global implementation of the UNGPs through policy dialogue and dedicated projects in partner regions and countries, including for the development of National Action Plans, with a view to ensure that possible negative human rights impacts from business activities are addressed as close as possible to where they occur.

In recent years, the EU has also moved towards legally binding requirements anchored in the UNGPs and other international norms on Responsible Business Conduct and decent work. Some EU Member States have adopted legislation on human rights due diligence and several pieces of EU legislation with elements relevant to the advancement of business and human rights policies have entered into force. These include the Conflict Minerals Regulation<sup>6</sup>, the Sustainable Finance Disclosures Regulation<sup>7</sup>, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive<sup>8</sup>, the Regulation on deforestation-free products<sup>9</sup>, the Regulation on batteries<sup>10</sup>, the Critical Raw Materials Act, the Digital Services Act<sup>11</sup>, the Artificial Intelligence Act, the new Environmental Crime Directive<sup>11</sup> and the revised Anti-trafficking Directive<sup>12</sup>, the Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence<sup>13</sup> and the Regulation prohibiting forced labour products<sup>14</sup> (see Annex 1 for a description). Some EU acts have undergone simplification<sup>15</sup>, with a view to facilitating implementation while maintaining their core policy objectives, principles and elements.

As part of a “smart mix” of measures, requirements in EU legislation, complemented by measures to ensure compliance and adaptation to the new requirements and international cooperation, have the potential to contribute to improved corporate respect of human rights in the EU and in some cases beyond.

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<sup>6</sup> Regulation (EU) 2017/821 laying down supply chain due diligence obligations for Union importers of tin, tantalum and tungsten, their ores, and gold originating from conflict-affected and high-risk areas.

<sup>7</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/2088 on sustainability-related disclosures in the financial services sector.

<sup>8</sup> Directive (EU) 2022/2464 on corporate sustainability reporting.

<sup>9</sup> Regulation 2023/1115 on the making available on the Union market and the export from the Union of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation.

<sup>10</sup> Regulation 2023/1542 concerning batteries and waste batteries.

<sup>11</sup> Directive (EU) 2024/1203 on the protection of the environment through criminal law and replacing Directives 2008/99/EC and 2009/123/EC.

<sup>12</sup> Directive (EU) 2024/ 1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims.

<sup>13</sup> Directive (EU) 2024/1760 on corporate sustainability due diligence and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 and Regulation (EU) 2023/2859.

<sup>14</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/3015 on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market.

<sup>15</sup> Directive (EU) 2026/470.

## EU Framework on business and human rights

The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027<sup>16</sup> identifies as a priority to strengthen the EU's engagement in international fora and with partner countries to actively promote and support global efforts to implement the UN Guiding Principles on business and human rights. It announced work on a "comprehensive EU Framework for the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles in order to enhance the coordination and coherence of actions at EU level". The adoption and entry into force of a range of measures relevant to the advancement of business and human rights policies, including legislation, incentive-based measures, the deployment of accompanying and support policy measures and international cooperation, provide the key pillars of the EU Framework.

It is important to ensure the coherence of business and human rights policies and measures undertaken at EU and Member State levels to enhance the effectiveness of collective efforts and limit the administrative burden for business and other stakeholders. It is equally important to ensure appropriate awareness and preparedness by businesses, civil society actors and other stakeholders, both in the EU and beyond, including for the applicable regulatory requirements and related expectations. To carry out relevant actions, policy makers at EU and Member States' levels need sufficient capacity to effectively implement the business and human rights agenda, and put in place feedback and review mechanisms allowing for possible improvements and adjustments as appropriate. Additional steps could be considered to sustain efforts to implement the UN Guiding Principles with respect to those aspects that are relatively less advanced or not specifically addressed by EU legislation. Finally, the success of the global business and human rights agenda rests on strong partnerships, through meaningful engagement, dialogue and cooperation with stakeholders including governments, business, trade unions and civil society in the EU and beyond, and continued engagement in international fora.

The EU Framework on business and human rights was prepared following consultations and exchanges during 2021-2025 involving experts from EU institutions, Member States, National Human Rights Institutions, civil society organisations, business organisations, business-led and multi-stakeholder initiatives. The elements build on the UNGP10+ Roadmap for the next decade<sup>17</sup> (henceforth, the UNGP10+ Roadmap) issued in 2021 by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights. They also take into account the OECD Recommendation on the role of government in promoting Responsible Business Conduct adopted by OECD members<sup>18</sup> in December 2022 (henceforth, the OECD Recommendation), to which the EU has adhered.

**The EU Framework identifies five areas** central for the impact of the EU business and human rights agenda. Aiming to support the work of EU policymakers, these areas focus on the first and third pillars of the UNGPs, i.e. the duty of State to protect against business-related human rights abuses, and taking appropriate steps to ensure, should such abuses occur, effective access to remedy for those affected. Each action area is articulated around a number of points that may be further operationalised at technical level in line with a human rights-based approach as well as available resources, consistently with other relevant EU laws and policies.

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<sup>16</sup> The [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy \(2020-2027\)](#).

<sup>17</sup> [UNGP10+ A roadmap for the next decade of Business and Human Rights: Raising the ambition-increasing the pace](#).

<sup>18</sup> [OECD Recommendation on the role of government in promoting Responsible Business Conduct](#)

## 1. Ensuring policy coherence

In view of the multiplicity of recent initiatives relevant to the advancement of business and human rights policies, and the variety and actors involved in their implementation, there is a recognition of the need to ensure coherent and collaborative action, starting with policy makers at EU and Member States levels. Continuous anchoring of business and human rights initiatives in relevant international norms, including the UNGPs, supported by regular dialogue and coordination between practitioners, helps enhance the effectiveness of collective efforts and avoid fragmentation. It can also help ensure that business and other stakeholders are confronted with a consistent set of expectations and reduce the costs of implementation.

Elements aiming to strengthen policy coherence include:

**-Continue anchoring the EU business and human rights agenda in the UNGPs and other relevant international instruments.** This helps ensure consistent expectations for business and predictability for other stakeholders and reduce the risk of regulatory divergence. At the same time, due account should be given to the specificities of legally binding requirements, and the need to ensure legal certainty and predictability for businesses and other stakeholders. Beyond the UNGPs, other relevant international instruments include the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct<sup>19</sup> and the ILO Tripartite Declaration on Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy<sup>20</sup>.

**-Supporting enhanced dialogue and coordination among policy makers in the EU on business and human rights policies.** Regular dialogue, inter alia through the community of practice, helps maximising synergies in the design, implementation and enforcement of policies at the EU and Member States levels. Enhanced dialogue and coordination should also help support the consistent implementation of EU legislation and support measures, its effective enforcement, and the monitoring of its impact and effectiveness in inducing the expected corporate behaviour and human rights outcomes.

**-Encouraging effective “whole of government” mechanisms and systems of internal coordination and coherence on business and human rights.** Business and human rights measures are part of wider sustainability policies and actions, including those related to Responsible Business Conduct and Corporate Social Responsibility, the Green Deal and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as simplification measures to promote effective take up by business and stakeholders. Efforts should also continue to ensure the consistency between EU internal and external policies and instruments and the UNGPs and other relevant norms.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/81f92357-en.pdf?expires=1728645363&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=8E05407931EA1F48149913764CD183D3>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/ilo-department-sustainable-enterprises-productivity-and-just-transition/areas-work/tripartite-declaration-principles-concerning-multinational-enterprises-and>

## 2. Increasing preparedness among stakeholders

The increased pace and breadth of policy developments relevant to the advancement of business and human rights requires strengthening efforts to ensure that businesses and other stakeholders are prepared, including for the applicable legal requirements. In particular, the transition periods ahead of the full entry into application of EU legislation should be used to support businesses' preparedness and other stakeholders' adaptation to the new regulatory landscape.

Elements aiming to increase preparedness include:

**-Providing guidance and other support measures to businesses, in particular to SMEs.**

In addition to specific safeguards for businesses, in particular SMEs, set out in EU legislation, support measures for business include dedicated tools (such as helpdesks, platforms and portals), general and sector-specific guidelines (including for specific human rights risk factors), information campaigns, capacity building and training, including at EU level to avoid duplication and ensure equal access.

**-Supporting stakeholder initiatives that promote respect of human rights by business.**

Business organisations, industry-led, multi-stakeholder and sector specific initiatives, as well as academic and research institutions play a key role in increasing awareness and building capacity and have developed a range of support tools including trainings, codes of conduct, standards and certification systems, helpdesks, self-assessment tools, digital tools and projects in support of business, notably SMEs<sup>21</sup>. In some cases<sup>22</sup>, EU legislation foresees the development of guidance for assessing the fitness of industry schemes and multi-stakeholder initiatives to support the implementation of due diligence obligations<sup>23</sup>.

**-Supporting initiatives to increase awareness on business and human rights for specific issues, sectors, contexts, as well as specific groups of rights-holders and stakeholders.**

Issues requiring specific guidance may include labour rights, managing the human rights impact of new technologies, respecting human rights in high-impact sectors such as those connected to extractive industries or in contexts characterised by high levels of informal work. The surge of conflicts in several regions also trigger the need for raising awareness on the need for enhanced due diligence in challenging and conflict-affected contexts. Particular attention should be devoted to ensuring meaningful participation, consultation and access to remedy for rights-holders, especially where business activities may affect women, children, indigenous peoples, migrant workers, persons with disabilities, human, environmental and labour rights defenders, persons belonging to racial, ethnic and religious minorities and LGBTI persons, and other persons in vulnerable situations or affected by discrimination or marginalisation, in line with the UNGPs and specific EU law requirements.

## 3. Enhancing the EU's capacities and reviewing impacts

Policy makers at both EU and Member States' levels should have appropriate capacities to take the business and human rights agenda forward, including implementing relevant EU

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<sup>21</sup> Participation in such initiatives, however, does not diminish business responsibility to respect human rights.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, under the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive.

<sup>23</sup> While companies will remain responsible for the selection of specific initiatives and ultimately for compliance with their own due diligence obligations.

legislation. Training, platforms for expert discussions, and sharing of best practices can support collective learning and improvements. Efforts should also continue to promote the transparency of policies and review their impact, including through evidence-based research.

Elements aiming to enhance capacities and review impacts include:

**-Ensuring sufficient skills and capacities to implement the business and human rights agenda.** This includes providing training and guidance to staff in EU Delegations and relevant authorities, sharing know-how and good practices at EU level i.a. with respect to National Action Plans on business and human rights, the implementation of legislation and human rights policies at domestic level, and the design and implementation of accompanying measures in partner countries<sup>24</sup>.

**-Guaranteeing appropriate mandates and resources for the implementation of business and human rights policies, notably EU legislation.** EU institutions and Member States' administrations in charge of the implementation of EU policies relevant to the advancement of business and human rights, including enforcement of relevant EU legislation, need appropriate powers and adequate resources to fulfil their mandate. In particular, Member States should provide sufficient resources for their competent authorities and bodies to ensure effective implementation, and support cross-border cooperation where appropriate. European National Human Rights Institutions should continue to play an important role in the implementation of the business and human rights agenda, including by supporting the national transposition of legislation and in their role as grievance mechanisms.

**-Promoting transparency of policies and measures taken to implement the business and human rights agenda.** EU institutions regularly report on main developments in the implementation of the business and human rights agenda<sup>25</sup> and a number of EU Member States issue reports on the implementation of National Action Plans. Cooperation projects carried out with partner countries and regions also provide useful information. Efforts should continue to ensure the transparency and visibility of collective EU efforts, including when engaging with partner countries and regions.

**-Reviewing and assessing the impacts of EU policies and measures implementing the business and human rights agenda.** Complementing formal review clauses provided for by relevant EU legislation, initiatives to monitor the impacts in inducing the expected corporate behaviour and human rights outcomes, including independent and evidence-based research, can help identify good practices, lessons learnt, areas for improvement, etc.

**-Promoting transparency about companies' policies and impacts with respect to human rights.** The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive<sup>26</sup> mandates reporting by companies in scope according to the European Sustainability Reporting Standards<sup>27</sup> on sustainability issues including environmental, social and human rights, and governance. Such transparency requirements can facilitate the tracking and evaluation of business performance under

<sup>24</sup> Including an updated EU Toolkit on Business and Human Rights.

<sup>25</sup> The annual report by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security policy on human rights and democracy in the world provides an overview of main developments in the implementation of the business and human rights agenda at EU level, including legislative developments, engagement in multilateral fora, EU-funded technical assistance and ongoing development cooperation projects in third countries.

<sup>26</sup> Directive (EU) 2022/2464

<sup>27</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation of 31.07.2023 supplementing Directive 2013/34/EU.

specific EU law requirements and contribute to the implementation of the UNGPs and the business and human rights agenda.

#### 4. Sustaining EU efforts

To maintain and reinforce its commitment to promoting the business and human rights agenda, the EU should sustain efforts through a smart mix of measures, notably to support progress in priorities set by the UNGPs but whose implementation is relatively less advanced or is not mandated by specific legislation.

This includes encouraging EU Member States to continue developing, reviewing and updating National Action Plans on business and human rights involving relevant stakeholders and relying on best practice tools and methodologies, and monitoring their effective implementation.<sup>28</sup> National Action Plans already adopted might need to be recalibrated to support the implementation at domestic level of newly adopted EU legislation relevant to business and human rights.

Additional steps could be considered with respect to **encouraging governments to “lead by example”** when acting as economic actors in their relationships with businesses.

Elements aiming to support governments to “lead by example” include:

- **Continuing efforts to integrate business and human rights and responsible business conduct in public procurement policies.** The promotion of sustainability is a priority for the EU public procurement policy<sup>29</sup>. The EU Directives<sup>30</sup> enable the use of social and human rights-related considerations in public procurement tenders and require EU Member States to take appropriate measures to ensure compliance with social and labour standards in the performance of procurement contracts, including respect for fundamental ILO conventions. The “Buying Social” guide<sup>31</sup> provides recommendations to public buyers on integrating social considerations into procurement procedures, including with respect to human rights due diligence. Compliance with the obligations of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive may also be used as an environmental or social aspect by contracting authorities in award criteria or contract conditions for public contracts and concessions. The EU also promotes the incorporation of social and human rights-related considerations in the public procurement chapters of Free Trade Agreements. The Net-zero Industry Act also requires responsible business conduct considerations to form part of the pre-qualification criteria in auctions concerning renewable energy sources.

-**Supporting the further integration of business and human rights principles into projects supported by EU development financial institutions, export credit agencies and trade and investment promotion bodies, and encouraging peer learning.** The

<sup>28</sup> As of November 2024, 15 EU Member States have adopted National Action Plans for the implementation of the UNGPs at national level, and other Member States are in the process of developing or updating them.

<sup>29</sup> Communication on “[Making Public Procurement work in and for Europe](#)”- COM (2017) 572

<sup>30</sup> Directive 2014/23/EU, Directive 2014/24/EU, and Directive 2014/25/EU

<sup>31</sup> [Buying Social - a guide to taking account of social considerations in public procurement](#). The “Buying green!” handbook outlines the possibilities to pursue green public procurement under the relevant directives.

European Commission, several Member States and the European Investment Bank<sup>32</sup>, apply Environmental and Social standards to development finance operations, and some have set up independent human rights grievance and accountability mechanisms. Projects supported by the EU Global Gateway are subject to screening processes aimed to ensure they uphold high Environmental, Social and Governance standards. The EU also supports the integration of human rights principles into the work of officially supported Export Credit Agencies.<sup>33</sup> Trade and investment promotion bodies of EU Member States, as well as institutions involved in economic diplomacy, can also help ensure that EU companies uphold their responsibility to respect human rights when operating internationally.

The EU could also consider measures to further **facilitate access to remedies** for those affected by business-related abuses of human rights<sup>34</sup>, in line with the right to effective remedy and fair trial according to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Access to remedy in cases of business-related human rights abuses brings particular challenges in cross-border contexts, including questions of applicable law and jurisdiction, particularly when the abuse takes place outside the EU Member States' national territories.

Elements aiming to further facilitate access to remedies include:

**-Reducing barriers to effective judicial remedies, including in cross-border cases.** The Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive requires EU Member States to ensure, in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and international law, effective access to remedies (supported by specific procedural guarantees) and full compensation for victims in case of non-compliance with due diligence duties. Effective access to remedy, including in cross-border cases, is also supported by the EU's accession to the 2019 Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters<sup>35</sup>. The European e-Justice Portal<sup>36</sup> provides information about judicial protection of victims of business-related human rights violations in a number of EU Member States, including legal aid and jurisdictional issues. For human rights abuses which are qualified as criminal offences, the legislative process for a revision of the Victims' Rights Directive aims to strengthen the rights of victims of crime in the EU<sup>37</sup>. The EU has also a system of collective action in the area of consumer protection which may be also relevant to addressing business-related human rights abuses<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> The EIB adopted an [Environment and Social Sustainability Framework](#) (ESSF) consisting of an Environmental and Social Policy and a revised set of Environmental and Social Standards

<sup>33</sup> The European Commission issues an Annual Review of Member States' export credit activities including with respect to the implementation of the [OECD Recommendation on Common Approaches for officially supported export credits and environmental and social due diligence](#).

<sup>34</sup> Report on access to remedy in EU Member States by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) issued in October 2020.

<sup>35</sup> The Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters entered into force on 1 September 2023.

<sup>36</sup> [https://e-justice.europa.eu/580/EN/business\\_and\\_human\\_rights](https://e-justice.europa.eu/580/EN/business_and_human_rights)

<sup>37</sup> [Commission proposal for amending Directive 2012/29/EU on establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime](#).

<sup>38</sup> [Directive 2020/1828/EU on representative actions for the protection of the collective interests of consumers and repealing Directive 2009/22/EC](#)

**-Promoting adequate and effective non-judicial State-based remedy mechanisms.** National Human Rights Institutions, Ombuds-institutions, labour and environmental inspectorates, data protection and privacy authorities, competition authorities and consumer protection bodies play an important role in addressing grievances on business-related harms. EU Member States adhering to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises have established National Contact Points for Responsible Business Conduct which i.a. provide a non-judicial grievance mechanism to address specific instances. The EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive provides for administrative enforcement by independent supervisory authorities of Member States, supported by a European network of supervisory authorities. Victims must be entitled to submit complaints (in the form of “substantiated concerns”), which supervisory authorities must follow up, subject to independent review by a court or an impartial public body. The EU has also developed good practices on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for consumer disputes which may provide useful learning.

**-Promoting adequate, effective and rights-compatible grievance and remedy mechanisms.** EU business and stakeholders have developed a number of private-led or collective action initiatives in the area of remedy<sup>39</sup>. Under the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, Member States must ensure that companies in scope provide remediation for actual adverse impacts.

## 5. Strengthening partnerships

Partnerships are essential to ensure ownership of the business and human rights agenda and the collective action needed to address the systemic challenges which often lie at the root of many business-related human rights abuses. Partnerships entail ensuring meaningful engagement and dialogue with a broad range of stakeholders within and outside the EU, including businesses (including smallholders and SME), business associations, civil society organisations, trade unions, National Human Rights Institutions, human rights and environmental defenders, industry-led and multi-stakeholder initiatives, business leaders’ platforms, sector-based platforms, private standard setting initiatives, professional associations, corporate lawyers and business advisors, academia and research institutions.

Elements aiming to ensure meaningful engagement and dialogue with stakeholders include:

**-Engaging with stakeholders during the development and implementation of business and human rights policies and measures.** Participation by stakeholder groups is an essential element of the process of developing and updating National Action Plans on business and human rights. Stakeholder involvement is also crucial during the preparation of EU legislation and at the implementation and evaluation stages.

**-Promoting engagement with rights holders and stakeholders by business.** The UNGPs and EU legislation such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive requires companies to engage meaningfully with stakeholders as part of their due diligence duty. The

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<sup>39</sup> These include factory and company-based mechanisms, worker-driven and site-level grievance systems, social dialogue and community-driven mechanisms, industry-led, multi-stakeholder and sectoral grievance platforms, schemes and processes and international arbitration mediation mechanisms.

EU Whistleblowers Directive<sup>40</sup> and the new Environmental Crime Directive<sup>41</sup> require Member States to take measures for the protection of whistleblowers. The Directive on strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP)<sup>42</sup> protects persons from abusive litigation in cross border cases, including when they voice concerns about business-related human rights abuses.

The EU should continue building international partnerships to advance the business and human rights agenda and support the emergence and adoption of frameworks, norms, rules and initiatives consistent with the UNGPs.

Elements aiming to strengthen international cooperation include:

**-Cooperating with partner countries and regions for the advancement of the business and human rights agenda.** Business and human rights regularly feature on the agenda of human rights, trade, industrial and political dialogues between the EU and partners countries and regions, and engagement should continue at the stage of implementation of EU legislation, including by communicating the objectives and features of the EU approach. The EU and EU Member States support a variety of technical assistance projects for the development of National Action Plans and other actions to implement the UNGPs worldwide. The range of EU cooperation projects has expanded to accompany the entry into application of EU legislation, notably on due diligence<sup>43</sup>. The EU is also keen to engage with partners that are strengthening their business and human rights and responsible business conduct policies, including by adopting relevant legislative frameworks.

**-Engaging on business and human rights with international organisations and in international fora.** The EU supports the work of the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, UNDP, UNICEF and other UN agencies in this field. It engages constructively in discussions aimed at developing a Legally Binding Instrument on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises, based on the EU experience with adopting and implementing relevant EU legislation. The EU also actively participates in the work of the ILO and the OECD Working Party on Responsible Business Conduct and plays an active role in the elaboration, ratification, and implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019L1937>

<sup>41</sup> Directive (EU) 2024/1203 on the protection of the environment through criminal law and replacing Directives 2008/99/EC and 2009/123/EC.

<sup>42</sup> [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1069 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings](#) ('Strategic lawsuits against public participation').

<sup>43</sup> A dedicated Team Europe Initiative for the promotion of sustainable supply chains contributed to the setting up a [EU Due Diligence Navigator for partner countries](#), to help stakeholders understand EU legislation, find accompanying measures and support available from the European Commission, EU Member States and other organisations.

<sup>44</sup> A number of MEAs include clauses relating to human rights affecting activities of businesses.

**-Supporting accountability and access to remedies for victims of corporate human rights abuses in partner countries.** The difficulties that victims of business-related human rights abuses face in accessing effective redress combined with a deterioration of the global state of the rule of law and human rights, underline the need to continue promoting access to remedies worldwide. This includes engaging with partner countries on ensuring effective remedies for victims of corporate human rights abuses and an overall rule of law environment. The EU also supports initiatives to broaden the public debate about responsible business conduct, and to enhance the oversight role of civil society, trade unions and human rights defenders, including land and environmental defenders, in monitoring, preventing and responding to human rights violations and abuses. The EU is strongly committed to the protection of human rights defenders at risks, including through the Human Rights Defenders Mechanism<sup>45</sup>.

**-Promoting human rights in EU external action.** The ratification and effective implementation of international human rights and labour rights conventions and instruments facilitate business respect for human rights, including through due diligence. In line with the EU Action Plan on human rights and democracy 2020 – 2027, the EU will continue supporting partner governments in their efforts to respect, protect and fulfil human rights via a range of instruments. These include political and human rights dialogues, cooperation with UN human rights mechanisms, actions in multilateral and regional human rights fora, thematic and geographical programmes, public diplomacy, trade and investment policy, support to civil society organisations and protection of human rights defenders.

## Conclusion

The EU is committed to advancing corporate respect for human rights and foster sustainable and responsible business conduct throughout the EU global value chains. The EU is strengthening its role as a global leader on business and human rights, notably through the adoption and implementation of relevant legislation and related policies.

The areas and points identified in this Framework could be further operationalised at technical level as appropriate and in close coordination between EU institutions and Member States, in line with a human rights-based approach, consistent with relevant EU law and policies, as well as available resources.

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<sup>45</sup> [Protect defenders.](#)

## **Annex 1 Glossary**

CSO Civil society organisation

CSR Corporate social responsibility

EEAS European External Action Service

EU European Union

FRA European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

ILO International Labour Organization

NAP National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights

NCP OECD National Contact Point

NGO Non-governmental organisation

NHRI National human rights institution

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OHCHR Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

SLAPP Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation

UN United Nations

UNGPs United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

## Annex 2

### **Main EU legislations relevant for the advancement of the business and human rights agenda**

The **Anti-trafficking Directive** (Directive 2011/36/EU) in force since 14 July 2024 introduces stricter criminalisation and provides stronger tools for public authorities to investigate and prosecute new forms of exploitation, including those that take place online, and ensure better assistance and support to victims of trafficking.

The **Conflict Minerals Regulation** (Regulation (EU)2017/821) in force since 1 January 2021 lays down supply chain due diligence obligations for EU importers of Tin, Tantalum, Tungsten and Gold (3TG). Its main aim is to stop profits from trade in conflict minerals being used to fund armed conflicts while making possible the responsible sourcing from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas.

The **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive** (Directive (EU) 2022/2464) in force since 5 January 2023 modernises and strengthens the rules concerning the social and environmental information that companies have to report. A broader set of large companies, are required to report on sustainability. The Directive has been amended through Directive (EU) 2026/470.

The **Digital Services Act** (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065) in force since 16 November 2022 sets out rules for digital services acting as intermediaries for consumers and goods, services, and content. In the context of the DSA, digital services refer to intermediary services such as host providers, online marketplaces, and social media networks.

The **Regulation on deforestation-free products** (Regulation (EU) 2023/1115) in force since 29 June 2023 requires operators or traders who place a number of commodities on the EU market, or export from it, to be able to prove that the products do not originate from recently deforested land or have contributed to forest degradation. It repealed the [EU Timber Regulation](#).

The **Regulation on batteries** (Regulation (EU) 2023/1542) in force since 17 August 2023 mandates due diligence obligations for all batteries placed on the EU market with respect to social and environmental risks linked to the sourcing, processing and trading of raw materials.

The **new Environmental Crime Directive** (Directive (EU) 2024/1203) in force since 20 May 2024 strengthens the protection of the environment through criminal law.

The **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive** (Directive (EU) 2024/1760) in force since 25 July 2024 sets out a corporate due diligence duty for very large companies to address adverse human rights and environmental impacts in their own operations, those of their subsidiaries and in their chains of activities. The Directive has been amended through Directive (EU) 2026/470, both as regards its substance and the timelines for transposition and entry into application.

The **Artificial Intelligence Act** (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689) in force since 1 August 2024 is the first-ever comprehensive legal framework on AI worldwide. The AI Act is part of a

wider package of policy measures to support the development of trustworthy AI, which guarantee the safety and fundamental rights of people and businesses when it comes to AI.

The **Regulation prohibiting forced labour products** (Regulation (EU) 2024/3015 aims to ban from the EU market all products made with forced labour irrespective of their origin (those made in the EU for domestic consumption, exports, and imported goods).