

Business and Human Rights in Technology Project (“B-Tech Project”): Applying the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to Digital Technologies

What is the Business and Human Rights in Technology Project (“B-Tech project”)?

A project led by UN Human Rights¹ to provide an authoritative and broadly accepted **roadmap for applying the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) to the development and use of digital technologies**. Through an inclusive process of consultation and research involving key actors (public and private), and building on existing initiatives, good practice and expertise, the roadmap will comprise **practical guidance and public policy recommendations** to realize a rights-based approach to the development, application and governance of digital technologies.

Why the B-Tech Project?

The project addresses the growing and urgent need voiced by companies, civil society and policy makers to find **principled and pragmatic ways to prevent and address the socio-political harms** that might, or do, occur during the application of digital technologies by the private and public sectors. **These issues are increasingly seen through the lens of human rights risks, not just ethical dilemmas**. The lens has widened to bring into view issues of governance, public policy, and corporate responsibility and accountability. This makes the **UNGPs a useful framework to prevent, address and remedy** the vast array of actual or potential harm related to digital technologies, since they can offer:

- Solutions that are based on the right **balance of corporate responsibilities and State duties**;
- Clarity about what **responsible conduct** looks like in practice regarding the **development, promotion and sale of digital technologies**, as well as its **use** (whether by the private sector or the State);
- A roadmap for policy makers based on a **smart mix of regulation, incentives and public policy tools** - providing human rights protections without hampering the potential of digital technologies to address social and ecological challenges;
- Guidance on **workable models for remedy and accountability** when harm has occurred.

As the demand for regulation in the digital space grows, public and private responses risk being ad hoc, fragmented and not aligned with international standards. This risk will be mitigated by UN Human Rights convening and steering an inclusive process of consultation and engagement to deliver **coherent, well-grounded guidance to regulators and companies** navigating this landscape.

¹ The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

What will the project deliver?

The project will produce **guidance notes, good practice case studies, commentary on shared dilemmas and policy recommendations** that clarify what certain key concepts/expectations of the UNGPs look like *in practice* in relation to the design, development and use of digital technologies. This diverse array of outcomes will be short, demand-driven and focus on practical applications, rather than attempting to provide a lengthy guide on digital technologies and the related human rights issues. Different deliverables will build on each other in a dynamic and iterative manner to leverage learnings and guidance on an ongoing basis. All deliverables will be posted on the [B-Tech Portal](#)².

What will be the scope of the project?

The project will focus on **four inter-related focus areas**:

- ❖ **Focus Area 1: Addressing Human Rights Risks in Business Models**
- ❖ **Focus Area 2: Human Rights Due Diligence and End-Use**
- ❖ **Focus Area 3: Accountability and Remedy**
- ❖ **Focus Area 4: “A Smart Mix of Measures”: Exploring regulatory and policy responses to human rights challenges linked to digital technologies**

Within these broad areas, the Project will aim to support alignment of UNGPs interpretation and approaches in relation to strategic issues/questions that seem to be recurring regardless of the specific technological application, and where the practical guidance and insights developed by the project can add substantial value, including by leveraging other efforts.

The four inter-related focus areas span **all three pillars** of the UNGPs. This is critical given the central role that State interests play in creating the context for the development of digital technologies – whether as end-users of technologies, as regulators, or when incentivizing investment and commercial innovation.

How will the project work?

- UN Human Rights will involve key actors from the tech sector, government, academia, and civil society to leverage and build on existing expertise and insights;
- The overall approach of the project is to work in a multi-stakeholder fashion, though specific events may involve only single stakeholders as appropriate;
- Different deliverables will be supported by targeted research outputs produced in partnership with universities, think tanks and experts. They will mostly be short and action-oriented, with a focus on policy as well as practical applications, and be applicable across different technologies and companies;
- All activities and outputs will be posted on the B-Tech Project portal on the OHCHR website.

Who is the target audience?

UN Human Rights recognizes that different stakeholders will have different levels of interest in each focus area set out below. While the B-Tech Project will involve all relevant stakeholders (notably States, business, civil society,

² <https://bit.ly/38rsiLx>.

national human rights institutions, academics and other experts), **the target audience and format of deliverables will vary** according to the specific work streams undertaken under the different focus areas.

Why UN Human Rights?

As calls for companies and policy makers to take a rights-based approach to addressing the challenges of new digital technologies gain traction, UN Human Rights can play a unique role in **initiating, hosting and stewarding the development of pragmatic approaches**. We bring to this project:

- A **neutral platform based on universally recognized values and principles** to convene leaders and decision-makers from across business, civil society, and government, *as well as* engage the expertise and interests of diverse groups in a non-competitive space;
- An **authoritative voice** on the interpretation of international human rights standards, including the *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*;
- A **demonstrated commitment** to find principled, yet pragmatic solutions to complex societal and legal challenges in the business and human rights space that start, and end, with a commitment to international human rights norms;
- **Strong connections** to the technology industry by virtue of frequent, constructive interaction with major tech companies.

Why should tech companies engage with the project?

The project aims to develop **public goods that can support all stakeholders** in their efforts to address the human rights risks related to digital technologies. For companies specifically, the project will:

- Provide a **platform to profile their existing efforts** to implement the UNGPs, as well as **creating safe spaces to openly discuss** emerging challenges in doing so;
- Build a **stronger understanding across diverse experts and stakeholders** about the dilemmas faced by businesses – related to the development and use of digital technologies– while also co-crafting what good human rights due diligence and access to remedy means in practice;
- **Enable business to input** into constructive discussions about what appropriate public policies and regulations to govern the development and use of digital technologies might look like.

Funding

The project is initially projected to run until 31 December 2021. **UN Human Rights is seeking funding** to cover costs integral to the realization of this project, including expert consultancy support, research, staff and stakeholders’ travel to relevant discussions in different parts of the world. The **costs** cover project management staff, research, travel and other operational costs.

We are seeking funding from **both States and companies**. For corporate funding, UN Human Rights has established a **“consortium” model** to protect the integrity of the project and mitigate risks of being perceived as being controlled by corporate stakeholders. This means that any **individual corporate contribution is subject to a cap of USD 50,000**; and that a **minimum of four different companies** are needed to pledge to contribute funds before any corporate contributions can be received.