

B-Tech Peer Learning Platform

Summary Note — Inaugural Session

INTRODUCTION

On 8 February 2023, the [UN Human Rights B-Tech Project](#) launched the Peer Learning Platform (PLP), a series of webinars open to participants from a diverse range of tech companies from different geographic regions.

The B-Tech Project aims to prevent and mitigate human rights risks relating to the development and use of digital technologies. This is done through promoting effective implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (“UNGPs”) in tech. Over the past years, the B-Tech Project has engaged with a number of companies in the sector through the [Tech Company Community of Practice \(CoP\)](#), which has greatly informed and enhanced the many different B-Tech [outputs](#). In order to expand engagement to more companies from diverse geographic regions, the B-Tech Project introduced the PLP to be open to any company from the tech sector or with an interest in the application of the UNGPs to the sector.¹ The PLP is intended to:

- Broaden tech companies’ engagement with the UNGPs, informed by B-Tech foundational guidance;
- Support capacity building within these companies;
- Broker connections among human rights functions across the industry; and
- Foster geographic outreach to tech firms headquartered globally.

Held in two sessions at 10am CET and 9am PST to accommodate participants in different time zones, the first convening of the PLP welcomed a wide array of companies in the tech space, including those engaged in information technology, social networking and messaging, telecommunications and media, artificial intelligence, and content delivery, among others. Participants expressed a variety of reasons for attending the inaugural PLP session; some companies hoped to learn how to incorporate human rights principles into tech policies, workflows, product development cycles, and social sector research, and others expressed an interest in building their network, learning about resources and B-Tech initiatives, and understanding how to conduct human rights due diligence, engage vulnerable groups, and provide remedy in the tech sector.

PART I: INTRODUCTION TO THE UNGPs

The session began with an introduction by Lene Wendland (Chief, UN Human Rights Business and Human Rights Unit) to the background and key features of the UNGPs. Participants were familiarized with

¹ Participation in the Peer Learning Platform is limited to representatives from industry in order to foster an open, peer learning environment. B-Tech offers a separate opportunity for civil society representatives, as well as various multi-stakeholder engagements and events.

how the UNGPs became the authoritative global framework for business and human rights, the impact it has had on business practice and regulatory frameworks, and its foundational role in the B-Tech Project. Importantly, the B-Tech Project recognizes that new technology does not necessarily demand new standards – rather the UNGPs apply to any business activity in any sector and, therefore, provide a framework for preventing, identifying, mitigating, and addressing risk to people from digital technologies.

PART II: OVERVIEW OF UN HUMAN RIGHTS B-TECH

Part two of the session provided participants with an overview of the B-Tech Project’s focus areas, modalities, and work streams. The B-Tech Project’s four focus areas are reflective of the three pillars of the UNGPs² and include:

1. Identifying avenues to address human rights risks related to tech company business models.
2. Promoting robust product and service human rights due diligence (HRDD).
3. Identifying the challenges of ensuring access to remedy for harms related to the use of technologies.
4. Hosting multi-stakeholder dialogue to inform State action about smart-mix legal and policy measures, HRDD, and remedy.

The B-Tech Project engages in these areas through dynamic and interactive processes, such as performing research and consulting with stakeholders to explore new ideas and guidance; drafting foundational papers, guidance notes, case studies and comments; and conducting outreach across diverse geographic regions.

B-Tech Project work streams can be multi-stakeholder or single-stakeholder. For example, [B-Tech Africa](#) engages key digital economy stakeholders across Africa, including technology company operators, investors, and civil society, to create awareness of implementing the UNGPs. The [CSO Working Group](#) organizes regular online meetings with an open group of key relevant civil society representatives to enhance dialogue between UN Human Rights and civil society. Forthcoming work streams and outputs for the B-Tech Project include B-Tech India (exploratory consultation with stakeholders in the region), the Investor Track (engagement with investors on how to use leverage to address business model risks), and the “UNGPs Compass” (guidance tool for policy makers).

PART III: PLANS FOR THE NEW PEER LEARNING PLATFORM

In part three of the session, Benjamin Pitler and Stephanie Seale, B-Tech Project Advisors, discussed plans for the new PLP and explained how it differs from the CoP. The CoP, which was launched in 2021, invited a limited number of tech companies to engage with the work of the B-Tech Project. Among other activities, CoP company representatives participate in core sessions focused on specific aspects of implementing the UNGPs, including HRDD and remedy, and attend update calls with the B-Tech team. CoP participants also co-organized a dialogue with senior executives from their companies and the UN High Commissioner in December 2022 on the expectations of the “Responsibility to Respect” Pillar Two of the UNGPs.

² 1. State duty to protect human rights; 2. Corporate responsibility to respect human rights; 3. Access to remedy.

During the first PLP session, a number CoP participants shared their experiences engaging with B-Tech, specifically highlighting the opportunity that the CoP has provided for tech companies to learn from each other and the upcoming work of UN Human Rights. One of the company presenters provided insight on the uncertainties inherent in the tech industry and, in his view, the importance of finding a community of people grappling with the same or similar challenges. For these participants, the CoP has provided a chance to learn and benefit from expertise and contemporary thinking, as well as join a safe space to share doubts and uncertainties regarding human rights responsibilities in the technology sector.

The PLP offers similar opportunities for connection and dialogue. PLP sessions will provide introductions and insights into the UNGPs to companies at various stages of engagement with the UNGPs. Many may not yet have developed formal human rights policies, or may benefit from the opportunity to engage with peer tech companies facing similar challenges in operationalizing the UNGPs. While the CoP was a small setting for tech companies in North America and Europe to convene and discuss challenges, the PLP will broaden the accessibility of these resources to include companies focusing on users in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as well. The PLP provides an anchor opportunity to expand discussions on application of the UNGPs, engage with other tech companies with varying levels of capacity, and consult with and learn from experts.

UPCOMING PLP SESSIONS FOR 2023:

- **March 15:** HRDD & End Use, Regulation (DSA, etc.)
- **May 10:** Human Rights Risks in Business Models/Responsible Investment
- **July 12:** Regulation and the Smart-Mix concept (UNGPs Compass)
- **September 13:** Access to Remedy
- **November 8:** Stakeholder Engagement, Vulnerable Groups & Governance Gaps

These sessions are subject to change and the list may be amended based on participant input and demand. The B-Tech Project welcomes participants to share their ideas for particular dilemmas or urgent topics to be covered in future PLP sessions. Participants may join in any or all of the sessions of the PLP, which do not constitute a linear course. B-Tech will post brief summary notes, such as this one, of the issues covered in each session, on our [website](#). As per the Chatham House Rule, these notes will have no attribution.

For additional information about the B-Tech Peer Learning Platform, please contact OHCHR-b-techproject@un.org. For more information about the B-Tech Project, including past and upcoming activities, please visit the B-Tech [project portal](#).