



4TH UN REGIONAL FORUM ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

The EU Policy and Regulatory Impact on Business and Human Rights

Date:	11-12 November 2024
Venue:	Budva, Montenegro
Organizers:	UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub and UNDP Montenegro Partners: UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, European Union, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Global Compact
Key objective	European Union (EU) representatives, States, businesses, civil society organizations, trade unions, NHRIs, environmental and human rights defenders, media, academia, UNDP Country Offices, and international institutions with expertise and existing programming on business and human rights. The event will unpack the implications of new EU due diligence and sustainability requirements on businesses, governments, and civil society in the region, and use a new UNDP survey to gauge business’ readiness to implement the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).
Topics in focus:	The event will explore the impact of UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and EU policy and regulatory innovations on business and human rights practices in Europe and Central Asia (ECA). ¹ To enable an evidence-based and focused discussion, UNDP will present a regional survey to assess businesses’

¹ Understood as encompassing the [following countries and territories covered by UNDP](#): Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo¹, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Tajikistan, North Macedonia, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

¹“References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).”

	readiness for CSDDD. Discussions will cover legal frameworks and institutional capacities, challenges and opportunities, trends, best practices, strategies for capacity building, and the roles of the UN and EU in facilitating compliance and enhancing corporate human rights due diligence. The sessions will also feature corporate human rights due diligence in the deployment, regulation, and application of digital technologies and AI.
Participants & Format:	EU and UN representatives, governments, businesses, CSOs, trade unions, NHRIs, environmental and human rights defenders, media, academia, and international institutions with expertise and existing programming on B+HR. Hybrid format (online and offline)
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I. Regional context

The [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights \(UNGPs\)](#), adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2011, are grounded in the recognition of States’ duty to protect human rights, the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, and access to remedy. The UNGPs thus set out a framework for business enterprises to respect human rights, including by undertaking Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for how they address their human rights impacts.

At the same time, stepping up inclusive, green, and responsible business practices is at the heart of the EU acquis, the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), and the [EU Green Deal](#). This is further reinforced by the recently adopted [EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive](#) (CSDDD) and [Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive \(CSRD\)](#). Most importantly, these principles are integral to the EU integration efforts and the strategies and commitments of EU candidate countries.

The ECA countries are gradually adopting global trends that require businesses to respect human rights through comprehensive human rights due diligence across their value chains. Their close economic ties with the EU, and the need for investments and integration of domestic businesses into European and global markets and value chains, significantly underscore the importance of aligning their policies and practices with responsible business conduct and human rights standards. These standards are outlined in the UNGPs, EU CSDDD, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and other relevant policies. The implications of these regulatory pushes are far-reaching and require States and businesses to adapt by, for instance, aligning their legal frameworks with EU standards, developing institutional capacities,

relevant corporate policies, human rights due diligence procedures, and mechanisms for access to legal remedies.

Over the last years, the region's States have been undertaking various measures to develop comprehensive business and human rights policies. The governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine have included references to implementing UNGPs in their national strategies and action plans on human rights.² However, as documented by UNDP's [Scoping Study on the Status of the Implementation of the UNGPs in Europe and Central Asia \(2023\)](#), challenges persist in addressing business-related human rights abuses in the region, particularly in sectors such as energy, mining, infrastructure, and the gig economy. Moreover, a [recent report identified over 400 allegations of human rights abuses in 16 countries in the region in connection with the mining of transition minerals](#).

Despite recent efforts, businesses continue to lack awareness of the UNGPs and often confuse the fundamental concepts of business and human rights (to do no harm and to address their adverse impacts on human rights) with corporate social responsibility. This is reflected in the fact that very few businesses in the region report on non-financial indicators of their operations, with even fewer undertaking human rights impact assessments or integrating human rights due diligence processes into their operations. Finally, rights-holders lack access to independent judicial institutions or other mechanisms they would trust to handle their complaints fairly.

The impacts of technological advancements on human rights, notably privacy, equality, and freedom of expression in the ECA region, have been also documented in the [UNDP's study](#), calling for better private sector regulation, transparency, access to effective remedies, and independent oversight.

The impact of the EU regulations

The ECA region's efforts to implement the UNGPs have gained new momentum thanks to the entry into force on 25 July 2024, of the [European Union's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive \(CSDDD\)](#). The Directive will play a key role in the countries of the region, owing both to their strong trade ties with the EU and their status as candidates for EU membership, which currently include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine. Although the CSDDD has its limitations, both in scope and substance, **it stands to significantly impact businesses in the ECA region**. For instance, suppliers of large EU companies, including those outside of the EU, will have to assess and address their potential and actual adverse impacts on human rights. Similarly, victims of business-related abuses in the supply chains of large EU companies will be able to seek remedies before EU countries' courts and administrative enforcement bodies.

EU candidate countries will need to harmonize their domestic legal orders with the new EU laws. Additionally, governments will have to decide how to enforce these laws, such as by designating administrative enforcement bodies as foreseen by the CSDDD. Moreover, access to remedy will need to

² See e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina's [BiH Framework Guidelines for implementing the UNGP 2021-2025](#); Ukraine's [National Human Rights Strategy](#); Georgia's [national baseline assessment](#); Türkiye's recent legislative and policy developments, including the 12th National Development Plan and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security's Strategic Plan (2024-2028), aim to strengthen Türkiye's position in global supply chains and raise awareness about protecting human rights; Kyrgyzstan's [National Action Plan on BHR](#) and Kazakhstan's 2023 National Plan of Action on Human Rights and the Rule of Law. With the support of UNDP, National Baseline Assessments on BHR were prepared in Türkiye, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine, and are now being finalized in Azerbaijan and Serbia.

be eased for victims of business-related abuses through courts and other grievance mechanisms. Finally, businesses must align their practices with the new EU due diligence requirements, necessitating concerted support from governments, chambers of commerce, business associations, trade unions, and other stakeholders.

II. Objectives of the Forum

In this context, it becomes essential to **delve deeper into the impact of EU policies and regulatory changes on business and human rights practices in ECA to understand the needs of the region better, particularly EU candidate countries**, in ensuring the protection of and respect for human rights in the context of business activities. Following the [previous series](#), the **4th UN Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights for Europe and Central Asia** will continue to serve as a dialogue platform for critical national and regional stakeholders involved in policymaking on business and human rights practices. The aim is to enhance learning and awareness of the latest business and human rights (BHR) trends, review the readiness of the region to implement UNGPs and new EU CSDDD requirements, and discuss the implications for legislative and governance mechanisms and business practices. The forum will highlight challenges and opportunities and offer practical insights and recommendations.

Specific objectives of the event include:

- **Enhance Awareness and Understanding** of the applicability of the UNGPs in the current regional context.
- **Unpack new EU human rights due diligence and sustainability requirements** and outline the expectations for action by States, civil society, and businesses to improve compliance with human rights standards.
- **Review Regional Capacity** to address specific issues such as legislative gaps, limited enforcement mechanisms, access to remedy, and opportunities for enhancement to align with the UNGPs and the EU CSDDD standards fully. Discuss the relevance of EU accession processes for compliance with BHR standards in the candidate countries.
- **Discuss Compliance Trends and Improvement Opportunities:** Provide insights from UNDP's survey on businesses' adherence to UNGPs and EU CSDDD standards, identifying trends and opportunities for improvement.
- **Facilitate Networking and Partnerships** between the public and private sectors, engaging rights holders, affected communities, civil society representatives, and experts.
- **Exchange Good Practices:** Offer a platform for State, business, and civil society representatives to share good practices and opportunities for advancing the business and human rights agenda across all sectors and industries.

III. Forum Format

The forum will bring together up to 30 persons who will participate in person and the remainder online. Day 1 (11 November 2024) will be a hybrid event, with in-person and online participation. It will include a **special breakfast session with Montenegro's businesses focusing on business and human rights in the tourism sector** and **the consultation on the Working Group on BHR's report to the UN Human Rights Council on human rights in the context of technological innovation**. Day 2 (12 November 2024) will also be in a hybrid format and focus on internal strategy sessions for EU and UN representatives and their partners.

IV. Organizers

About UNDP's role in BHR

UNDP collaborates with governments, businesses, civil society, human rights defenders, and academia to implement the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) and promote responsible business practices globally. Supported by Sweden, Japan, and the European Union, this work is part of a broader initiative to advance justice and human rights through the [Global Programme for Strengthening the Rule of Law, Human Rights, Justice, and Security](#). Operating in over **41 countries**, UNDP supports the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) and other policy instruments to foster corporate accountability and responsible business practices. It facilitates regional forums, peer learning, and capacity building on the UNGPs, while offering Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) training and developing tools to manage human rights risks, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

In the ECA region, the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub (IRH) has played a key role in promoting regional collaboration on BHR, [co-organizing regional forums](#) with the UN Working Group on BHR and launching a comprehensive [Scoping Study on the Status of the Implementation of UNGPs in the ECIS](#). This study, presented at the 3rd Forum, has informed regional policy-making on BHR. IRH also published an assessment on [The Impact of Digital Technology on Human Rights in Europe and Central Asia](#).

At the country level, UNDP is actively working in **Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Ukraine, and Serbia** to assist local authorities in integrating BHR into national human rights strategies and strengthening the capacities of local institutions. Additionally, UNDP supports companies in implementing HRDD and has trained over 400 companies in the ECA region through the [UNDP's flagship B+HR Academy](#). These companies, including over 100 Japanese companies, joint ventures, and their partners in ECA countries, received expert training on Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD). To align business operations with human rights standards in the context of the armed conflict, UNDP launched a [Guide on Heightened Human Rights Due Diligence for Business in Conflict-Affected Contexts](#) and conducted training sessions in Ukraine.

Partners

About the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights (UNWG on BHR)

The UN [Working Group on Business and Human Rights](#) was established by the Human Rights Council in 2011 by resolution [17/4](#) and is tasked with promoting, disseminating, and implementing the [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNGPs). The group is also mandated to exchange and promote best practices and lessons learned on the implementation and to make recommendations on the UNGPs. In addition, the WG chairs the [UN Forum on Business and Human Rights](#), the world's largest global gathering on business and human rights and an important global platform for stakeholders to discuss trends and challenges in the implementation of the UNGPs and promote dialogue and cooperation on issues related to business and human rights. The Working Group is composed of five independent experts of balanced geographical representation. Collectively, these experts bring diverse skills and experience on the advancement of business respect for human rights across a wide range of countries, issues, and sectors.

Provisional Agenda

4TH UN FORUM ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

11-12 NOVEMBER 2024/ HYBRID (IN BUDVA, MONTENEGRO AND ONLINE)

DAY 1

Monday, 11 November 2024/Central European Time (CET)

08:30 – 09:00 Registration and introduction of the Forum platform

Parallel intro sessions

09:00 – 11:00 Breakfast with Montenegrin businesses: introduction to UNGPs on BHR

10:00 – 11:00 The consultation on the report of the Working Group on BHR on human rights in the context of technological innovation

11:00 – 12:00 *High-Level Opening Plenary*

Objective: The opening plenary will set out the key global and regional business and human rights trends to be discussed in the 4th UN Forum on Business and Human Rights for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The plenary will be kickstarted by an opening welcome from the host country, followed by a panel that will set out the challenges facing countries and businesses in the region both in implementing the UNGPs and the demands – and opportunities - created by the EU’s reform agenda.

12:00– 13:15 *Session I – Business and Human Rights in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: the impact of the EU’s reform agenda*

Objective: The adoption of the CSDDD, CSRD, and other initiatives creates significant demands and opportunities for governments, businesses, and rights-holders in the region. This session will feature an opening one-on-one conversation with an EU official to unpack the most important changes ushered in by recent laws. It will be followed by a panel discussion to explore the principal implications of this trend for governments, businesses, workers, and other regional stakeholders including *in the digital space*.

13:15 – 14:30 Lunch

14:30 – 15:45 *Session II - Legislative developments in the EU: The implications for businesses (and other stakeholders) in the ECA region*

Objective: To frame the discussion on implications of legislative developments in the EU on the ECA region, this session will feature a presentation of the findings of ***UNDP's Survey on the preparedness of businesses in the ECA region to implement the CSDDD and other EU legislation***. This will be followed by a discussion with businesses, government representatives and other stakeholders on the subject.

15:40 – 15:50 Break

15:50 – 17:00 *Session III – Break out session – what support do you need to implement the UNGPs and the EU's reform agenda*

Objective: This session will be an interactive, sense-making exercise, that will draw on inputs from the participants of the Forum to formulate actionable ideas on how the UNGPs and the EU reform agenda can be promoted and implemented further in the ECA region.

17:00 - 17:15 *Closure of the Forum*

19:00 *Reception for participants in Budva*

DAY 2

Tuesday, 12 November 2024/Central European Time (CET)

09:00 - 13:00 *Session IV – Session for UN agencies and partners on business and human rights (online and offline)*

Objective: This session will provide an opportunity for UN agencies and their partners active in business and human rights to strategize on possible joint programming, build their capacities on chosen topics, such as human rights due diligence, and engage in peer learning.