

Equality and Human Rights Commiission

UN Global Compact

Communication on engagement

June 2016

Statement of support for the UN Global Compact

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) is a signatory of the UN Global Compact and remains committed to the initiative and its principles.

As a National Human Rights Institution, the Commission has an important role to promote and protect human rights, including in relation to the activities of businesses.

This document describes the Commission's activities over the past two years to support the UN Global Compact principles and the UK Network.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Hilsenrath', with a stylized, wavy line extending from the end.

Rebecca Hilsenrath
Chief executive

About the Equality and Human Rights Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is a statutory body established under the Equality Act 2006. It operates independently to encourage equality and diversity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, and protect and promote human rights. It contributes to making and keeping Britain a fair society in which everyone, regardless of background, has an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential. The Commission enforces equality legislation on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. It encourages compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 and is accredited by the UN as an 'A status' National Human Rights Institution (NHRI).

As a NHRI, the Commission has a mandate to promote and protect human rights, including in relation to the activities of business.

Find out more at www.equalityhumanrights.com.

Commission activity on business and human rights 2014-16

We live in a country with a long history of upholding people's rights, valuing diversity and challenging intolerance. The Equality and Human Rights Commission seeks to maintain and strengthen this heritage while identifying and tackling areas where there is still unfair discrimination or where human rights are not being respected. We use a range of powers to do so, by providing advice and guidance to individuals, businesses and other organisations, reviewing the effectiveness of the law and taking legal enforcement action to clarify the law and address significant breaches of rights. We also promote, monitor and report on the seven UN human rights treaties signed by the UK.

The Commission work on business and human rights is informed by an external working group of business and human rights experts drawn from business, government and civil society. The Commission regularly reports progress on its business and human rights activities to the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI).

This section describes how the Commission supports the UN Global Compact principles using the prescribed categories.

Internalizing the UN Global Compact Principles

The Commission contracts goods and services from a wide range of suppliers. For the past four years, the Commission has used the SID4GOV online platform to annually monitor and assess the sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) actions of its suppliers. Key performance indicators include human rights, labour standards, environmental protections and ethical conduct.

The platform provides the suppliers with recommendations to improve their practice. The Commission uses this information to work with suppliers on improvements. This allows the Commission to demonstrate its commitment to sustainable business practices, and encourage suppliers to adopt sustainability practices.

Participation in the Global Compact UK Network

The Commission has participated in several Global Compact UK Network meetings and events to promote awareness and implementation of the UNGC principles. The Commission:

- provided information about its work on the impact of outsourcing on working conditions in the cleaning sector in Great Britain at the 'Living with the Living Wage' event in London in 2014;
- spoke about its human rights role and its work to support smaller and medium sized business understanding of the responsibility to respect human rights at the 'An Introduction to the UN Guiding Principles' event in Manchester in 2014;
- presented its evidence on poor employment conditions and lack of grievance arrangements in the meat processing and cleaning sectors at the 'Realising the Third Pillar' event in London in 2015. This also highlighted the

Commission's collaborative approach to working with the sectors to improve working conditions;

- met with UK Minister for Employment Relations and Consumer Affairs and government officials at a side meeting organised by the Global Compact UK Network during the 2014 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights in Geneva. The meeting acknowledged the importance of the Commission's work in highlighting businesses' domestic human rights impacts, such as labour exploitation in the British meat processing industry; and
- participated in the Global Compact UK Network's 'Operationalizing the UN Guiding Principles' training events in July 2014 and July 2015.

Engaging with business

The Commission's work programme covers a wide range of issues relevant to business and human rights:

- We launched 'Business and Human Rights: a five-step guide for company boards' in May 2016. We developed the guide through extensive consultation with company directors, advisers to company boards and investors. We will shortly publish guidance on human rights due diligence and company grievance mechanisms.
- We have conducted detailed examinations into key sectors of the British economy:
 - Our research into commercial cleaning sector found that some employers did not provide contracts of employment; failed to pay their employees in full, or to pay sickness or holiday leave entitlements. Many cleaning operatives are female migrants, who said they did not understand their rights. Many firms now outsource cleaning services, which puts a downward cost pressure on cleaning firms with an impact on working conditions and pay. To address these problems, we convened a taskforce bringing together representatives from cleaning firms, clients, trade bodies, trade unions and government to improve outsourcing and employment practices.
 - Our research into the meat and poultry sector found widespread evidence of exploitative labour practices and poor working conditions in the sector. The sector is reliant on agency workers, many of whom are migrant workers. We worked with an industry wide taskforce to secure improvements in working conditions and the treatment of employees and agency workers.
- We published our report examining board level recruitment and appointment practices in the 350 FTSE companies in March 2016. To complement this we also published a guide, 'How to improve board diversity: a six-step guide to good practice' explaining how companies can improve their appointment process and the diversity of their boards.
- We published our research in March 2016 on pregnancy and maternity discrimination and disadvantage in the workplace. The research was based on the experiences of employers and mothers across Britain. To improve employer and employee knowledge about rights and obligations we published guidance and toolkits about pregnancy and maternity issues at work. We are currently developing a campaign aimed at business to improve knowledge and practice.

- We published research in 2015 assessing the knowledge, attitudes and practices of small to medium-sized businesses in relation to equality and human rights and to inform the role of advice providers.

Partnership projects, special initiatives and work streams

The Commission sets up advisory groups consisting of representatives of business, government and civil society to inform its major employment-related projects.

Since 2010, the Commission has benefited from the support of an external working group of business and human rights experts drawn from business, government and civil society to inform the development of new resources specifically on human rights. The Global Compact UK Network has been an active member of this working group.

Looking ahead

The Commission's work programme covers a wide range of employment and human rights issues. These are set out in our Business Plan for 2016/17 and the basis for our position as an 'A' status accredited national human rights institution

The Commission will continue to engage with the UN Global Compact and the UK Network by:

- seeking opportunities to improve business understanding and practice on a range of equality and human rights related issues
- continuing to share expertise and learning with the UN Global Compact and its members