

Call for inputs for United Nations entities and specialized agencies

Working Group on Business and Human Rights Report to the 50th session of the Human Rights Council on *“COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learnt and moving forward”*

Introduction

The pandemic and the related severe socioeconomic consequences have been a test of leadership and service delivery for governments and businesses alike. It has highlighted existing inequalities, exacerbated them, and showed that protection of human rights is especially critical in times of crisis. This period has served as a reminder that, in times of crisis, human rights protection can be compromised leaving millions of people and communities vulnerable, in situations of fear and abuse, exposed to danger and the real risk of death.

The pandemic has demonstrated that to effectively protect human rights under such crisis conditions, standards and protection measures must not only be maintained but significantly strengthened. It is critical for States, businesses, and all stakeholders to learn the lessons of the pandemic and take all appropriate practical measures to limit the human cost of future crises and achieve solutions that save lives and protect human rights, even when crisis cannot be averted. The pandemic has been a human rights crisis of immense proportions, but it should also be a wake-up-call and trigger for States, the international community and business to take the necessary action that is commensurate to the challenge.

The United Nations’ Working Group on Business and Human Rights (the Working Group) repeatedly emphasised what is required from all relevant stakeholders to ensure responsible business conduct during the pandemic and in the recovery period¹.

Against this background, the Working Group decided to focus its forthcoming report to the 50th session of the Human Rights Council in June 2022 on the lessons learnt from the pandemic and the identification of opportunities and challenges related to protection,

¹ Including in the recommendations of the Working Group’s Information Note “A Roadmap for Responsible Recovery in Times of Crisis” (<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Business/WG/Responsible-recovery-information-note.pdf>), the statement of the Working Group “Ensuring that business respects human rights during the Covid-19 crisis and beyond: The relevance of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights” (<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25837&LangID=E>), as well as in other relevant work by human rights mechanisms and bodies, such as Special Procedures, Treaty Bodies as well as the OHCHR (<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Business/BusinessAndHR-COVID19.pdf>).

prevention, response, and redress for business-related human rights abuses based on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). It seeks to consider how the business and human rights agenda can contribute to efforts to build back better following the pandemic, and to address emerging new global crises on the horizon.

Call for input

The Working Group kindly requests that your organization provides its input by responding to the below attached questions to ohchr-wg-business@un.org by **24 February 2022**. Please indicate “**WG BHR - COVID-19 / UN**” in the email subject line; limit your contributions to a maximum of 2,500 words and if necessary, provide links to relevant documents or attach annexes.

Unless indicated otherwise, the responses received will be posted on the Working Group’s webpage in the language in which they are received.

The Working Group issued separate calls with similar questionnaires to States, businesses and business associations, unions, national human rights institutions, and UN entities.

Questions:

- 1) What were the most significant challenges and obstacles during the pandemic and the recovery period related to ensuring an enabling environment for business to respect human rights? What were the most important lessons learnt from the crisis and how can these lessons help in addressing business-related human rights abuses linked to future crises?
- 2) What policies and measures did your organization use to address business-related human rights abuses? Please outline any multilateral and international cooperation efforts, and steps to provide financial and technical support to States in times of crisis and during the recovery period. How can these efforts serve as an example for how to both build back better and entrench an enabling environment for sustainable development? What lessons have been learned for handling future crises in a spirit of global solidarity and shared responsibility?
- 3) What opportunities would allow your organization to contribute to build back better while ensuring stronger and more decisive action to protect human rights in the context of business activities particularly for those individuals and communities at heightened risk of discrimination or marginalization?
- 4) What efforts were made by your organization to engage with all stakeholders in a constructive and meaningful dialogue, including States, businesses, and the civil society sector, to address business-related human rights abuses in crisis situations, to build alternatives for recovery and to prevent human rights abuses in future crisis situations?
