

B-Tech Company Community of Practice

2022 Year-End Review

OVERVIEW

In 2022, The B-Tech Project led a second year of the tech company Community of Practice (COP), convening representatives of thirteen large tech companies to discuss implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), including various aspects of Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD), end-use and remedy. While the COP in 2021 focused on feeding into the development of the B-Tech [foundational papers](#), the 2022 COP focused more directly on specific challenges the COP participants face.

2022 DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES

A number of unexpected issues emerged over the course of the year which impacted the COP:

- The war in Ukraine heavily occupied COP participants' time and attention, both at the start of the conflict and throughout the year. B-Tech devoted time during a few sessions to discuss the challenges the conflict elicited, both in terms of ad hoc policies and business practices in the affected region and beyond, and in June the group convened for a special session with external experts on heightened HRDD and International Humanitarian Law.
- B-Tech began 2022 with the enthusiasm and momentum of the 2021 tech company leader [dialogue](#) with the then-High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet. After exploring plans with COP participants for a second convening with the High Commissioner, which would focus on the role of senior management in meeting a company's "Responsibility to Respect" role under Pillar Two of the UNGPs, plans to hold a second meeting were suspended once the High Commissioner announced that she would step down by the end of August. The new High Commissioner, Volker Türk, has expressed interest in connecting with both the B-Tech Project and the COP, and plans are underway to realize this in 2023.
- One of the most active companies in the COP, Twitter, saw its entire human rights team laid off in November. Other large tech companies including some members of the COP saw layoffs or continue to experience hiring freezes. UN Human Rights' advocacy efforts to support human rights teams, policies, and investments within these companies include a [high-profile letter](#) to Elon Musk from High Commissioner Türk.
- The B-Tech Team continued to operate with limited resources; this modest capacity, coupled with the departure of a key team member in the second half of 2022, had an impact on the ability to extract learnings from the COP sessions.

COP STRUCTURE AND MODALITIES

Due to the ongoing restrictions and concerns stemming from the Coronavirus pandemic, the COP meetings continued to be Zoom-based throughout 2022, which allowed for polls, small groups, and plenary-type conversations. In 2023, the plan is to continue to convene virtual sessions but also to convene in-person where possible.

In advance of each COP session, an agenda was shared with participants. As per the practice established from the outset of the COP, each session began with a B-Tech representative reading out an anti-trust statement, delineating which topics are in or out of scope for discussion. In addition to topics scheduled for discussion, each session also included brief updates by COP participants. This allowed for informal presentations by company representatives, expressing priorities and challenges in implementing the UNGPs, with the objective of aiding participants to find commonalities in their work and share learning.

Sessions were not recorded, although notes were taken for B-Tech learning purposes only.

PARTICIPANTS

The core group of the COP remained largely the same from 2021, with the addition of the Spain-based telecommunications provider Telefónica:

Apple	Ericsson	Meta	Telefónica
Cisco	Google	Microsoft	Twitter
Cloudflare	Hewlett Packard Enterprise	Salesforce	Verizon
			Vodafone

Most COP companies met their participation commitment by including one or more representatives in each session. The May 17th session, which focused on the roles of non-human rights colleagues in the human rights due diligence process, saw the participation of numerous “guests” from COP companies. Other sessions included outside experts, including representatives from Mazars, Pluto & Associates, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Global Network Initiative (GNI), and the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB).

COP SESSIONS: DATES AND THEMES

COP Q1 Session 1: February 28 — *HRDD, Enterprise Risk Management and Compliance*

COP Q2 Session 2: March 14 — *Operationalizing Severity*

COP Q2 Session 1: May 3 — *Stakeholder Engagement Workstream; World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Human Rights*

COP Q2 Session 2: May 17 — *HRDD and Remedy on End Use; the Role of Key Colleagues*

COP Special Session: June 21 — *HRDD in Conflict Settings*

COP Q3 Session: September 12 — *B-Tech and COP Participant Priorities*

COP 2023: A LOOK AHEAD

Through the COP engagement with tech companies, the B-Tech Project has been able to provide space for authoritative guidance on the operationalization of the UNGPs in the tech sector, as well as an opportunity for representatives across the industry to learn from each other and from some of the leading advisors in Business & Human Rights.

In 2023 the COP will continue functioning in its current set up. To complement the COP and to extend B-Tech engagement with a broader and more diverse range of tech companies from different geographic regions, B-Tech is also establishing a series of webinars open to interested companies, or individuals seeking to implement the UNGPs within their company. This B-Tech **Peer Learning Platform** (PLP) will also see the participation of COP participants, who can share experiences and lessons learned in seeking to operationalize the UNGPs with a wider group of companies. The objectives of the PLP include expanding the number of tech companies engaging with the UNGPs informed by the B-Tech foundational guidance, support capacity building within these companies, brokering connections among human rights functions across the industry, and geographic outreach to tech firms headquartered globally. B-Tech will also continue with its Civil Society Organization (CSO) Working Group, in order to ensure that perspectives and input from the global digital rights sector contribute to the greater B-Tech conversation.

Contact

For further information about the B-Tech Company Community of Practice please write to 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](#).