



## Climate Action and Human Rights

### Transition to renewable energy

The transition away from oil and gas to alternative energy sources is necessary to reach the target to limit the global temperature increase by 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels as set out by the Paris Agreement. However, the scale of the transition needed, coupled with the speed in which it must occur, creates challenges for companies to conduct effective human rights due diligence.

This briefing presents an overview of some of the potential human rights risks associated with the transition to renewable energy, as well as the challenges to effective human rights due diligence, and provides some insights from business practice.

#### Potential human rights risks associated with mining

Mining the cobalt, lithium, nickel, graphite, and copper needed for batteries and wind turbines will require drastic increases in mining globally.

Human rights risks associated with the mining of the minerals needed to fuel the transition to renewable energy include:

- child and forced labour in mining operations
- hazardous working conditions in mining and processing operations
- threats to livelihoods for communities around mine sites
- exposure to environmental degradation related to land and biodiversity loss
- water shortages for communities; pollution of vital resources
- violations of human rights by security forces
- exacerbating human rights violations in conflict-affected or high-risk areas
- harms to vulnerable communities, including Indigenous Peoples

#### Potential human rights risks across the renewable value chain

- **Polysilicon** is a material commonly used in solar panels and is linked to alleged state-sponsored forced labour in half of the locations where it is manufactured.
- **Transport and logistics** can be linked to worker exploitation, the payment of recruitment fees, hazardous working conditions, gender discrimination and discrimination against minority groups.
- **Deployment** of renewable energy projects has also been linked to land “grabs” and the acquisition of Indigenous Peoples’ lands without free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), interference with sacred and traditional sites, environmental destruction, and biodiversity loss.
- **Decommissioning** renewable project sites can lead to adverse impacts on Indigenous and other communities due to failure to properly restore land rights or dispose of project waste.

## Challenges to human rights due diligence

Effective human rights due diligence in the transition to renewable energy is challenging because of the scale of the transition and the speed with which it must occur. In practice, this includes large-scale mining of critical minerals, rapid deployment of wind and solar farms, and a transition out of oil and gas projects leaving some workers and communities behind.

In this context, human rights due diligence may be seen as a barrier to a rapid transition. Internally, business practitioners may need to navigate perceived tensions between the desire to transition to renewable energy quickly to meet climate targets and the company's responsibility to respect human rights. Efforts to ensure effective human rights due diligence is undertaken may lead to internal pushback from colleagues who see decarbonisation as the priority and perceive human rights as slowing or interfering with the transition process.

## Actions companies can take

- Business practitioners should seek to apply the human rights lens early in the development of renewable energy projects. Familiarising colleagues about human rights risks and opportunities early on can help to gain internal buy-in for human rights due diligence throughout the lifetime of a project.
- For sites for solar and wind farms, companies should seek to implement appropriate and legitimate FPIC processes.
- Where climate action involves new business activities for companies, they should adapt existing human rights due diligence processes to reflect the context of the new activity.
- The transition to renewable energy may require companies to transition out of assets or geographies, or business relationships. If that is the case, companies should seek to responsibly engage with a wide range of stakeholders prior to any decision.

