



# Bridging the gap between respect for human rights and climate - a framework for action

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The need for just transitions and rights-respecting climate action is now widely recognised, and a welcome focus on how to achieve them has been prominent in the lead-up to and during COP27.

In our conversations with companies around the world, we see this reflected in practitioners' interest in better connecting human rights and climate within their organisations – recognising that a joined-up approach offers a dynamic and robust foundation for transition. Too often, these areas of work progress in siloes.

The focus of practitioners' interest is on how.

It may not be obvious where to start. Or what, exactly, a joined-up approach should look like. Or whether it is practicable. How to bridge the conceptual differences between respect for human rights and climate action. How to overcome internal barriers – for example, relating to organisational structure or ways of working. The extent to which key standards, such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), can support efforts to connect human rights and climate.

Increasingly, we hear a need for a simple framework that can help business practitioners – in particular, companies' human rights managers – to identify any gaps and opportunities to better connect human rights and climate.

We see three clear focus areas that should inform an initial mapping, set out in our [Framework for Action](#).

## **Climate-sensitive respect for human rights**

Efforts to embed respect for human rights in the company's policies, due diligence processes and grievance mechanisms should be designed with reference to the external environment and the company's operating context – which includes the implications of climate change.

Companies should systematically consider how climate change is affecting – and will affect – their operating context and stakeholders.

For example, how will the working conditions and livelihoods of workers in agricultural supply chains be impacted by warmer temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and more severe weather events? What about the health, safety and access to essentials of workers in locations experiencing extreme heat, or at risk of fires, floods and other disasters? Or the rights of communities affected by drought and water scarcity? What impact will climate-related migration and displacement have on local communities – and how might it affect migrant workers' risk of vulnerability or marginalisation?

Insights from scenario planning exercises may provide a valuable starting point to consider such questions. Ensuring senior leaders understand the value of [managing human rights risks during a crisis or disaster](#) should also be a priority.

## **Rights-respecting climate action**

Human rights due diligence should encompass the entire business – including action taken in response to climate change. However, most businesses are still working to ensure their human rights risk management is systematic and comprehensive – and the climate dimension is a common gap.

Companies should map the decisions and actions they are taking in response to climate change and check if they have effective measures in place to know and show how they are managing any human rights risks.

The human rights risks associated with the energy transition (both transition in and transition out) will be front of mind for many practitioners. Ensuring human rights due diligence is undertaken on these areas of the company's decisions and actions should be a priority. Less obvious areas of climate action that appear to be gaps for some companies include the transition to green transport (i.e. electric and other low-emissions vehicles), packaging and recycling, and carbon trading (schemes based on reforestation, for example, may impact the rights of Indigenous peoples and other communities dependent on forests and land for their livelihoods and cultural practices).

By proactively identifying human rights risks associated with climate action, companies can put in place measures to address the risks to people while also responding to climate change.

## Embedding a better-connected approach

To enable both climate-sensitive respect for human rights and rights-respecting climate action, businesses need to embed a joined-up approach. Companies should ensure that their leadership, governance frameworks, coordination mechanisms and capability (both internal and appropriate external expertise) support efforts to better connect human rights and climate.

Simple initial steps can be impactful. For example:

- Finding terminology that resonates across the business – the language of 'resilience' or use of the 'doughnut model' can help senior management and colleagues appreciate the value of better-connecting human rights and climate.
- Cross-functional workshops to discuss vision, strategy and roadmaps can bring colleagues with different but complementary areas of expertise together to pool knowledge and ideas.
- Raising awareness of both the 'people' and 'planet' dimensions of sustainability can help effect shifts in culture and mindset.
- Bringing the human rights and climate specialists at corporate level together under one manager can create a foundation to develop a shared vision, achieve cross-familiarisation of key concepts, approaches and challenges and increase confidence and comfort discussing both areas and their connections.

Getting these connections in place should also help position the company to navigate more effectively the changing legal landscape, in which legislation that addresses human rights, environment and climate together is becoming increasingly common.

**Download GBI's [Framework for Action](#).**