



The Bridge: The GCBHR Human Rights Defender Advisory Service

Integrating human rights defenders in human rights due diligence processes

Companies need to deliver meaningful stakeholder engagement and conduct effective risk management as part of mandatory human rights due diligence processes.

The Challenge: Current data sources for understanding human rights risks are decreasing in quality and not sufficiently granular. Without local insights, companies can face blind spots that lead to project delays, reputational damage, and legal liabilities. Human rights defenders possess unique local expertise that is often an untapped resource for companies as human rights defenders lack safe channels for sharing their concerns with companies. Their integration is a key component of meaningful stakeholder engagement as required in emerging regulations.

The Solution: As an academic institution, the [Geneva Center for Business and Human Rights](#) (GCBHR) serves as a neutral intermediary. By providing a safe, confidential channel for companies to access the expertise of local human rights defenders the GCBHR serves as a bridge to enhance information sharing between companies and human rights defenders.

The GCBHR as a bridge between human rights defenders and companies

Independent Neutrality: The GCBHR has extensive experience providing rigorous research and engaging with companies. As an academic institution, we provide facilitated engagement with human rights defenders to better understand human rights risks on the ground. We integrate knowledge, expertise, and insights from a broad range of civil society and independent experts to inform our approach.

Gap Analysis: The "bridge" service allows companies to gain insights into the human rights perspectives regarding specific geographies or communities that may be a blind spot, such as conflict drivers or environmental issues that may be overlooked. For example, when a company plans to set up a new production site or engage with a new supplier in a region where it has not previously operated, understanding the human rights context and potential risks can significantly help in addressing material business risks and developing effective human rights due diligence processes that ensure respect for human rights.

Knowledge adds value to corporate decision making: In our pilot projects for this service, we found conflict risks in multiple instances that routine due diligence processes missed. While the operating companies complied with the bare minimum of in-country regulations, genuine and informed engagement with communities was lacking. As a result, underlying tensions if not addressed create potential conflict and business risks. Understanding these underlying issues is critical to adequately assess business risks and responses.



Benefits for companies

- **Strengthen supply chain resilience:** Ground level intelligence enhances supply chain resilience. Businesses thrive in environments when there is respect for human rights, including the rule of law and civic space. Human rights defenders can provide unique insights into local, regional, and global issues which may be blind spots for companies.
- **Risk mitigation:** Through GCBHR's facilitated engagement companies will have insights that can enhance their ability to anticipate and respond to emerging threats and prevent risks that could otherwise generate incalculable costs for companies.
- **Reputation:** Companies can choose to publicly acknowledge participation in the service either with the human rights defenders or publicly. Engagement can help provide assurances of the company's commitment to robust stakeholder engagement and addressing human rights risks.

How to submit a request

Define the scope: Companies request insights into specific countries, regions, sites, or issue areas. Companies outline their specific interests and ask questions to guide the GCBHR's interviews with human rights defenders.

Methodology

- **Confidential framework:** The service will be conducted in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity for human rights defenders and the company when engaging with either party. Companies may opt for different levels of disclosure to gain sensitive insights through an anonymized process that protects the company's interest and the safety of local experts.
- **Research and interviews:** The GCBHR will conduct desk research and engage human rights defender organizations to identify suitable contacts and conduct interviews.
- **Synthesize:** The insights will be anonymized and summarized in a strategic briefing paper for the company highlighting local perspectives, situational warnings, and actionable recommendations to address the risks.

What we deliver

Briefing paper: The GCBHR provides a briefing paper including:

- Local contextual analysis of key human rights issues in the relevant geographical context tailored to the company's sector. Relevant references to guide mitigation strategies.
- Industry specific human rights risk issues analysis integrating local context.



- Human rights defender's perspective, through verbatim anonymized insights on the role of business in the context at stake, currency and legacy concerns, and expectations from local communities.
- **Engagement** (optional): The GCBHR will provide options for facilitated dialogue. The GCBHR can organize dialogues on specific challenges, themes, and proposed solutions in human rights due diligence processes between the company and human rights defenders. A company can opt for full anonymity or allow the GCBHR to share the name of the company or sector with the human rights defenders to generate further insights, recommendations, and solutions.

Costs

Service fees and distribution: Companies will pay a service fee to the GCBHR for each assessment request, which the GCBHR will share a portion of with human rights defender organizations engaged in the service. The overall fee for one assessment is 10,000 CHF. The assessment will be available within a few weeks, depending on the request and context.

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