



UNIVERSITÉ  
DE GENÈVE

GENEVA SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS  
AND MANAGEMENT

GENEVA CENTER  
FOR **BUSINESS**  
& **HUMAN**  
**RIGHTS**

# The Business and Human Rights Clinic

A Toolkit  
for Business Schools

## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

The Geneva Center for Business and Human Rights at the University of Geneva (GCBHR) developed the business and human rights clinic (BHR clinic) concept in 2020 and launched the first BHR clinic at the Geneva School for Economics and Management (GSEM) in 2021, led by Dr. Berit Knaak and Prof. Dr. Dorothée Baumann-Pauly. The insights and success factors outlined in this toolkit are drawn from the experiences of four BHR clinics. We have created this practical toolkit to inspire business schools to integrate human rights in business education through this novel concept.

This toolkit describes both the concept and the process for setting up clinical education on the topic of business and human rights. For further questions about our work, please feel free to reach out to us at [gsem-gcbhr@unige.ch](mailto:gsem-gcbhr@unige.ch).

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# The Business and Human Rights Clinic

A Toolkit  
for Business Schools

Berit Knaak and Dorothée Baumann-Pauly

## — PREFACE —

In recent years business school educators have become increasingly focused on the values of experiential learning as an added dimension to in-class instruction. The logic is clear. We all learn by doing, by applying the lessons we have been taught and applying them in practice. This toolkit describes a breakthrough initiative by the Geneva Center for Business and Human Rights (GCBHR) for applying experiential learning to the emerging field of business and human rights (BHR).

As background on this field, attention to human rights emerged after World War II and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which institutionalized universal rights, meaning that everyone on earth is born with these rights and owns them regardless of where they were born or live.

The discussion of human rights in the first decades focused on governments, but since the 1980s, as the global economy expanded, two points became increasingly obvious. First, in too many countries, governments are either unable or unwilling to protect their own people. Second, as multinational companies expand their operations to these countries, they also have a role to play in ensuring basic rights for the people with whom they interact – the workers producing their products and the communities where they operate.

The BHR field is still in its early stages of developing rules of the road for global companies. The fit is not easy or obvious because not all standards applicable to states apply to companies. Moreover, the business models for global companies vary from one industry to another.

In 2011, the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights established the responsibility of businesses to address human rights in their own operations. In spring 2024, the European Union took an important next step when it adopted the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive as part of a broader effort to find the right balance between governments and the private sector in addressing human rights issues relating to corporate conduct.

*“Future business leaders need to be well schooled both in the substantive content of human rights and how it relates to the private sector.”*

It is in this context that attention to human rights finds its way into business school education.

These are 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges and future business leaders need to be well schooled both in the substantive content of human rights and how it relates to the private sector. They also will need to consider how companies can best manage changing public expectations with respect to these issues and the evolving relationship between government regulators and business conduct.

In 2013, I was fortunate to be offered a professorship at NYU Stern School of Business, and to open the first human rights center at a business school. Based in Switzerland, Dorothée Baumann-Pauly joined our embryonic endeavor in its first year and in 2019 she spearheaded the creation of the GCBHR. Together we are building a network of business schools interested in developing teaching and research models pertaining to human rights, now with representatives in more than 35 countries.

The GCBHR is leading the way applying the now-time-tested model of experiential learning to the evolving field of business and human rights. One of its most exciting innovations was the initiation of a BHR clinic. This toolkit describes how the GCBHR constructed the clinic model and worked collaboratively with global businesses and multistakeholder initiatives to apply this model in practice. What the GCBHR has done offers a promising roadmap for business schools and companies seeking to collaborate with students and educators to build the foundation for this important new field.

Michael Posner

Jerome Kohlberg Professor of Ethics and Finance at NYU Stern  
Director of the NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights



— INTRODUCTION —

Advancing human rights in business education  
with a business and human rights clinic

The main objective of a BHR clinic is to **empower tomorrow's business leaders to manage human rights** in corporate practice. Human rights challenges are among the most complex and underestimated business challenges of our time. For example, businesses often lack expertise in areas such as reporting on human rights impacts, remediating labor rights violations in global supply chains, training employees on adherence to human rights standards, aligning business models with the needs of a vulnerable migrant workforce, balancing the need for security with the right to privacy, or operating in conflict and post-conflict societies. Yet, these issues are becoming increasingly relevant for future business success. A BHR clinic institutionalizes human rights within the business curriculum with a focus on developing applied human rights management skills.

Equipping future leaders with the skills and practical knowledge to address human rights challenges also helps meet emerging legal requirements for human rights due diligence. A BHR clinic allows students to develop practical approaches that ensure that human rights are integral to the foundation of business practices.

*"I want to work in a company one day, but I want business to contribute to sustainable solutions for business and society. This program allows me to learn about solutions and practice key skills."*

— Student at the University of Geneva and participant in the BHR clinic

The benefits of clinical education are best documented in U.S. law schools<sup>1</sup>, where clinics emerged in the 1960s to complement the traditional legal education. Law clinics in Europe followed a few decades later. In 2021, the GCBHR pioneered the first human rights clinic in a business school by establishing the BHR clinic

within the Geneva School for Economics and Management at the University of Geneva (GSEM).

The human rights context is well-suited to clinical education. It requires **translating principles to practice**. Clinics enable the transfer of theoretical knowledge to real-world settings and help students develop applied leadership skills.

A **BHR clinic offers a safe space for companies** to explore innovative solutions to human rights challenges in business. For students, a clinic allows discussions on human rights challenges in the safety of the classroom while gaining hands-on experience in managing complex business challenges.

BHR clinic projects **address complex and pressing human rights topics**, demonstrating that business schools can integrate projects of great practical relevance and invest in active exchanges between academia and practice. The **design of clinics is inclusive and participatory**, connecting companies with students who expect businesses to respect human rights and actively contribute to solving societal challenges. The **outcomes of clinics are directly applicable** in practice, proving that human rights challenges can be effectively addressed by business.

Students, business schools and partner organizations stand to gain significantly from embracing the BHR clinic concept. This toolkit provides business schools with a comprehensive guide to creating that mutually beneficial environment through the establishment of a BHR clinic.

The business and human rights clinic concept  
and its benefits



The BHR clinic trains students to develop concrete solutions to complex human rights management challenges.

### What is a BHR clinic?

The BHR clinic offers students hands-on experience in business and human rights (BHR) management, bridging the gap between theory and practice. It incentivizes action-oriented research and enables closer collaboration between academia and the corporate world.

#### Definition of BHR clinics

BHR clinics are elective courses within the academic curriculum that allow a small group of students to jointly work on a real-world project for academic credits, under the guidance of a senior researcher. Clinics are conducted in collaboration with a partner organization, which proposes the project and defines the deliverables based on a current, real-life business challenge. The partner organization also engages with the students, helping guide their progress.

Clinical education is a **pedagogical innovation** that offers a supervised, applied knowledge and skill-building experience in close collaboration with practitioners. Clinics expose students to a professional business context and an actual human rights challenge faced by a business. Participating in a BHR clinic creates ample opportunities for students to develop both hard and soft skills, which can be critical in their future careers.

The BHR clinic is organized in collaboration with an external organization, i.e., a partner organization. In a business school setting, the partner organization is ideally, but not necessarily, from the private sector. The partner organization outlines a real-life business challenge for a selected team of students. The students then work on this challenge over a period of five to six months, with each student cohort addressing a different, concrete human rights issue.

The work of the BHR clinic should lead to **tangible outputs** that can be applied in practice. The format of the output depends on the challenge: the objective is to develop a concrete, actionable solution that is grounded in research and applicable to the partner's specific operating context. The outcome should advance the understanding of and the respect for human rights in business. Ideally, its insights gained can be transferred to organizations facing similar challenges.

#### Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

*The deliverables of the BHR clinics included, among others, training material, a rating methodology, and a survey to assess workers' rights along with an associated action plan.*

### Participants in the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

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**Partner organization:** The BHR clinic at the University of Geneva partners with one organization per clinic, represented by a designated point of contact (often the person who oversees human rights topics within the organization). This contact is responsible for involving relevant colleagues.

**Academic supervisors:** Based on our experience, leading a clinic typically requires one professor, who is present at key moments (including for the project kick-off, milestone reviews, and project workshops), one senior academic supervisor at 50% capacity for six months (who serves as the clinic lead and main point of contact for both the students and the partner organization), and optionally one additional senior supervisor at 20% capacity (who provides relevant subject matter expertise).

**Student team:** We found that the ideal team size comprises six to eight students, selected based on their motivation and complementary skills, and ideally representing diverse educational and cultural backgrounds.

**External guests:** Depending on the challenge, one to three topic experts may be invited to the mid-project workshop or to review an intermediate version of the deliverable.

**Interview partners:** During the research phase, students interview relevant colleagues within the partner organization, as well as additional experts from various stakeholder groups who can provide insight on, for example, the selected human rights issue, the industry, or a specific geography.

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Although the BHR clinic resembles a consultancy project, there are important distinctions. The partner organization does not pay for the project but instead offers a donation to help fund the pedagogical concept. Clinics have a fixed end date defined by the academic semester schedule, rather than the status of the deliverables. Students work for academic credit and receive no monetary compensation, and the results of the BHR clinic are not intended for commercial use. The development of the deliverable is a process of co-creation: while the student team takes the lead, the BHR clinic also relies on the commitment of the partner organization.

*“In a previous internship at a company, I realized how important responsible management is. I want to learn more about how to implement responsible management in practice.”*

— Student at the University of Geneva  
and participant in the BHR clinic

## What are the benefits of a BHR clinic?

BHR clinic collaborations generate unique benefits for students, partner organizations, and the business school hosting a BHR clinic.

For the business school, a BHR clinic underscores its mission to create relevant knowledge for society and educate skilled and responsible professionals. The BHR clinic enables partnering with organizations that recognize the importance of addressing human rights challenges in business and fosters a close exchange between the clinic partner and a team of exceptional students.

### Benefits for students

Participating in a BHR clinic offers business students a valuable opportunity for learning by doing under the guidance of experienced academic staff. Students gain and practice and critical skills for success in a professional environment, including:

*“We appreciate the responsibility that has been given to us to provide the company with practical recommendations and solutions. Thanks to these collaborations with industry experts, we have acquired new skills that advance our academic and professional careers. Hence the relevance of having a BHR clinic in a business school.”*

— Collective statement from participants in the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

- Students apply their theoretical knowledge to real-life business cases while gaining familiarity with corporate processes, structures and complexities. At the same time, they build expertise in specific business and human rights topics.
- In the process of developing the BHR clinic deliverables, students hone their research, writing and presentation skills. They enhance their analytical skills and their ability to organize data and findings, and they learn to translate insights into management strategies.
- Students acquire project management skills, such as task breakdown, time and expectation management, teamwork, stakeholder engagement and communication.
- By interacting closely with practitioners and applying new skills in a safe and supportive environment, students build confidence that projects into their future careers.

### Benefits for the partner organization

For the partner organization, BHR clinics offer well-researched insights and practical recommendations on specific topics of interest, as well as extended interactions with Generation Z and experts in human rights within the corporate context:

- The partner organization receives a concrete, solution-focused project deliverable that is directly applicable to its needs and practices.
- The partner organization gets access to state-of-the-art academic expertise and to experts specialized in human rights in the corporate context.

- The BHR clinic partner benefits from talented young minds who think outside the box and offer fresh and independent perspectives on business and human rights challenges. These perspectives come from a culturally diverse and interdisciplinary group of master students.
- Partnering in the BHR clinic provides organizations with a concrete way to demonstrate their commitment to human rights. Additionally, it supports the education and employability of the next generation of professionals, contributing to a more skilled and better prepared pool of candidates.

*“The BHR clinic was a real success for us,  
and was worth the time we put in.  
We benefited in three concrete ways:*

*First, the immediate output provided by  
the BHR clinic is readily applicable  
to our business context.*

*Second, the coordination for the BHR clinic  
contributed to very good internal exchanges  
between our human rights teams and  
our security teams, and this collaboration  
reflected positively to the Executive Committee.*

*Third, we created valuable relationships with  
academia and in the industry.”*

— Partner organization for the BHR clinic at GSEM

### Benefits for the business school

For the business school hosting the BHR clinic, the collaboration with the partner organization helps embed the school within society and strengthens its educational programs:

- Collaborations between academia and practice highlight the real-world relevance of the business school. Working on applied business challenges also makes the school more attractive to students who value such practical offerings.
- Over the course of the BHR clinic, the business school forms close working relationships with practitioners which can lead to additional benefits beyond the clinic collaboration.
- High-profile collaborations enhance the school's reputation, thereby raising the profile of its academic programs.

*“Finding ways to apply theory  
and gain practical responsible  
management skills is very important  
to me. The master program at GSEM  
offers several opportunities to do so,  
such as the BHR clinic, and  
that is why I chose this program.”*

— GSEM student and participant  
in the BHR clinic

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**Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva**  
*Approximately 40% of students in the annual cohort of the MSc  
in Responsible Management applied for the BHR clinic.*  
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## Why should there be BHR clinics in business schools?

Companies are increasingly expected to **address human rights impacts in their global business operations**. Legislators, investors, and civil society demand greater transparency and accountability, while also seeking positive examples of companies integrating respect for human rights into their business models. Against this background, business students are eager to acquire high-demand applied management skills.

*“Our studies are often theoretical, so the BHR clinic offers a great opportunity to see how responsibility is incorporated into business in practice. I also applied to see what challenges arise when trying to integrate human rights, as I am sure there are complications that have not occurred to me before.”*

— Student at the University of Geneva and participant in the BHR clinic

Identifying and mitigating human rights risks is often complex and challenging for companies. Business schools are well-positioned to **develop human rights expertise and new management skills** necessary to navigate such challenges. The BHR clinic fosters a two-way exchange between academia and practice, enhancing the development of relevant human rights expertise.

The unique pedagogical model of the BHR clinic **fully immerses students in corporate practice** offering an experience that is difficult to simulate in the classroom. Beyond working closely with peers and academic staff, students engage directly with a team of business professionals from the partner organization, who are facing a concrete human rights management challenge.

Each clinic project tasks students with developing practical deliverables that advance human rights in business and create tangible impact on corporate practices. The opportunity to change business as usual is a key motivator for students participating in the BHR clinic.

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Implementing a business and human rights clinic  
at a business school

Preparing well for the BHR clinic is key to its success. Depending on available resources, business schools can consider offering one clinic per academic year or one per semester. This chapter of the toolkit provides an example of how a BHR clinic can be implemented, based on the experiences of four BHR clinics completed successfully at the University of Geneva.

Organizers of BHR clinics in business schools should allocate five to six months for implementing a clinic, from the kick-off meeting to the handover of the final deliverable. Preparations leading up to the kick-off should begin well in advance, including selecting the partner organization, refining the challenge for the clinic, and reviewing student applications — all of which require ample time.

### Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

#### TIMELINE OF THE BHR CLINIC

February–June (or rolling basis)

Partner acquisition and challenge selection

June–August

Administrative preparations (e.g., collaboration and non-disclosure agreement between the partner organization and the university)

Mid-September–mid-October

Student application phase

End of October

Welcome meeting (student team and academic supervisors)

Early November

Kick-off meeting (partner organization, student team and supervisors)

November–December

Research phase (including interviews and analysis of findings)

January

Mid-project workshop (partner organization, student team, academic supervisors and selected experts)

December–February

Exam periods and semester break

February–March

Knowledge application phase and development of the BHR clinic deliverables

End of March

Final project workshop (partner organization, student team and supervisors)

April

Finalization of deliverables (potentially including a pilot test)

End of April

Debrief (student team and academic supervisors) and closing meeting (partner organization and academic supervisors)

## Preparing the BHR clinic

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Business schools considering offering a BHR clinic must first define the general set-up, including embedding the BHR clinic in the university's curriculum and securing a robust funding model. Further preparations for each BHR clinic involve finding a partner organization and a suitable challenge, adhering to administrative procedures for collaborations, and selecting the student team.

### Embedding the BHR clinic at a business school

The specific arrangements for embedding a BHR clinic into the curriculum need to be coordinated with the host institution, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach. In general, offering a BHR clinic is best suited for the master level where students can draw on more experience from their studies and will soon enter the workforce.

#### Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

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Integrating the BHR clinic into business school curriculum:

**Course level:** The BHR clinic was offered as an elective course within the Master of Science in Responsible Management program. It counted towards the special distinction of "Sustainable Business and Human Rights".

**Credits and grading:** Students received 6 ECTS upon successful completion. The BHR clinic was graded on a "pass" or "fail" basis, which is allowed for selected elective courses at the University of Geneva.

**Eligibility:** The BHR clinic primarily targeted students enrolled in the management master program. In one instance, a student from a different program was accepted, and this experience showed that an interdisciplinary team can be beneficial. Exchange students were eligible as well, although aligning their exchange period with the clinic dates proved challenging in practice.

**Duration:** From project kick-off to the final presentation, the average duration of the BHR clinic was five to six months. The student application process began a month in advance. The BHR clinic schedule were determined according to the academic semester, with less intensive periods during exam weeks and semester breaks.

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Establishing a BHR clinic requires adequate staffing and funding:

- **Staffing.** Running a BHR clinic requires at least one senior academic supervisor who leads the BHR clinic and can commit approximately 50% of their time to the project during its course, as well as a professor who remains informed of the BHR clinic's progress, engages in all key moments of the BHR Clinic, and acts as a sparring partner by providing expertise and authority. Depending on the concrete challenge, involving another academic supervisor with relevant expertise in the selected topic can be beneficial.

The role of the academic supervisor is to guide, not instruct, thereby empowering students to work independently and creatively. Compared to the average class size in conventional teaching, the smaller number of students in a BHR clinic allows for more interaction among students as well as between students and academic supervisors.

- **Funding.** Offering a BHR clinic is resource-intensive and requires adequate financial resources. Academic independence remains an essential criterion, so funding should ideally come from independent or, and at the very least, from diversified sources. Business schools can opt for a funding model that aligns with their funding principles and institutional policies.

University contributions can range from providing classrooms to funding the position of a clinical professor. Additional funding can come from governmental organizations, foundations that recognize the value of clinical education, or individual donors.

The partner organization should also be asked to contribute financially to clinical education at the business school to ensure their commitment throughout the BHR clinic.

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#### Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

*All financial contributions were directed towards supporting clinical education in general, rather than being designated to a specific BHR clinic.*

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### Identifying the partner organization and the clinic challenge

To select a committed partner organization and a suitable BHR challenge for students, the following steps are necessary:

- **Promoting the BHR clinic to potential partner organizations.** Given that the Clinic is an unfamiliar concept to most partner organizations, **promoting the BHR clinic** requires active engagement from the clinic organizers. This can include one-on-one networking, attending dedicated business and human rights events, and sharing information through business communities such as the national UN Global Compact network. **Providing information materials**, such as brochures<sup>2</sup>, examples of deliverables and testimonials from previous partners, can help persuade organizations to participate as a partner of the BHR clinic. **Personal interaction** is indispensable to overcome any concerns about discussing sensitive human rights topics. A reasonable timeframe for starting to solicit potential challenges is six months prior to the clinic.

- **Selecting a challenge for the clinic.** Organizations interested in the BHR clinic submit a **challenge proposal** (two to three pages) that includes a short description of the organization, the specific human rights challenge, a paragraph explaining the challenge's relevance to the organization and what has been done so far to address it, and the expectations for the project deliverable. Offering a scoping call with the potential partner can be an effective way to refine the challenge. When **selecting a challenge**, criteria such as relevance, specificity, feasibility (given the available time, resources, and expertise) and potential impact should be considered.

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#### Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

*The selection of the partner organization for the BHR clinic was not carried out by the clinic supervisors themselves, as they are closely involved in defining the challenge. Instead, a recommendation for a challenge was made by a selection committee consisting of academic members of the GCBHR's Advisory Council. The committee evaluated the different proposals and provided feedback for fine-tuning the challenge.*

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- **Organizing the BHR clinic with the selected partner organization.** Once a partner is selected, it is essential to discuss logistics with that partner, including assigning key contacts in the organization, outlining communication methods and finalizing **formal agreements** (such as collaboration and non-disclosure agreements). One of the earlier steps should be **deciding on key dates** in the BHR clinic, for example, for the kick-off meeting ideally held on-site at the partner organization's premises, the mid-project workshop, and, if possible, the final workshop. **Preparing for the kick-off phase** helps set the BHR clinic on a positive trajectory and generate momentum from the very beginning. The partner should be ready to introduce the challenge, provide pre-reads for students (such as documents introducing the organization), and consider relevant interviewees.
- **Managing the administrative aspects of the collaboration.** Before the BHR clinic begins, both the partner organization and the university should sign a collaboration agreement and a non-disclosure agreement. These agreements not only formalize the collaboration, but also establish a safe space for discussing sensitive human rights topics. Organizers should not underestimate the time required for coordinating between the different departments at both the university and the partner organization

### Selecting the student team

The student team for the BHR clinic is composed of six to eight students, selected through a two-stage application process. Defining the optimal **team size** involves balancing the need for a small, agile team with the desire to be inclusive and giving more students the opportunity to gain experience from participating in the clinic.

The **target group** may vary depending on the specific clinic's setup, but ideal candidates are typically graduate students interested in pursuing careers in responsible management, business and human rights or sustainability.

Selecting the student team encompasses the following steps:

- **Presenting the BHR clinic and inviting applications.** Information about the BHR clinic's content and requirements can be communicated through various channels used by the business school, such as the program website or announcements to the incoming student cohort. An **in-person presentation** can be arranged to allow students to meet the supervisors and ask questions. For example, the welcome day for incoming students provides a good opportunity to introduce the BHR clinic, which can be followed by a 5- to 10-minute presentation during one of the first classes of the semester. At this point, it is ideal to be able to share details about the partner organization and the challenge.
- **Reviewing the applications and conducting interviews.** Students apply to the BHR clinic by submitting their **CV and a one-page cover letter**. The cover letter should outline their motivation for joining the BHR clinic and the qualities they bring to the student team. The second part of the application process involves a **15-minute individual interview** with the clinic supervisors. Depending on the number of applications, a preselection of candidates will be invited for interviews.
- **Selecting the student team.** Admission criteria include **enrolment in the degree program** for the duration of the BHR clinic; no further prerequisites or background knowledge are required. While striving to provide equal opportunities for practical experience, it is important to assemble a capable team that can effectively address the specific challenge and represent the business school in interactions with the partner organization. Organizers should aim to select a team with the strongest combination of complementary skills. **Diversity within the team** – encompassing gender, cultural and educational backgrounds – can enrich the clinic experience. For some clinics, particular language skills or industry experience can provide an advantage. Selected students should have a genuine interest in human rights, demonstrate the will to deliver value for the partner, and be capable of working independently and with a focus on outcomes.

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#### Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

*One observation is that students should have intrinsic motivation to go the extra mile. The BHR clinic will have peak phases with intensive work and slower phases, but overall, the clinic demands more effort than many other courses. Students with side jobs should be aware of the time commitment required.*

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### Running the BHR clinic

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Running the BHR clinic requires structuring the work around the substance of the challenge. Over the course of five to six months, students produce new insights and tools that have the potential to advance human rights in corporate practice. A key to success is structuring the project early on and breaking down the challenge into smaller, manageable steps that lay the groundwork for the final deliverable.

## Structuring the project

Organizing a complex, long-term project such as the BHR clinic, with only a rough idea of the outcome at the outset, is a key part of the students' learning experience. Structuring the BHR clinic involves the following steps:

- **Developing the project timeline.** Students and supervisors jointly develop a project management plan. This includes a visualization of the **project timeline** with key dates (such as mid-project and final workshops and target dates for expert interviews) and other relevant dates (such as exam periods, semester breaks, thematic conferences or partner organization events). Next, the project is broken down into **milestones and sub-tasks**. More detailed plans are developed as the project progresses e.g., from drafting a list of interview partners to preparing for interviews, analyzing data and following up. All steps should include time for feedback loops and specify who is responsible for each task.

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### Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

*Planning ahead is vital for delivering the project on time. The timeline of the BHR clinic was aligned with the academic calendar to ensure that the more intense phases of the clinic did not coincide with exam periods and semester breaks. However, the BHR clinic also requires flexibility to accommodate the partner's availability. Balancing academic commitments with the need to accommodate partner availabilities is essential for a successful clinic experience.*

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- **Assigning roles and responsibilities.** Typical roles include a **project manager** (responsible for ensuring milestones are met and serving as the main contact for supervisors), a **contact person for the partner organization** (a role shared with supervisors), a **note-taker for meetings** (documenting topics covered, decisions made and follow-up steps), and a **manager for technical infrastructure** (organizing research materials and progress documentation). Students are encouraged (but not required) to rotate these roles throughout the clinic.
- **Setting up the project infrastructure.** The university may provide a **shared platform** for organizing research insights, meeting protocols, and drafts of deliverables. For some projects, students may choose to work with **additional tools**, for example, to create mind maps, manage the project timeline, or design interactive deliverables. If such tools are used, terms and conditions for these tools should be clarified in the beginning, including access limitations (in terms of time or number of accounts), and options for offline downloads and archiving.
- **Defining the work mode and communication.** A fixed meeting is scheduled for the **student team and supervisors** every one or two weeks. For coordination **among students**, the team self-organizes additional working sessions. Most meetings are group sessions, although the team may split into sub-groups during certain project phases. Students provide regular updates to the **partner organization** throughout the clinic. At the same time, supervisors and the partner organization also keep direct communication lines.

## Delivering the project

The BHR clinic is typically structured into two main phases: the **research phase**, focused on data collection and analysis, and the **knowledge application phase**, where the deliverable is developed. These phases are framed by two shorter periods at the start and end of the BHR clinic.

At the **start of the clinic**, supervisors should dedicate time to structure the project and, if necessary, introduce students to the field of business and human rights. Towards the **end of the clinic**, sufficient time should be reserved for the review and presentation of the deliverables.

- **Getting started.** The BHR clinic starts with two important meetings: First, a **welcome meeting** between students and the clinic supervisors to establish rapport and set the tone and expectations. The second meeting is the official **kick-off meeting** with the partner organization. If logistically possible, meeting on-site at the partner’s facilities can inspire the student team. Content-wise, the first weeks are crucial for gaining momentum and aligning everyone. Activities during this period should focus on: introducing students to business and human rights, familiarizing students with the clinic challenge, and preparing the kick-off meeting, including reviewing any pre-reads, and formulating questions to the partner organization.
- **Research phase.** Every BHR clinic starts with a research phase that is based on **desk research** and expert **interviews**. The first interviews are conducted with the partner organization. The focus of this phase depends on the particular challenge submitted by the partner organization – whether it involves **analyzing existing knowledge and tools** or **developing a theoretical framework** for the knowledge application phase. It might be beneficial to form sub-groups within the student team at this stage. Supervisors guide students to remain within the scope of the challenge and extract relevant insights from their research. This phase culminates in a **mid-project workshop** marking the transition to the knowledge application phase.

### — Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

*For example, during the very first BHR clinic, the research phase resulted in a case database of human rights-related incidents within the industry. This database was then analyzed to identify the most concerning issues and select themes for the training scenarios that were developed in the knowledge application phase.*

### — Practical information for the mid-project and final project workshops

The goal of the **mid-project workshop** is to present a synthesis of the research insights and align on the framework for the final deliverable. During this workshop, the student team presents a draft framework for the final deliverable, which is then refined through an interactive work session with the students, the partner organization and invited experts. By the end of the mid-project workshop, students should have a clear understanding of the final deliverable they are working towards.

The **final workshop** focuses on presenting the results and discussing their applicability to practice. This workshop provides an opportunity for students to showcase how far they have come, summarizing their achievements from the kick-off meeting, through the insights they gathered during the research phase, to the final product they developed for the partner organization.

Optionally, in both workshops, the partner organization may be invited to lead one part of the meeting, for example, to provide further information about the context in which they intend to use the clinic deliverable.

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- **Knowledge application phase.** During this phase, students' roles shift **from gathering information to applying their knowledge**. This transition can be challenging, and actively involving supervisors to begin drafting the final deliverable—such as by leading a working session—can be helpful. Once a draft is created, subsequent iterations become easier. The final deliverable should stand the test of **high quality** and **practical applicability**. Toward the end of this phase, students reconnect with a few selected experts to review an advanced draft. The results and feedback from the partner organization are then discussed in the **final workshop**.

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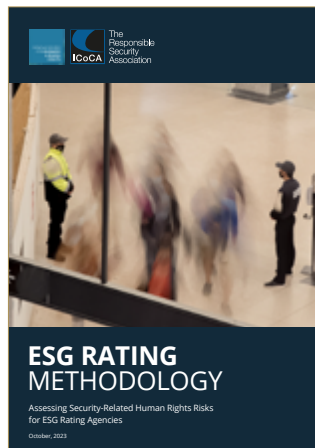
**Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva**

*While the type of deliverable (e.g., a training scenario or a rating methodology) is defined early on, the concrete format often becomes clearer after the research phase. Some students may find the transition to application overwhelming, as they move out of their comfort zone shortly after becoming familiar with the topic. Others might feel underwhelmed, seeing the complexity of the challenge and perceiving their contribution as marginal. However, both perceptions tend to dissipate once students start to see the deliverable take shape.*

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- **Presentation of results.** After the final workshop, students implement the **last revisions** to the deliverables. Despite the extensive work students put into the BHR clinic over many weeks, the results are seen by practitioners who will use them in the partner organization for the first time. It is therefore worth spending time on **designing the deliverable** in a way that provides the partner organization with clarity on its practical application, and on delivering an **accompanying guide** on the methodology and implementation of the deliverable (which could be included in the final presentation). In some clinics, the partner organization invited students to **pilot test** the deliverable or observe its company-led application.

Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva  
 Deliverable from one of the BHR clinics  
 (designed by the clinic partner)



**PHASE 1: PRE-SCREENING AND TENDERING**

Before contracting a PSP, client companies engage in pre-screening and tendering processes. These procedures involve evaluating the PSPs to ensure they can deliver services that respect human rights and do not contribute to abuses. Pre-screening involves gathering information about the PSP from various sources, such as public records, the PSP itself, or industry peers.

Tendering focuses on the eligibility criteria a PSP must meet to be considered a potential contractor. It is critical to include measures to assess human rights policies, procedures, and track record, as well as the qualifications and training of its security personnel.

INDICATORS	NON-APPLICABLE	INSUFFICIENT	SATISFACTORY	EXCELLENT
1. Policy: Does the client have a policy on human rights when contracting PSPs that cover the nature of relevant human rights issues?	There is no policy.	There is a policy but the human rights requirements are not specified in the tendering process.	There is a policy and the PSPs with a track record of human rights abuses, such as child labor, human trafficking, and sexual violence are excluded in the tendering process.	In addition to the satisfactory, the policy also applies to subcontractors.
2. Pre-Screen: Does the client check the public human rights record of the PSPs?	The client does not check the public human rights record of the PSPs.	The client checks the PSPs public human rights record but does not include PSPs with records of past human rights abuses from being contracted.	The client checks the PSPs public human rights record and excludes PSPs with records of past violations, and maintains PSPs' responses to such abuses.	In addition to the satisfactory, the client processes the following, among other measures: frequency, severity, and nature of past violations, and maintains PSP's responses to such abuses.

Wrapping up the BHR clinic and follow-up

The BHR clinic concludes when students hand over the project deliverable to the partner organization, after integrating feedback from the final project workshop. Following the handover, supervisors can organize a final reflection meeting with the students as well as a debrief session with the partner organization. Supervisors then work with university staff to complete the remaining administrative processes. The final tasks include:

- **Submitting the final deliverable and documentation. Finalizing the documents** means integrating feedback from the final workshop and compiling the relevant documents for the clinic partner. This is the stage where good project documentation throughout the clinic pays off. After aligning with supervisors on the final version of the deliverable, students e-mail the documents, together with a thank you note, to the partner organization. Provided that the partner approves, students may also share the deliverable with the **experts and interview partners** who contributed to the project.

Final documents at the end of the BHR clinic

The documents to be handed over to the clinic partner include:

The deliverable in its final format as the main product

Intermediate results (e.g., from the research phase), if applicable

The presentations from the mid-project and final workshops

Typically, there is no final written report. Any intermediate results or presentations handed over to the partner organization serve as supplementary documents that explain the methodology used to develop the deliverable and provide insights and recommendations for their implementation in practice.

Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva  
 Milestones from the research phase (top) and the knowledge application phase (bottom) of one of the BHR clinics

Excerpt from the database

		Themes identified for each case		6W and root cause analysis	
Case Name	Summary	Main theme	Related themes	Who	What
27	Caterpillar bulldozer in Israel	Abuse of Force	Political instability	Caterpillar	Federal lawsuit against Caterpillar for its involvement in ...
28	Unocal Corp. in Myanmar	Abuse of Force	Political instability Forced Labour Abuse of Force	Unocal	Lawsuit filed by Myanmar villagers after reports of harm...
29	John Doe et al. v. Exxon Mobil Corporation et al.	Abuse of Force	Sexual / Gender based ...	Exxon Mobil Corporation	The villagers argue that an Exxon-Mobil tank ...
30	Mining company Drummond and paramilitary forces in Colombia	Abuse of Force	Contingual killings Child and Sexual Trauma	Drummond Colombia (subsidiary)	In March 2001, the trade unions Union Quilacá and ...

Phase one - Developments

**PHASE 1**

January 30<sup>th</sup>

Theme	Human rights in question	Training content	Perspective
Force abuse by hand of PNP's Community	Force abuse	Importance of selecting the right staff, guards, importance of existing conditions, handle a situation where the public image of the company is at stake	Participants are expected to conduct the exercise from the perspective of the firm, Security Representative

Summary

The scenario unfolds in a plant nearby a village in 'Wadda'. The company's production plant lies at the outskirts of a village. Close to the plant and the village is a field where many children and young people like to play. The situation escalates when one of the guards, annoyed by all the shouts and yelling of the children, violently pushes a child which causes him to open his forehead and lose blood.

\*Yello country

– **Internal reflection with the student team.** The objective of the BHR clinic is to facilitate experiential learning and produce outcomes that are relevant for practice. An essential component for students is reflecting on their personal and professional growth. The final meeting is an opportunity for each team member to share how the BHR clinic experience has shaped them, identify the aspects of the clinic they appreciated the most and exchange feedback for improving future BHR clinics.

– **Debrief with the partner organization.** During this debrief, supervisors are able to reflect on the BHR clinic, deriving insights from the partner’s perspective that can help attract future clinic partners. At the same time, this meeting provides an opportunity to discuss the future outlook of the underlying BHR challenge and how the clinic’s deliverable can advance human rights in practice. The overall goal is to maintain and strengthen the relationship between the business school and the clinic partner that was established through the BHR clinic, fostering continued exchange between academia and practice.

*“We’ve been extremely impressed with the students. Having discussed this internally and if there’s interest from their side, we think it would make a lot of sense to bring on one or two of them as interns.”*

— Partner organization for the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva



*“[The] teamwork, creativity,  
and quick grasp of the BHR challenge  
have been truly impressive.”*

— Partner organization  
for the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

- **Following up on the remaining administrative tasks.** For the supervisors, wrapping up the BHR clinic involves several administrative tasks: ensuring that there are **no outstanding invoices or reimbursements** (e.g., if clinic students incurred costs for transport during on-site visits), submitting **grades for the BHR clinic students**, requesting **testimonials** from students and the partner organization about their experiences with the BHR clinic, and **communicating about the BHR clinic** through various channels, such as social media accounts or other outlets dedicated to business education, clinical education or the concrete topic addressed in the completed clinic.

Clinics often serve as initial explorations and can lead to further study into the specific business and human rights issue addressed. Supervisors may consider leveraging the preliminary insights from the BHR clinic to develop additional research projects.

#### Communication about the BHR clinic

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The BHR clinic supervisors can liaise with the business school's communications team throughout the duration of the clinic. The team can support by promoting the BHR clinic on the business school's social media accounts and internally within the faculty by, for example, publishing a short announcement at the beginning of the clinic, with professional pictures from the workshops, and a post about the insights derived from the BHR clinic. Such activities enhance the visibility of the business school and its research, while also raising the profile of its graduates.

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— 3 —

Insights from the business and human rights clinics  
at the University of Geneva

Running a BHR clinic in a sustainable way requires a significant commitment from the university. While the process can be resource-intensive in terms of staffing and time, it offers substantial rewards for all parties involved. Core funding for a BHR clinic should be provided by the business school that houses the clinic.

### What are the main challenges for running a clinic at a business school?

Certain aspects of the BHR clinic cannot be rushed. Among the greatest challenges of running a BHR clinic is finding a suitable partner organization. The selection process must be conducted thoroughly, as companies need to pitch a clear management challenge and must be willing to support the student team throughout the clinic, for example, by investing time for interviews and establishing contact with internal stakeholders.

The essence of the BHR clinic is to tackle a real and unresolved human rights challenge in business. This is a process of co-creation that evolves as the project progresses, making flexibility a key factor for a successful outcome. The better the preparation and briefing, the faster students become up-to-speed, which means they have more time to think creatively and in depth about the challenge. However, since the BHR clinic is a student-led project with a fixed deadline and limited resources, it is also important to remain pragmatic about achievable outcomes.

Finally, the BHR clinic is work-intensive, and both students and supervisors should be prepared for the fluctuations in workload and the challenges of integrating the BHR clinic within the academic schedule.

### What are the main success factors for a BHR clinic?

To ensure the success of a BHR clinic, business schools need to designate **adequate supervisory capacity** to accompany the student team and monitor progress. While most tasks should be initiated and performed by students, it is important to recognize that this is a challenging task for them. Therefore, supervisors play a critical role in maintaining the pace of the work, focusing on the intended use case and communicating a clear vision, such as by emphasizing the purpose of each project step. Supervisors should provide

guidance and set examples to advance the work but must also balance their involvement to allow students the space to develop their skills.

*“We consider it a privilege to be working on a hands-on challenge and applying the theories and concepts learned in the classroom to a real-world situation. The experience of the BHR clinic has further solidified our commitment to making a positive impact through our professional careers.”*

— Collective statement from participants in the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

**Student ownership** of the BHR challenge is a key success factor. The BHR clinic is a team effort, and it is essential that students feel a sense of responsibility for the collective outcome throughout all phases. Encouraging a strong sense of project ownership among students enhances timely delivery and quality of the deliverable.

**Building trust and establishing clear communication** are vital. Strong communication helps reassure the partner organization, particularly given the sensitivity of real-life human rights issues. It is equally crucial that the partner communicates openly so that students and supervisors have a clear understanding of the partner organization's expectations and the context of the challenge.

#### Examples of benefits for the participants beyond the context of the BHR clinic

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**Career advancement:** Former **students** have found their participation in the BHR clinic to be advantageous when starting their professional careers. Some students benefitted directly, such as by obtaining internships with the partner organization. Many others reported indirect benefits, for example, by using their BHR clinic experience to demonstrate practical knowledge and skills in job interviews.

**Impact on practice:** The work of the BHR clinic translates into real-world impact when **partner organizations** integrate the deliverables into human rights activities. Previous partner organizations utilized the results of the BHR clinic both internally (e.g., to train their global staff) and externally (e.g., as part of a broader stakeholder engagement strategy for human rights).

**Academic and research insights:** For the **business school and academic supervisors**, the BHR clinic's work generates valuable research insights that inform further academic research and can be shared with a broader audience.

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#### Further resources about the BHR clinic

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About the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

<https://gcbhr.org/focus/business-education/business-and-human-rights-clinic>

Clinical education as a pedagogical innovation

<https://www.unige.ch/innovations-pedagogiques/en/project-list/resolution-denjeux-de-droits-humains-avec-des-entreprises>

Brochure for partner organizations

<https://gcbhr.org/backoffice/resources/bhr-clinic2022.pdf>

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## — APPENDIX —

This repository compiles an overview of complementary resources for each chapter in this toolkit. The resources include examples from four business and human rights clinics at the University of Geneva's School of Economics and Management.

These examples are intended to serve as inspiration or checklists for business schools interested in establishing a BHR clinic.

## The business and human rights clinic concept and its benefits

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### Previous BHR clinics at the University of Geneva's School of Economics and Management

#### **FALL 2021** – The first BHR clinic in partnership with a Swiss multinational company in the building materials industry

**Objective:** Develop human rights training for global middle management.

**Intermediate results:** Created a database of relevant human rights cases in the industry and identified themes for training scenarios.

**Final deliverable:** Five training scenarios, each including a trigger event and a realistic escalation, as well as training objectives and discussion questions.

**Application:** Co-facilitated two of the five training scenarios in an interactive online workshop for over 100 employees.

#### **FALL 2022** – The second BHR clinic in partnership with an international multi-stakeholder organization in the field of security operations

**Objective:** Develop a rating methodology to measure the “S” in ESG (environment, social, governance issues) in the security sector, allowing investors to assess the human rights due diligence of companies that hire security services.

**Intermediate results:** Identified the human rights risks associated with the security sector and consolidated them into categories for the rating framework.

**Final deliverable:** A rating methodology that includes 19 indicators to assess companies' performance on the “S” in ESG.

**Application:** Alignment with the consultancy advising the organization on their ESG investor guide, cross-referencing the students' ESG rating methodology, and an internship for a student to support the organization's investor relations team on security and human rights topics.

#### **SPRING 2023** – The third BHR clinic in partnership with a leading multinational information technology company

**Objective:** Understand the role that technology providers can and should play in building resilience against cyber influence operations.

**Intermediate results:** Summarized the state of research in a flowchart, mapped the factors that influence societal resilience, and explained the characteristics of disinformation campaigns.

**Final deliverable:** A white paper analyzing the risks and opportunities of the company's products in relation to disinformation campaigns, with seven concrete suggestions for the company to build resilience.

**Application:** A comprehensive report intended for the company's internal use, including to support the human rights team's communication with the technology development team.

**FALL 2023** – The fourth BHR clinic in partnership with a multinational company in the food and beverages industry

**Objective:** Map and address vulnerabilities of migrant workers in the global supply chain of a soft commodity.

**Intermediate results:** Mapped the migration dynamics for two different countries.

**Final deliverable:** A diagnostic tool to assess the vulnerabilities of migrant workers and relevant remediation strategies.

**Application:** Presented the diagnostic tool to several country managers who would implement the tool and discussed the operationalization in their respective contexts.

### Implementing a business and human rights clinic at a business school

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#### Questions to evaluate a proposed BHR clinic challenge

**Real:** What concrete human rights challenges is the organization currently facing? What challenges are relevant to the industry?

**Impactful:** How will the organization apply the outcome of the BHR clinic to its operations?

**Inspiring collaboration:** Can the BHR clinic facilitate interaction both within the company and across the industry?

**Scalable:** How can the challenge inspire other organizations to implement human rights in practice?

**Feasible:** Is the task clearly defined and manageable within the given time frame?

#### Checklist of the administrative requirements for the BHR clinic

Before starting the BHR clinic, ensure following key formalities are agreed upon between the university and the partner organization:

**Collaboration agreement:** The legal department should advise on the form and content of the agreement. Aspects that should be included in the agreement are the following: project description and scope, contact persons for each party, responsibilities and undertakings of each party, confidentiality and limitations on public communication, use of results and intellectual property rights, limitation of liability and jurisdiction, potential amendments, and duration of the agreement.

**Non-disclosure agreement (NDA):** The NDA may be incorporated as a clause into the collaboration agreement or drafted as a separate document. It can stipulate the anonymization of publications but should explicitly allow the use of insights from the BHR clinic in students' final theses.

**Confidentiality undertaking for students and guests:** The university can usually only sign the NDA for its employees. Thus, students and guests are asked to sign a separate agreement with the partner organization to acknowledge awareness of and compliance with the NDA.

**Invoicing procedure:** Financial contributions from the partner organization should be aligned with the funding principles of the business school.

**Ethical approval of the research:** Research projects involving other people (e.g., for interviews) often require prior approval from the university's ethics committee.

**Release form for photos:** The university can provide a template to be signed by all participants (students, partner organizations, supervisors and guests), permitting the use of photos for promotional activities related to the BHR clinic, for example, on social media accounts or the website of the university.

**Communication about the collaboration:** Both the business school and the partner organization should agree to make their collaboration on the BHR clinic public and determine the level of transparency of such communication (e.g., at a minimum, permitting mentions of the topic and objective of the challenge).

### Expectations for all BHR clinic participants

The role and input of students during the BHR clinic:

- Take responsibility for the project timeline and delivery of results, guided by academic supervisors.
- Be present and actively participate in team meetings and interactions with the partner organization and experts.
- Document work thoroughly, including meeting notes, research analyses and feedback loops.
- Work together as a team, act as sparring partners for one another and keep each other up to date about contributions by other members of the student team.
- Commit to delivering the best possible outcome to make a meaningful impact on the human rights challenge the partner organization faces.
- Embrace the challenge and use the clinic as a safe space to practice new skills and foster personal and professional growth.

The role and input of the partner organization during the BHR clinic:

- Introduce students to the context of the challenge and frame their tasks, such as through delivering the kick-off session, preparing pre-reads and reserving time for interviews.
- Regularly interact with students (facilitated by the academic supervisors), jointly define milestones and provide time and expertise to review intermediate project results.
- Consult with colleagues, who are the intended beneficiaries and users of the deliverables, to ensure that the results are relevant and applicable.
- Explore ways to leverage the BHR clinic experience for advancing human rights in corporate practice, including through the implementation of the deliverables in the organization or continued interactions with the university and experts beyond the clinic.



The role and input of academic supervisors during the BHR clinic:

- Ensure clinic deliverables meet the partner organization’s needs by providing feedback on the content and maintaining an overview of the project objectives.
- Coordinate between the student team, partner organization and business school; handle administrative tasks. Plan ahead and line up opportunities for interviews, events, and possible internships.
- Monitor progress, guide students through peak and transition phases. Be prepared to spend considerable time on feedback; offer working sessions with sub-groups, as needed. Step in and provide concrete directions and advice when needed to move the clinic forward.
- Allow students to drive the clinic; develop guiding questions to spark creative thinking and unlock new ideas, while empowering the students to meet learning objectives and develop soft skills.
- Share general expertise in business and human rights, research approaches, and stakeholder management.

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#### Experience from the BHR clinic at the University of Geneva

*Supervisors can enhance the learning experience of students, for instance, by acting as role models (e.g., being more active in the first interview), by being approachable for the team (e.g., listening in during student rehearsal sessions) and by constructively challenging the students’ work (e.g., critically commenting on the content and clarity of draft versions of the deliverables).*

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## — ENDNOTES —

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Bauer, J. (2017). Equipping professionals for the next challenges: The design and results of a multidisciplinary business and human rights clinic. *Business and Human Rights Journal*, 2(2), 359-363.

<sup>2</sup> GCBHR (2022). Brochure for partner organizations for the Business and Human Rights Clinic. See <https://gcbhr.org/backoffice/resources/bhr-clinic2022.pdf>.

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We also extend our sincere thanks to the previous clinic partners for their donations and their engagement, as well as to the members of GCBHR's Advisory Council for their in-kind support.

We are indebted to our students at GSEM who approached each BHR challenge with great motivation. We hope that the efforts they put into the BHR clinic will benefit future generations of business school students.

We also thank our colleague Serra Cremer who supported the drafting and editing of this toolkit.

## ABOUT THE GENEVA CENTER FOR BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Geneva Center for Business and Human Rights (GCBHR) was founded in 2019 at the University of Geneva as the first business and human rights center at a business school in Europe. Under the direction of Professor Dorothee Baumann-Pauly, the GCBHR educates future business leaders and supports companies in developing business models that align profits and human rights principles.

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Page 5: GCBHR

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