



## Women's Empowerment Principles, the UN Global Compact and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human rights - Explanatory Note

### Introduction

This brief explanatory note explains the relationship between the Women's Empowerment Principles (**WEPs**), the UN Global Compact and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. In a nutshell, the UN Global Compact focuses on corporate sustainability of which respect and support for human rights is one key part. The **WEPs** elaborate the gender dimension of corporate sustainability, including the corporate responsibility to respect and corporate commitment to support women's rights. And the Guiding Principles elaborate the state duty to protect against human rights abuses (including of women's rights) by third parties, including business; the corporate responsibility to respect human rights (including women's rights); and the need for more effective access to remedies for such abuses. The Guiding Principles elaborate on the policies, processes and actions required of all businesses to meet their responsibility to respect human rights, including women's rights as explained further below. The **WEPs**, the UN Global Compact and the Guiding Principles are complementary to each other.

### What are the Women's Empowerment Principles?

The [Women's Empowerment Principles \(WEPs\)](#) are a set of Principles for businesses offering seven steps for how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. The development of the **WEPs** included an international multi-stakeholder consultation process, which began in March 2009 and culminated in their launch on International Women's Day in March 2010. As at 1 December 2012, more than 450 CEOs from across the globe had signed the CEO Statement of Support for the **WEPs**.

Subtitled *Equality Means Business*, the **WEPs** emphasize the business case for corporate action to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and are informed by real-life business practices and input gathered from across the globe. The **WEPs** seek to point the way to best practice by elaborating the gender dimension of corporate responsibility, the UN Global Compact, and business' role in sustainable development. As well as being a useful guide for businesses, the **WEPs** seek to inform other stakeholders, including governments, in their engagement with business.

The **WEPs** are derived from international Conventions and Declarations in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and has since been ratified by 187 UN Member States, ILO Convention No. 111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (1958), and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998).

The **WEPs** are built on existing standards, initiatives and best practices related to business and women, and seek to fill gaps to present a coherent vision for business to maximize the positive impacts and minimize negative impacts on women. In doing so, the **WEPs** help to elaborate both expectations of, and opportunities for business, in relation to women with a view to bringing about more equitable and inclusive workplaces, marketplaces and communities.

The **WEPs** are the result of a collaboration between the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Global Compact.<sup>1</sup> More information is available at [www.weprinciples.org](http://www.weprinciples.org)

#### **The WEPs in brief**

[Principle 1: Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality](#)

[Principle 2: Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination](#)

[Principle 3: Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers](#)

[Principle 4: Promote education, training and professional development for women](#)

[Principle 5: Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women](#)

[Principle 6: Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy](#)

[Principle 7: Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality](#)

#### **What is the UN Global Compact?**

The [United Nations Global Compact](http://www.unglobalcompact.org) ([www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org)) is a call to businesses everywhere to align their strategies and operations with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, and to take action in support of UN goals and issues. It revolves around 10 principles derived from international Conventions and Declarations that enjoy a high degree of consensus among UN Member States. **Principle 1 states that “Business should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights.”** The UN Global Compact has a mandate from the UN General Assembly to advance United Nations values and responsible business practices within the United Nations system and among the global business community. As indicated above, the **WEPs** elaborate on the gender dimension of corporate sustainability, including respect and support for women’s rights:

**THE CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS** means avoiding any infringement of the human rights of others, including women, and addressing any adverse human rights impact with which the business is involved. The corporate responsibility to respect applies to the business’s own activities and to its business relationships, linked to its operations, products or services. **The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights**<sup>2</sup> elaborate the corporate responsibility to respect human rights. The Guiding Principles were adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011 and provide an authoritative global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse impacts on human rights linked to business activity. They also provide civil society, investors and others with the tools to measure progress by business in meeting their responsibility to respect human rights. The relationship between the Guiding Principles and the UN Global Compact is set out in a note at: <http://bit.ly/YrwGTJ>

<sup>1</sup> The text of the WEPs is adapted from the Calvert Women's Principles®.

<sup>2</sup> “Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework” as annexed to the Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, A/HRC/17/31, United Nations, 21 March 2011, available at [www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/business/A.HRC.17.31.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/business/A.HRC.17.31.pdf) Endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in A/HRC/RES/17/4

**THE CORPORATE COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT HUMAN RIGHTS** means additional voluntary actions that seek to advance human rights, including women's rights, through core business activities, strategic social investments and philanthropy, advocacy and public policy engagement, and/or working in partnership and other collective action.

In the area of women's empowerment, respect for women's rights is the minimum required of business. Additional actions to support women's rights are strongly encouraged even though not required. Actions to support women's rights cannot be a substitute for failing to respect women's rights. The **WEPs** and the UN Global Compact call on businesses to take action to both respect and support women's rights.

## **What is required of all businesses to meet the responsibility to respect women's rights?**

This requires avoiding the infringement of women's rights and addressing any adverse impact on women's rights with which the business is involved. The corporate responsibility to respect applies to the business's own activities and to its business relationships, including but not limited to those activities and relationships identified in the **WEPs**. In order to meet this responsibility, all business should put in place appropriate policies and processes, as set out in the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. These include:

1. **Policy Commitment:** a statement that sets out the business's responsibility to respect rights, including women's rights, as described in the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. A policy commitment should be approved at the most senior level of the business and be informed by relevant expertise. It should stipulate the business's expectations of personnel, business partners and others directly linked to its operations, products or services. It should be publicly available, communicated internally and externally, and embedded in relevant policies and procedures. It may also include a statement of the business's commitment to support women's rights.

2. **Human Rights Due Diligence:** a business's ongoing processes for assessing its actual and potential human rights impact, including on women's rights, integrating and acting upon its findings, tracking its responses and communicating how its impact is addressed. Human rights due diligence should cover any adverse impact that the business may cause or contribute to through its own activities, or which may be directly linked to its operations, products or services by a business relationship. To carry out human rights due diligence, all business should:

- Identify and assess any actual or potential adverse impact on women's rights. This should draw on human rights expertise and involve meaningful consultation with women and other potentially affected groups and relevant stakeholders. It should take into account that women and men and girls and boys may face different risks.
- Integrate the findings from their impact assessments across relevant internal functions and processes and take appropriate action (as defined in the Guiding Principles). Where a business causes or contributes to an adverse impact on women's rights, or where it may do so, it should take the necessary steps to cease or prevent the activity, or its contribution to it, and use its leverage to mitigate any remaining impact. Where a business is linked to an adverse impact by a business relationship, it should use its leverage and consider other relevant factors in determining the appropriate action to take.
- Monitor and track the effectiveness of the business's responses in order to verify whether an adverse impact on women's rights is being addressed, using appropriate qualitative and quantitative indicators and drawing on feedback from internal and external sources, including affected women and

other stakeholders. The business should consider using tools such as performance contracts and reviews, surveys and audits (self-assessments or independent audits) on a periodic basis.

- Be prepared to communicate externally on their efforts to address the business impact on women's rights in a form and with the frequency that reflect such an impact and that is accessible to its intended audiences. The business should provide sufficient information to evaluate the adequacy of its responses. Such communication should not pose risks to affected stakeholders, personnel or to legitimate requirements of commercial confidentiality.

**3. Gender-sensitive processes to enable remediation:** the processes to enable remediation of any adverse impact on women's rights that the business causes or contributes to. Where a business identifies that it has caused or contributed to an adverse impact on human rights, it should provide for or cooperate in their remediation through legitimate processes, including effective operational level grievance mechanisms or judicial mechanisms, as appropriate. Operational level mechanisms should be accessible to women and men, girls and boys, and those who represent their interests, and meet the effectiveness criteria for non-judicial grievance mechanisms set out in Principle 31 of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

[www.weprinciples.org](http://www.weprinciples.org)  
[www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org)