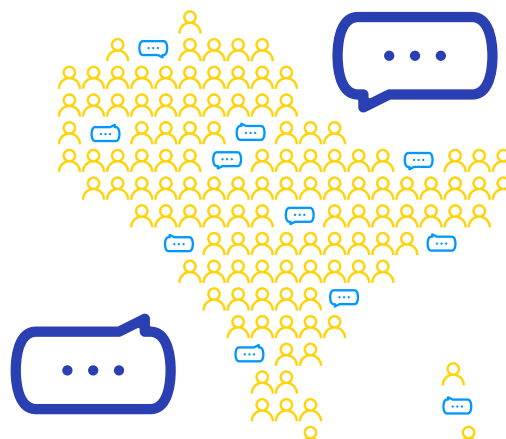


3rd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights

28-30 March 2022

(Pre-Forum Sessions 23-25 March 2022)

CONCEPT NOTE



Background

The [UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights \(UNWG\)](#) launched its [Roadmap for the next decade of business and human rights \(UNGPs 10+ Roadmap\)](#) in November 2021. The Roadmap was informed by a [stocktaking](#) exercise conducted by the UNWG on implementing the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights \(UNGPs\)](#) between 2011 and 2021. The Roadmap lays out key priorities for the next decade. It provides key action points for States, businesses and other stakeholders to realise business respect for human rights and access to effective remedy.

One could observe some promising business and human rights developments since the [2nd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights](#) held in March 2021. For example, Pakistan formally adopted a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAP) in September 2021. Moreover, India is in the final stages of its NAP development, while Nepal has formally committed to developing a NAP.

Nevertheless, South Asia continues to face a wide range of systemic challenges that obstruct business respect for human rights and undermine sustainable development. For example, the devastating social and economic impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to plague the sub-region in the near future. In addition, widening inequalities continue to drive social divides and disproportionately impact vulnerable and marginalised sections of society. The challenge of shrinking civic space adds to the impacts faced by rights holders, human rights defenders and youth activists and diminishes prospects of access to effective remedy. Similarly, governments and businesses across the sub-region are yet to address worsening environmental crises. Indeed, climate change, environmental destruction, and biodiversity loss are projected to negatively transform the lives of people across South Asia and require interventions and just transitions of an unprecedented scale.

Adding to this extensive yet non-exhaustive list of challenges is the issue of business-related human rights abuses in the informal economy. As more than 80% of workers and over 90% of South Asia's businesses operate in the informal economy, human rights issues linked to informality cannot be overlooked. Indeed, governments and businesses must close protection gaps in the informal economy. Thus, the question remains how the implementation of the UNGPs by governments and predominately large corporations can support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and ultimately enhance protection and respect of workers' rights in the informal economy.

To address these challenges, ensure just transitions and rights-based COVID-19 recovery, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is imperative to mainstream business respect for human rights and strengthen the State duty to protect and corporate accountability for human rights abuses. International instruments such as the UNGPs and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) and ILO Recommendation 204 concerning the Transition from the Informal to Formal Economy can guide all types of actors in this regard.

3rd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights

Against this context, the UNWG and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), are organising the 3rd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights on 28-30 March 2022. Country-specific sessions and side sessions organized by partners will take place on 23-25 March 2022. The Forum aims to facilitate a robust and multi-stakeholder dialogue that will foster joint action to prevent, mitigate and remediate business related human rights abuses and advance the decent work agenda in South Asia.

The Forum will build on the [2nd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights](#), which was organised virtually on 17-19 March 2021 and brought together 1,500 participants from 89 countries. The 2021 Forum featured country-specific sessions to assess challenges and opportunities in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Stakeholders participating in these sessions elaborated national roadmaps to promote business respect for human rights. All of these sessions concluded that there is an urgent need to enforce existing labour, human rights and environmental laws, eliminate child and forced labour, address business related human rights abuses in the informal sector, mainstream human rights due diligence, and ensure access to effective remedy. In addition to discussing thematic challenges and opportunities common to the entire sub-region, the 2022 Forum will provide space for country-specific dialogue and follow-up on the country roadmaps outlined in 2021.

Objectives

- Assess sub-regional progress, challenges and opportunities in implementing the UNWG's Roadmap for the next decade of business and human rights and the country roadmaps outlined at the 2nd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights.
- Explore linkages between business and human rights, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and related issues such as climate change and COVID-19 recovery.
- Encourage peer-learning among governments, national employers' organisations, trade unions, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), businesses and civil society organisations (CSOs) in South Asia, facilitating the regional exchange of good practices in implementing the UNGPs and the MNE Declaration and contributing to achieving the SDGs.
- Provide safe spaces to CSOs, trade unions, businesses, and NHRIs, enabling open discussions about the challenges faced by respective actors.

Programme

The programme of the 3rd UN South Asia Forum will be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders. The following is a tentative list of topics or sessions that the organisers envisage featuring in the programme:

- Country sessions for Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
- Safe space sessions for CSOs, trade unions, businesses, and NHRIs
- Developing, implementing and monitoring national action plans on business and human rights
- Raising awareness of business and human right standards and challenges among businesses, including MSMEs
- Addressing business related human rights abuses in the informal economy
- The role of CSOs, human rights defenders, trade unions, business associations, NHRIs, academia, journalists, young people and others in promoting business respect for human rights

- Connecting business and human rights with other social movements, including youth-led movements
- Achieving policy coherence between human rights and international trade and investment
- Linkages between business and human rights, environment, climate change, sustainable development, COVID-19 recovery, just transitions, conflict and related topics
- Protecting and respecting the rights of migrant workers, women, children, and Indigenous Peoples
- State duty to effectively apply, implement and enforce the business and human rights legislation, including concerning human rights due diligence
- Improving access to effective remedy through judicial and non-judicial mechanisms

Format

The 3rd UN South Asia Forum will be organised in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in a hybrid format over three days: 28-30 March 2022. Safe space sessions – which will be held under the Chatham House Rule and aim to facilitate conversation among specific stakeholder groups – will be organised on 28 March before the Forum's official opening on 29 March.

In addition, there will be some space for external partners to organise side events, workshops, consultations or meetings during the Forum. Those who are interested in organising such events should indicate their interest with a one-page concept note outlining the title, background, objectives, format, and proposed speakers latest by 9 February 2022.

A draft program of the Forum will be available in early March 2022. All the sessions will be live-streamed. Participants will be informed on how to join sessions after they have registered for the Forum.

Queries related to programme, sessions, speakers, participation, side events, etc

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