

Human Rights at Work: Poland Making Inroads on Corporate Responsibility Agenda

Nov 18, 2015



More than four years ago, the UN's 'Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights' (UNGPs) were proposed by John Ruggie, UN Special Representative on business and human rights, and endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council and the European Commission.

Last Thursday, ahead of this week's [UN Forum on Business and Human Rights](#) in Geneva, the first ever roundtable focusing exclusively on business and human rights was held in Warsaw. The event, attended by 17 companies representing different sectors, was designed to provide the participants with the information necessary to get them started on the best path to implementing the UNGPs, including an introduction to the [UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework](#). This new reporting standard, developed by the [Shift Project](#) and [Mazars](#), is meant to help companies advance their human rights practices by providing critical guidance not only on reporting aligned with UNGPs, but also on human rights management, communication and transparency.

The initial idea for the event originated at the [Polish Institute of Human Rights and Business](#) (PIHRB). It followed earlier efforts undertaken by the organization to build understanding within Polish companies of what human rights are and how they relate to companies' day-to-day operations. The common goal of those early activities, as well as last week's roundtable, is to provide Polish terminology and context for a number of key concepts, such as salient human rights issues, human rights risk management or human rights due diligence, that are critical to adequately understanding corporate responsibility to respect human rights and to implementing the UNGPs.

The workshop was delivered jointly by PIHRB and the [Shift Project](#) to ensure that Polish companies get access to the best know-how available in this area and are well-equipped to take the first steps toward improving their human rights performance. The event had the backing of the [Polish Ombudsman](#), the [Minister of Economy](#), the [Global Compact Network Poland](#) as well as business association [Konfederacja Lewiatan](#) and [CSR Europe](#). In his opening statement the Ombudsman highlighted the importance of corporate respect for human rights and announced plans to create a Working Group on Business and Human Rights at his office to support government-led efforts to develop a national action plan in this field.

As one of the main sponsors, [Microsoft's](#) key contribution was to share the company's experience with the implementation of the UNGPs and lessons learnt from applying the UNGP Reporting Framework. Microsoft was one of the first technology companies to publically endorse the principles and commit to raise awareness and help advance them. With no Polish company having experience in the implementation of the UNGPs, let alone using the UNGP Reporting Framework, Dan Bross, Senior Director for Business and Corporate Responsibility at Microsoft, provided valuable guidance and encouraged an open discussion amongst the participants on identifying issues and finding appropriate solutions to the 'real life' challenges to be encountered at various stages throughout the process.

PIHRB will drive forward this practical approach to discussing the management of human rights issues which resonated well with participants with more focused, sector-oriented roundtables while accompanying the critical work of the government to define next steps for Poland's new business and human rights agenda.

Tags: [Human rights](#)