

Responsible Business Helpdesks

Building a network of support and common understanding of Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence in partner countries of global supply chains

The Responsible Business Helpdesks are a gateway for local businesses that want to step up their sustainability performance and comply with provisions deriving from Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence legislation. The helpdesks inform, sensitize, and advise companies about procedures and requirements and connect them with relevant service providers.

Background

There is growing momentum in many European countries to introduce mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence (HREDD). These laws oblige companies to analyse risks in their supply chains and take appropriate action to prevent and potentially remediate negative effects of their operations on people or the environment. After France and Germany, the European Union is putting forward a landmark legislative directive on mandatory HREDD.

While the direct legal effect of mandatory HREDD is limited to the companies within the respective jurisdiction, global supply chains go beyond borders and legal space. An effective implementation of HREDD therefore depends on the cooperation and contribution of all supply chain partners and their stakeholders. For this to be a success, a good and joint understanding of what Due Diligence means is equally important as access to advisory, tools and support for the implementation of HREDD in practice.

With international companies adapting their strategies to the Due Diligence approach, awareness and capacities among producers and stakeholders in the supply chains need to be strengthened. Furthermore, for collaboration to happen, organisations need to be connected.

Approach

The *Initiative for Global Solidarity* (IGS), implemented on behalf of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), supports selected local organisations to establish Responsible Business Helpdesks (RBH) in producer countries of global supply chains. The objective of the helpdesks is to serve as a gateway for local organizations

working on HREDD and strengthen the capacities of producers, associations, or service providers to perform corporate due diligence.

The helpdesks are physically present that are hosted by business organizations, for example, the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), EuroCham in Cambodia or the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). These organizations have a strong network of local businesses and enjoy their trust. They understand the local regulatory framework and are familiar with providing services to their members.

Main function

Similar to the [German Helpdesk for Business and Human Rights](#), the staff of the RBH provide first line support to companies and foster awareness on the Due Diligence approach, existing and planned legislation and consequential obligations. They also link companies to relevant service providers and act as a platform to foster dialogue and cooperation among supply chain partners, including international buyers.

The RBH service portfolio is integrated into the host organization's business strategy to ensure its long-term sustainability. Thereby it contributes to strengthening the host organization as a leading voice in facilitating public-private dialogue and providing information, services and advice on responsible business practice.



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Services offered by the RBH

The service portfolio of RBH varies depending on local needs and circumstances in the respective country. The service range falls under the following categories:

- 1. Advice for companies and business associations on HREDD.** Based on existing frameworks such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Due Diligence Guidelines, companies and other stakeholders are advised about the core elements and logic of the HREDD approach and its implications as well as present and planned regulatory references.
- 2. Referral to training and consultancy of HREDD service providers.** Based on the specific questions and needs of businesses, the RBH links companies with relevant service providers. Depending on the respective organizational set-up and business strategy of the host organization, selected services and trainings are offered by the RBH itself.
- 3. Raising awareness and fostering dialogue between stakeholders,** through (online) seminars, events, or consultations. This includes engaging with business to identify needs and risks and to formulate and voice positions. In addition, the RBH foster dialogue among local producers, buyers, social partners, government and multi-stakeholder initiatives to promote shared responsibility with regards to HREDD.
- 4. Provision of information on HREDD** through learning materials, FAQs, briefs and updates on HREDD, relevant policies, regulation and tools.

Building a replicable model

IGS provides technical support to the organizational development and capacity building of the RBH hosts, for example by bringing in international experts.

In addition, each RBH is part of the *Responsible Business Helpdesk Network*, which seeks to build a common understanding of HREDD across countries and harmonize action. Information and training materials are shared and developed jointly by the host organizations. Furthermore, common learning and knowledge transfer is facilitated.

The RBH Network collaborates closely with the *German Helpdesk on Business and Human Rights* to build on its experience and broaden the network of the German Helpdesk to qualified organizations in producing countries. Further it liaises with other chambers and associations for joint advisory.

Exchanging not only material, but also strategies and learnings, a replicable model of the RBH is created that draws from experience along the entire supply chain and can be scaled to other partner countries.

Expansion of the network

So far, the RBH are set up in Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Serbia. Further countries are planned, as BMZ is committed to broadening the RBH network. An expansion is planned to Turkey, Tunisia, Mexico, and Pakistan.

In light of the paradigm shift resulting from existing and planned regulation on HREDD, IGS invites further partners to join hands and stands ready to support additional local business organization to build their capacities to become frontrunners in preparing local industry to get ready for the new dynamics in Responsible Business Conduct.

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