

## II. General Policies

Enterprises should take fully into account established policies in the countries in which they operate, and consider the views of other stakeholders. In this regard:

### A. Enterprises should:

1. Contribute to economic, environmental and social progress with a view to achieving sustainable development.
2. Respect the internationally recognised human rights of those affected by their activities.
3. Encourage local capacity building through close co-operation with the local community, including business interests, as well as developing the enterprise's activities in domestic and foreign markets, consistent with the need for sound commercial practice.
4. Encourage human capital formation, in particular by creating employment opportunities and facilitating training opportunities for employees.
5. Refrain from seeking or accepting exemptions not contemplated in the statutory or regulatory framework related to human rights, environmental, health, safety, labour, taxation, financial incentives, or other issues.
6. Support and uphold good corporate governance principles and develop and apply good corporate governance practices, including throughout enterprise groups.
7. Develop and apply effective self-regulatory practices and management systems that foster a relationship of confidence and mutual trust between enterprises and the societies in which they operate.
8. Promote awareness of and compliance by workers employed by multinational enterprises with respect to company policies through appropriate dissemination of these policies, including through training programmes.

9. Refrain from discriminatory or disciplinary action against workers who make *bona fide* reports to management or, as appropriate, to the competent public authorities, on practices that contravene the law, the *Guidelines* or the enterprise's policies.
10. Carry out risk-based due diligence, for example by incorporating it into their enterprise risk management systems, to identify, prevent and mitigate actual and potential adverse impacts as described in paragraphs 11 and 12, and account for how these impacts are addressed. The nature and extent of due diligence depend on the circumstances of a particular situation.
11. Avoid causing or contributing to adverse impacts on matters covered by the *Guidelines*, through their own activities, and address such impacts when they occur.
12. Seek to prevent or mitigate an adverse impact where they have not contributed to that impact, when the impact is nevertheless directly linked to their operations, products or services by a business relationship. This is not intended to shift responsibility from the entity causing an adverse impact to the enterprise with which it has a business relationship.
13. In addition to addressing adverse impacts in relation to matters covered by the *Guidelines*, encourage, where practicable, business partners, including suppliers and sub-contractors, to apply principles of responsible business conduct compatible with the *Guidelines*.
14. Engage with relevant stakeholders in order to provide meaningful opportunities for their views to be taken into account in relation to planning and decision making for projects or other activities that may significantly impact local communities.
15. Abstain from any improper involvement in local political activities.

B. Enterprises are encouraged to:

1. Support, as appropriate to their circumstances, cooperative efforts in the appropriate fora to promote Internet Freedom through respect of freedom of expression, assembly and association online.
2. Engage in or support, where appropriate, private or multi-stakeholder initiatives and social dialogue on responsible supply chain management while ensuring that these initiatives take due account of their social and economic effects on developing countries and of existing internationally recognised standards.

## Commentary on General Policies

1. The General Policies chapter of the *Guidelines* is the first to contain specific recommendations to enterprises. As such it is important for setting the tone and establishing common fundamental principles for the specific recommendations in subsequent chapters.
2. Enterprises are encouraged to co-operate with governments in the development and implementation of policies and laws. Considering the views of other stakeholders in society, which includes the local community as well as business interests, can enrich this process. It is also recognised that governments should be transparent in their dealings with enterprises, and consult with business on these same issues. Enterprises should be viewed as partners with government in the development and use of both voluntary and regulatory approaches (of which the *Guidelines* are one element) to policies affecting them.
3. There should not be any contradiction between the activity of multinational enterprises (MNEs) and sustainable development, and the *Guidelines* are meant to foster complementarities in this regard. Indeed, links among economic, social, and environmental progress are a key means for furthering the goal of sustainable development.<sup>4</sup>
4. Chapter IV elaborates on the general human rights recommendation in paragraph A.2.
5. The *Guidelines* also acknowledge and encourage the contribution that MNEs can make to local capacity building as a result of their activities in local communities. Similarly, the recommendation on human capital formation is an explicit and forward-looking recognition of the contribution to individual human development that MNEs can offer their employees, and encompasses not only hiring practices, but training and other employee development as well. Human capital formation also incorporates the notion of non-discrimination in hiring practices as well as promotion practices, life-long learning and other on-the-job training.
6. The *Guidelines* recommend that, in general, enterprises avoid making efforts to secure exemptions not contemplated in the statutory or regulatory framework related to human rights, environmental, health, safety, labour, taxation and financial incentives among other issues, without infringing on an enterprise's right to seek changes in the

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4. One of the most broadly accepted definitions of sustainable development is in the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission): "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

statutory or regulatory framework. The words “or accepting” also draw attention to the role of the State in offering these exemptions. While this sort of provision has been traditionally directed at governments, it is also of direct relevance to MNEs. Importantly, however, there are instances where specific exemptions from laws or other policies can be consistent with these laws for legitimate public policy reasons. The environment and competition policy chapters provide examples.

7. The *Guidelines* recommend that enterprises apply good corporate governance practices drawn from the OECD Principles of Corporate Governance. The Principles call for the protection and facilitation of the exercise of shareholder rights, including the equitable treatment of shareholders. Enterprise should recognise the rights of stakeholders established by law or through mutual agreements and encourage active co-operation with stakeholders in creating wealth, jobs, and the sustainability of financially sound enterprises.
8. The Principles call on the board of the parent entity to ensure the strategic guidance of the enterprise, the effective monitoring of management and to be accountable to the enterprise and to the shareholders, while taking into account the interests of stakeholders. In undertaking these responsibilities, the board needs to ensure the integrity of the enterprise’s accounting and financial reporting systems, including independent audit, appropriate control systems, in particular, risk management, and financial and operational control, and compliance with the law and relevant standards.
9. The Principles extend to enterprise groups, although boards of subsidiary enterprises might have obligations under the law of their jurisdiction of incorporation. Compliance and control systems should extend where possible to these subsidiaries. Furthermore, the board’s monitoring of governance includes continuous review of internal structures to ensure clear lines of management accountability throughout the group.
10. State-owned multinational enterprises are subject to the same recommendations as privately-owned enterprises, but public scrutiny is often magnified when a State is the final owner. The OECD *Guidelines on Corporate Governance of State-Owned Enterprises* are a useful and specifically tailored guide for these enterprises and the recommendations they offer could significantly improve governance.
11. Although primary responsibility for improving the legal and institutional regulatory framework lies with governments, there is a strong business case for enterprises to implement good corporate governance.

12. An increasing network of non-governmental self-regulatory instruments and actions address aspects of corporate behaviour and the relationships between business and society. Interesting developments in this regard are being undertaken in the financial sector. Enterprises recognise that their activities often have social and environmental implications. The institution of self-regulatory practices and management systems by enterprises sensitive to reaching these goals – thereby contributing to sustainable development – is an illustration of this. In turn, developing such practices can further constructive relationships between enterprises and the societies in which they operate.
13. Following from effective self-regulatory practices, as a matter of course, enterprises are expected to promote employee awareness of company policies. Safeguards to protect bona fide “whistle-blowing” activities are also recommended, including protection of employees who, in the absence of timely remedial action or in the face of reasonable risk of negative employment action, report practices that contravene the law to the competent public authorities. While of particular relevance to anti-bribery and environmental initiatives, such protection is also relevant to other recommendations in the *Guidelines*.
14. For the purposes of the *Guidelines*, due diligence is understood as the process through which enterprises can identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their actual and potential adverse impacts as an integral part of business decision-making and risk management systems. Due diligence can be included within broader enterprise risk management systems, provided that it goes beyond simply identifying and managing material risks to the enterprise itself, to include the risks of adverse impacts related to matters covered by the *Guidelines*. Potential impacts are to be addressed through prevention or mitigation, while actual impacts are to be addressed through remediation. The *Guidelines* concern those adverse impacts that are either caused or contributed to by the enterprise, or are directly linked to their operations, products or services by a business relationship, as described in paragraphs A.11 and A.12. Due diligence can help enterprises avoid the risk of such adverse impacts. For the purposes of this recommendation, ‘contributing to’ an adverse impact should be interpreted as a substantial contribution, meaning an activity that causes, facilitates or incentivises another entity to cause an adverse impact and does not include minor or trivial contributions. The term ‘business relationship’ includes relationships with business partners, entities in the supply chain and any other non-State or State entities directly linked to its business operations, products or services. The recommendation in paragraph A.10 applies to those matters covered by the *Guidelines* that are related

to adverse impacts. It does not apply to the chapters on Science and Technology, Competition and Taxation.

15. The nature and extent of due diligence, such as the specific steps to be taken, appropriate to a particular situation will be affected by factors such as the size of the enterprise, context of its operations, the specific recommendations in the *Guidelines*, and the severity of its adverse impacts. Specific recommendations for human rights due diligence are provided in Chapter IV.
16. Where enterprises have large numbers of suppliers, they are encouraged to identify general areas where the risk of adverse impacts is most significant and, based on this risk assessment, prioritise suppliers for due diligence.
17. To avoid causing or contributing to adverse impacts on matters covered by the *Guidelines* through their own activities includes their activities in the supply chain. Relationships in the supply chain take a variety of forms including, for example, franchising, licensing or subcontracting. Entities in the supply chain are often multinational enterprises themselves and, by virtue of this fact, those operating in or from the countries adhering to the Declaration are covered by the *Guidelines*.
18. In the context of its supply chain, if the enterprise identifies a risk of causing an adverse impact, then it should take the necessary steps to cease or prevent that impact.
19. If the enterprise identifies a risk of contributing to an adverse impact, then it should take the necessary steps to cease or prevent its contribution and use its leverage to mitigate any remaining impacts to the greatest extent possible. Leverage is considered to exist where the enterprise has the ability to effect change in the wrongful practices of the entity that causes the harm.
20. Meeting the expectation in paragraph A.12 would entail an enterprise, acting alone or in co-operation with other entities, as appropriate, to use its leverage to influence the entity causing the adverse impact to prevent or mitigate that impact.
21. The *Guidelines* recognise that there are practical limitations on the ability of enterprises to effect change in the behaviour of their suppliers. These are related to product characteristics, the number of suppliers, the structure and complexity of the supply chain, the market position of the enterprise vis-à-vis its suppliers or other entities in the supply chain. However, enterprises can also influence suppliers through contractual arrangements such as management contracts, pre-qualification requirements for potential suppliers, voting trusts, and licence or

franchise agreements. Other factors relevant to determining the appropriate response to the identified risks include the severity and probability of adverse impacts and how crucial that supplier is to the enterprise.

22. Appropriate responses with regard to the business relationship may include continuation of the relationship with a supplier throughout the course of risk mitigation efforts; temporary suspension of the relationship while pursuing ongoing risk mitigation; or, as a last resort, disengagement with the supplier either after failed attempts at mitigation, or where the enterprise deems mitigation not feasible, or because of the severity of the adverse impact. The enterprise should also take into account potential social and economic adverse impacts related to the decision to disengage.
23. Enterprises may also engage with suppliers and other entities in the supply chain to improve their performance, in co-operation with other stakeholders, including through personnel training and other forms of capacity building, and to support the integration of principles of responsible business conduct compatible with the *Guidelines* into their business practices. Where suppliers have multiple customers and are potentially exposed to conflicting requirements imposed by different buyers, enterprises are encouraged, with due regard to anti-competitive concerns, to participate in industry-wide collaborative efforts with other enterprises with which they share common suppliers to coordinate supply chain policies and risk management strategies, including through information-sharing.
24. Enterprises are also encouraged to participate in private or multi-stakeholder initiatives and social dialogue on responsible supply chain management, such as those undertaken as part of the proactive agenda pursuant to the Decision of the OECD Council on the OECD *Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* and the attached Procedural Guidance.
25. Stakeholder engagement involves interactive processes of engagement with relevant stakeholders, through, for example, meetings, hearings or consultation proceedings. Effective stakeholder engagement is characterised by two-way communication and depends on the good faith of the participants on both sides. This engagement can be particularly helpful in the planning and decision-making concerning projects or other activities involving, for example, the intensive use of land or water, which could significantly affect local communities.
26. Paragraph B.1 acknowledges an important emerging issue. It does not create new standards, nor does it presume the development of new standards. It recognises that enterprises have interests which will be

affected and that their participation along with other stakeholders in discussion of the issues involved can contribute to their ability and that of others to understand the issues and make a positive contribution. It recognises that the issues may have a number of dimensions and emphasises that co-operation should be pursued through appropriate fora. It is without prejudice to positions held by governments in the area of electronic commerce at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It is not intended to disregard other important public policy interests which may relate to the use of the internet which would need to be taken into account.<sup>5</sup> Finally, as is the case with the *Guidelines* in general, it is not intended to create conflicting requirements for enterprises consistent with paragraphs 2 and 8 of the Concepts and Principles Chapter of the *Guidelines*.

27. Finally, it is important to note that self-regulation and other initiatives in a similar vein, including the *Guidelines*, should not unlawfully restrict competition, nor should they be considered a substitute for effective law and regulation by governments. It is understood that MNEs should avoid potential trade or investment distorting effects of codes and self-regulatory practices when they are being developed.

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5. Some countries have referred to the 2005 Tunis Agenda for the Information Society in this regard.