

## COVID-19 & Human Rights Due Diligence

Governments around the world have adopted various responses to COVID-19 and have called upon individuals, communities, organizations and businesses to work together to overcome this pandemic [\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#), [\[3\]](#). The Government of Canada and the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) remain committed to our duty in protecting human rights throughout the COVID-19 pandemic [\[4\]](#), and will support enterprises operating abroad in their responsibility to respect human rights.

In the past months, jurisdictions across Canada have swiftly adopted public health, economic, and social measures to better serve Canadians and Canadian businesses [\[5\]](#). For example, the creation of the Canada Emergency Business Account [\[6\]](#), and the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit, offers assistance to sustain livelihoods of businesses and Canadians [\[7\]](#). In many parts of the world, however, access to social programs and universal health coverage remains an ongoing challenge, increasing the risk and impacts of COVID-19 on communities living in vulnerable conditions extending beyond the pandemic itself [\[8\]](#).

In Canada, unemployment due to COVID-19 has disproportionately affected youth, women, and precarious workers [\[9\]](#). Globally, garment workers – who are predominantly women – have experienced mass layoffs and furloughs without pay or severance, while some remain precluded from health and social benefits. This magnifies pre-existing inequalities, as women tend to be paid less and are more likely to experience poverty [\[10\]](#). In order for businesses to respect human rights, it is therefore essential to identifying which workers and how workers may be especially vulnerable to negative impacts from COVID-19 emergency responses.

While many businesses have taken measures to ensure worker's health and safety [\[11\]](#), they must also ensure that COVID-19 responses do not encroach on workers' rights, such as freedom of movement [\[12\]](#), [\[13\]](#). Emergency responses should ensure that human rights are respected by adopting a human-rights based approach in alignment with internationally accepted best practices set out by the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization.

At CORE, we encourage Canadian companies to continue to respect human rights by undertaking due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for human rights impacts in business operations, using the [United Nations Guiding Principles \(UNGP\) on Business and Human Rights](#) and [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#) as frameworks for doing so.

To help Canadian companies respect human rights in their operations abroad, we have developed a list of credible [resources](#). As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, we will update the list of resources on this webpage. We invite Canadian enterprises with operations abroad to send us your questions or comments in respecting human rights in your operations abroad.

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## Resources

Please note that the resources below are not meant to be comprehensive. The opinions and recommendations expressed in the following resources do not necessarily reflect the views of CORE. Please consult the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, or the Human Rights Commission in the jurisdiction in which your business is operating for the most up-to-date information on COVID-19 and contextualized information.

### ***Checklists & Guidance to Self-Assess & Respond to Human Rights Impacts***

1. Human Rights Watch. (2020). COVID-19: A human rights checklist. (Available [here](#)).
2. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (10 April 2020). Human rights due diligence and COVID-19: Rapid self-assessment for business. (Available [here](#))
3. UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (25 March 2020). Human rights at the time of COVID-19: A guidance note. (Available [here](#) in English only)
4. World Health Organization: Regional Office for Europe. (2020). Checklist to evaluate preparedness prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention. (Available [here](#))
5. ILO. (April 16 2020). Prevention and Mitigation of COVID-19 at Work Action Checklist (Available [here](#)).
6. ILO. Family-friendly policies and other good workplace practices in the context of COVID-19: Key steps employers can take. (April 2 2020). (Available [here](#) in English only).
  - Detailed guide structured as a checklist with measures that companies can undertake to support workers with family-related needs during COVID-19.
7. PwC. COVID-19 Navigator. (Available [here](#)).
  - Survey to help businesses consider how their business may be impacted in terms of workforce, operations, supply chain, finances and business strategy, and respond to impacts to complement other checklists that consider human rights impacts.

### ***COVID-19 & International Human Rights***

1. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2020). COVID-19 and its human rights dimensions. (Available [here](#))
  - General resource portal with links to OHCHR guidance notes on specific human rights issues, and the other UN organizations working on COVID-19.
2. OHCHR. (2020). COVID-19 Guidance. (Available [here](#) in English only)

- General policy guidance note on various human rights issues and vulnerable groups.
3. Human Rights Watch. (16 March 2020). Human Rights Dimensions of COVID-19 Response. (Available [here](#))
    - Comprehensive overview of relevant international standards and human rights concerns relevant to COVID-19 responses in specific countries.

### ***Relevance to Business & the Workplace***

1. International Chamber of Commerce and World Health Organization (ICC-WHO) Joint Statement: An unprecedented private sector call to action to tackle COVID-19. (2020). (Available [here](#))
  - Ways that companies can support government efforts to address COVID-19
2. International Labour Organization (ILO). (Updates regularly). Business and COVID-19. (Available [here](#))
  - General resource portal with links to guidance on relevant labour standards, checklists, including analysis on how the world of work is being impacted by COVID-19 (Available [here](#)), responses by specific countries (Available [here](#)), and resources to help governments support businesses (Available [here](#) in English only)
3. World Health Organization. Guidance for schools, workplaces & institutions (Available [here](#))
  - General resources to help companies in different sectors prepare their workplace for COVID-19, including occupational health guidance (Available [here](#)) and infographics (Available [here](#)).
4. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Tackling the coronavirus (COVID-19) (Available [here](#)).
  - General portal with information on key impacts, policy responses, data, and other resources, including a brief on COVID-19 and responsible business conduct. (Available [here](#) English only).
5. Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. Covid-19 (Coronavirus) Outbreak. (Available [here](#))
  - General portal with relevant news, reports, and other information resources specific to business and human rights in the context of COVID-19.

### ***Vulnerable Populations***

1. Government of Canada. (15 April 2020). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Vulnerable populations and COVID-19. (Available [here](#))
  - Identifies vulnerable populations in general and measures to support them.
2. UN Women. (9 April 2020). Policy brief: The impact of COVID-19 on Women. (Available [here](#))
  - Identifies impacts and challenges for women, and measures to address them.
3. World Health Organization. (26 March 2020). Disability Considerations during the COVID-19 Outbreak. (Available [here](#))
  - Identifies considerations to support persons with disabilities during COVID-19.
4. Outright International. (March 31 2020). LGBTI Caucus statement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. (Available [here](#) with Google Translate Plugin).
  - Identifies impacts on diverse gender identities and along with recommendations.

## References

1. International Labour Organization. ( 14 April 2020). Country Policy Responses. Accessed April 2020. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/country-responses/lang--en/index.htm#AL>
2. The International Chamber of Commerce and World Health Organization (ICC-WHO) Joint Statement: An unprecedented private sector call to action to tackle COVID-19. (2020). Accessed April 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/16-03-2020-icc-who-joint-statement-an-unprecedented-private-sector-call-to-action-to-tackle-covid-19>
3. United Nations. (2020). COVID-19 Response. Accessed April 2020. <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/above-all-human-crisis-calls-solidarity>
4. Government of Canada. (13 March 2020). Government of Canada takes action on COVID-19. Accessed on April 29, 2020 <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/canadas-reponse/government-canada-takes-action-covid-19.html>
5. Department of Finance Canada. (11 April 2020). News release: Government introduces COVID-19 emergency response act, No. 2 to help businesses keep Canadians in their jobs. Accessed April 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2020/04/government-introduces-covid-19-emergency-response-act-no-2-to-help-businesses-keep-canadians-in-their-jobs.html>
6. Government of Canada. (2020). Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan. Accessed April 2020 <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>
7. Government of Canada. (16 April 2020). Canada emergency response benefit. Accessed April 2020. [https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/cerb-application.html?utm\\_campaign=gc-esdc-edsc-cerb-2021-0002-9791623908&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_source=google-ads-108391748828&utm\\_content=text-en-429935587353&utm\\_term=cerb](https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/cerb-application.html?utm_campaign=gc-esdc-edsc-cerb-2021-0002-9791623908&utm_medium=search&utm_source=google-ads-108391748828&utm_content=text-en-429935587353&utm_term=cerb)
8. United Nations Social Affairs. (12 April 2020). Everyone included: The Social Impact of COVID-19. Accessed April 2020 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/everyone-included-covid-19.html>
9. Statistics Canada. (9 April 2020). Labour Force Survey - March 2020. Accessed April 2020. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200409/dq200409a-eng.htm>

10. Worker Rights Consortium. (March 2020). Who will bail out the workers that make our clothes? Worker Rights Consortium White Paper. Accessed April 2020.  
<https://www.business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Who-Will-Bail-Out-the-Workers-March-2020.pdf>
11. Minderoo Foundation. (2020). Protecting people in a pandemic: Urgent collaboration is needed to protect vulnerable workers and prevent exploitation. Accessed on May 4 2020. <https://cdn.minderoo.org/content/uploads/2020/04/30211819/Walk-Free-Foundation-COVID-19-Report.pdf>
12. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.  
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>
13. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. <http://www.ohchr.org/en/ProfessionalInterest/pages/cat.aspx>