World Benchmarking Alliance



Corporate Human Rights Benchmark: Investor Guidance

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Introduction

Business can play a vital role in creating jobs, securing livelihoods, developing communities and generating public revenue. However, without a strong commitment to human rights and implementation through human rights due diligence, jobs can be precarious, communities negatively affected and inequalities exacerbated. Investors and other financial actors, such as banks and insurers, can uphold human rights and advocate for responsible practices in their portfolios and business relationships. By doing so, they can prevent and address both current and potential negative impacts on people, manage financial and systemic risks, and meet the evolving expectations of beneficiaries, civil society, regulators and clients.

The World Benchmarking Alliance measures how the 2,000 most influential businesses are impacting people and planet. Its research is freely available so that, together, we can hold companies accountable for contributing to sustainable development. The benchmarks and methodologies serve as a roadmap for companies to understand the changes they need to put our planet, society and economy on a more sustainable path. As an independent, non-profit organisation, WBA acts as a centre for advancing corporate accountability. It supports its Allies, UN agencies, governments and other stakeholders in the broader corporate accountability ecosystem to understand how they can establish clear consequences for corporate inaction.

This guidance builds on the 2026 Corporate Human Rights Benchmark (CHRB) and turns its findings into action by providing questions that investors could use in their engagement, broader stewardship initiatives and other tools within their reach. The guidance is organised around the four engagement priorities agreed in collaboration with the Investor Alliance for Human Rights in their company engagement efforts: embedding respect for human rights in management systems and company culture, conducting fulsome human rights due diligence processes, practising supply chain transparency and responsible purchasing, and ensuring effective grievance mechanisms and remedy.

A tool for investors: the Corporate Human Rights Benchmark

The 2026 CHRB assessed companies in five sectors identified as high-risk from a human rights perspective: apparel, food and agriculture, extractives, information and communications technology (ICT) manufacturing, and automotive manufacturing. The 2026 assessment focused on 105 previously assessed companies that demonstrated more advanced human rights practices relative to their sector peers, offering a roadmap for stronger corporate practice. Companies were assessed using a prioritised set of high-impact indicators across five areas:

policy commitments, board-level accountability, embedding respect for human rights, human rights due diligence, and remedies and grievance mechanisms.

How to use this guidance

Each theme sets out what the 2026 CHRB results show and why it matters, followed by questions to use during company engagement as well as what to look for and examples of leading practices. Investors may use the questions and examples below to encourage stronger disclosures and action on companies' delivery of their human rights commitments. These are presented in two levels in order to meet companies where they are at in their journey. We recommend that investors use the first level "establish the foundations" where a company has yet to disclose the basic human rights practices and the second level "test implementation and results" for more advanced companies to examine whether those plans and commitments work in practice.

Each example illustrates one practice from disclosures assessed in the 2026 CHRB where the company met the relevant elements. However, being referenced in an example is not an indication of the company's overall human rights performance.

Unless otherwise stated, figures refer to the 105 companies assessed in the 2026 CHRB following the prioritised CHRB methodology. Scores reflect publicly available evidence against individual elements, rather than independent verification of outcomes.

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Recommendations for investor action

Ensure companies have the expertise, resources and incentives to deliver on human rights commitments

In 2026, 90% of companies identify a senior manager accountable for human rights. Yet only 22% describe how they allocate resources and expertise for the day-to-day management of human rights issues within their own operations, and 33% link a senior manager's incentives to their human rights commitments. This means that companies may not have the necessary resources or adequate incentives for those accountable for human rights to fulfil their roles. At the board level, 70% assign human rights oversight to a board member or committee, but only 22% describe the board's human rights expertise. This gap in disclosure leaves investors with limited insight into whether those responsible for human rights issues have the needed expertise to scrutinise how risks to people are identified and managed. Investors could incorporate these criteria into their assessments of human rights governance to better understand whether formal responsibilities are implemented in practice.

Corresponding elements: B.01.A and B.01.B (board oversight and expertise), B.02.A (board's review process), C.01.A to C.01.D (senior accountability, resources and expertise), C.02.A to C.02.C (incentive schemes and remuneration criteria), C.05.A to C.05.C (training of own workers and business relationships).

Key questions to ask companies and what to look for

Questions to ask companies	What good looks like
Establish the foundations	
Which board member or committee oversees the company's approach to human rights, and how often does the board review it?	A named board member or committee has an explicit human rights mandate. The board reviews the approach on a set schedule, covering salient risks, serious incidents and progress on action.
Which senior manager is accountable for decisions regarding human rights issues, and how is responsibility assigned across departments, including procurement?	Someone with a senior role is named as accountable for human rights issues. Day-to-day responsibility sits with the functions whose decisions affect people, such as procurement, human resources and operations, with clear reporting procedures to senior management and the board.
How are staff in key functions, such as procurement, trained in what the company's human rights commitment means for their role?	Training is tailored to the decisions each function makes. Procurement staff, for example, learn how prices, lead times and order changes affect workers. The company reports how practices changed after training, not only how many staff attended.

Questions to ask companies	What good looks like
Test implementation and results	
What human rights expertise does the board member or committee with oversight have, and how was it acquired?	The company describes expertise relevant to the risks overseen, such as professional or lived experience, training or regular sessions with external experts. General sustainability experience alone does not establish human rights expertise.
Is any part of senior managers' remuneration linked to human rights performance, and what measures does the company publish?	The company discloses the roles covered and the human rights measures used, as well as their weight in remuneration and how achievement is assessed. The measures cover at least one salient human rights issue, beyond an aggregate sustainability score. Targets reward changes in practice and outcomes for people, such as reduced excessive overtime or recruitment fees repaid to workers, not only activities such as training delivered or audits completed.
What resources and expertise support the day-to-day management of human rights issues in the company's own operations and supply chain?	The company discloses the budget or staff allocated to its human rights commitments in its own operations and supply chain, the skills of those responsible, and how resource allocation is proportionate to the risks identified.

Examples of leading practice

Eni (Oil & Gas, Italy): Board expertise and pay linked to salient issues

Eni's board builds its human rights expertise through regular induction sessions, at times led by external experts. In 2024, all directors were briefed on the updated mapping of salient issues. Managers in functions linked to potential impacts receive annual human rights objectives on issues such as modern slavery, land rights and security. Its sustainability goals, including those linked to human rights, account for 10% to 25% of variable pay depending on the role. This helps investors and other stakeholders understand which issues managers are rewarded for.

Puma (Apparel & Footwear, Germany): Resources matched to sourcing risks

Puma has corporate and supply chain sustainability departments with human rights experts and has had a dedicated Human Rights Officer since 2023. Its supply chain team has local staff in nearly all high-risk sourcing countries, and the company added a role for Bangladesh and Pakistan in 2024. In high-risk countries with fewer than ten supplier factories, such as the Philippines, Mexico and South Africa, Puma clearly states that it relies on third-party social audits. This shows investors how the company's staffing follows risk and sourcing volume, as well as where human rights oversight rests on audits alone.

Verify that due diligence identifies and addresses the most significant risks to people

Investors need to know whether companies are identifying and prioritising the right human rights risks. In 2026, 61% of companies describe how they identify human rights risks in their own operations and 64% through business relationships. Furthermore, nearly every company (92%) discloses its salient human rights issues. However, only 1 of 18 extractives companies and 1 of 21 food and agriculture companies name free, prior and informed consent as salient, though it is widely recognised as a key risk in both sectors. While discrepancies with recognised sector risks cannot determine whether a company has accurately identified its most severe human rights impacts, given that impacts are based on company-specific circumstances, investors may spot potential blind spots by comparing a company's salient issues with recognised sector risks.

The perspectives of affected people should also be considered when identifying and prioritising risks, as well as when determining how to respond and whether the response works. While 61% of companies disclose involving affected people in assessing risks, only 23% of companies do so when deciding how to address salient issues and 37% involve affected people when evaluating their actions' effectiveness.

Where key sector risks are absent from saliency disclosures, investors could ask how the company examined its risks, what evidence informed their prioritisation, and how affected people were involved in the process, especially when deciding the actions to take to address salient issues and evaluating the effectiveness of those actions.

Corresponding elements: D.01.A to D.01.D (human rights risks and impacts identification), D.02.A to D.02.D (assessment and the disclosure of salient issues), D.03.A to D.03.D (acting), D.04.A to D.04.C (tracking effectiveness), D.05.A and D.05.B (communicating with affected stakeholders).

Key questions to ask companies and what to look for

Questions to ask companies	What good looks like
Establish the foundations	
How does the company identify its human rights risks, in its own operations and across its value chain, upstream and downstream, and what did it find?	An ongoing process covers actual and potential impacts in own operations and business relationships in the value chain, from suppliers to the use of its products and services. The company explains the locations, sources and affected groups covered and what it found. Findings reflect the company's own circumstances, not a generic list of sector risks.
Which affected stakeholders and human rights experts were involved in identifying and assessing those risks, and how?	The company names the affected groups involved, such as workers, trade unions and communities or their legitimate representatives, including people who face barriers to taking part. Expert research complements direct engagement with affected people.

Questions to ask companies	What good looks like
Test implementation and results	
How did the company decide which risks are most salient for prioritisation, and how did it assess the severity of potential harm to people?	The company explains the operations and relationships assessed and the evidence used. Severity is judged by scale (how grave the harm is), scope (how widespread) and irremediability (how hard to put right), and takes precedence over likelihood.
Where salient risks were identified but no action followed, what was the reason?	Each salient risk has an action plan or a dated sequence of action. Where action is delayed, the company explains the priority, owner and interim protections. Limited leverage prompts efforts to increase it or to collaborate.
How, if at all, were affected stakeholders involved in deciding how to address the salient issues and in evaluating whether the actions worked?	Affected people or their representatives help shape prevention, mitigation and remedy, and evaluation includes their feedback, gathered safely, on whether conditions improved. The company gives an example of how their views changed the action taken, and reports back to them, including on proposals not adopted. A completed action plan or audit alone is not treated as proof of effectiveness.
What action has the company taken on a salient issue in the last three years, and what changed for the people affected?	A dated example links an assessment finding to a specific action, the change in practice that followed and the change in affected people's circumstances, supported by follow-up evidence and their feedback. Activities such as training or audits, and actions still planned, are not presented as results for people.

Examples of leading practice

Woolworths Group (Food Retailers, Australia): Worker voice changes priorities and responses

A worker survey challenged Woolworths' assumption that recruitment fees mattered most. Workers in Australia ranked living conditions and accommodation highest, and workers in Thailand placed wages and job stability first. Furthermore, through a hotline run by the non-profit Issara, workers reported 17 issues at a Thai supplier site where a recent social audit had identified no critical findings. Woolworths joined a collective remediation effort coordinated by Issara, and the supplier repaid one worker's fees, trained its supervisors, improved workers' transport and translated their payslips.

Hewlett Packard Enterprise (IT Software & Services, United States): Workers involved in remedy and follow-up

Hewlett Packard Enterprise requires suppliers to consult their workers when defining recruitment-fee reimbursement plans and throughout the remedy process. Workers are also consulted in order to confirm that access to remedy and channels for raising concerns are effective. The company then monitors suppliers' improvements through regular worker feedback. To strengthen its disclosure, Hewlett Packard Enterprise could explain how workers' views changed a specific remedy.

Align purchasing practices with the expectations placed on suppliers

Of the 84 companies assessed in 2026 on their procurement and supplier engagement, 83% describe how their human rights commitments are reflected in binding arrangements with business relationships. Only 39% of companies describe practices to avoid price or short notice requirements undermining human rights, and even fewer (25%) disclose practices to pay suppliers in line with agreed timeframes. As a result, suppliers often face a 'double demand', where they are expected to meet buyers' human rights expectations while managing price and delivery pressures that may impair their ability to do so. Since purchasing practices shape costs and revenues, these gaps can signal wider business-model risks. For example, suppliers squeezed on price or left to absorb inventory risk may cut labour costs, increasing risks of wages falling below a living wage as well as the contextual risks for forced labour.

Investors could add payment times and protection of labour costs in pricing to the company's supply chain risk assessments, using public payment-practice data to fill disclosure gaps. In their company engagement, investors could ask procurement departments and sustainability teams whether the company's purchasing decisions consider risks to people alongside price and other procurement considerations, as well as whether suppliers are permitted to adjust their prices when costs rise. Supplier feedback tools, such as Cascale's, help investors check whether the company's description of its purchasing practices matches suppliers' experience.

Corresponding elements: C.04.D (policy commitments in contracts), C.07.A to C.07.D (selecting, renewing and supporting business relationships), C.08.A to C.08.D (responsible purchasing practices), C.09.A and C.09.B (identifying and disclosing suppliers).

Key questions to ask companies and what to look for

Questions to ask companies	What good looks like
Establish the foundations	
How are the company's human rights commitments reflected in supplier contracts, and how is human rights performance considered in the selection, renewal or termination of a supplier relationship?	Binding arrangements reflect human rights commitments and pass relevant requirements to sub-suppliers. Human rights performance counts in selection, renewal and exit decisions. A decision to exit weighs the potential harm to workers and does not replace providing remedy for harm the buyer caused or contributed to.
Which direct and indirect suppliers has the company identified, and what support does it give them to meet its human rights requirements?	Suppliers are mapped back to the product's source, starting with the most severe risks, and gaps are explained. Support, such as training, technical assistance or better commercial terms, reaches lower tiers and is judged by changes in workers' conditions.
Test implementation and results	
Which contract terms bind the company as the buyer, rather than the supplier?	Contracts set the buyer's own obligations on pricing, order changes, payment and responsible exit. Responsibility for prevention and remedy is shared according to each party's role in the harm, and suppliers can raise concerns about the buyer's conduct.

Questions to ask companies	What good looks like
What notice does the company give when an order changes, and what happens to the price when it does?	Suppliers receive realistic forecasts and lead times. Changes to volume, specifications or delivery dates are agreed with them, and price and timing are adjusted to cover any extra pressures, including labour costs.
What channel, if any, do suppliers have to request a change in trading terms when their costs rise?	A published process sets out the evidence needed, who decides, response times and how to escalate unresolved requests. The company reports how the process has been used.
Does the company pay suppliers on the agreed terms, and what evidence demonstrates this?	The company reports agreed payment terms and actual performance, such as average payment times and the share of invoices paid on time, whether or not reporting is legally required. It explains optional supplier financing and associated fees, distinguishing early payment through financing from its own payment performance.
Has the company reviewed whether its own purchasing practices undermine human rights, and if so, what did it adjust as a result?	The review covers planning, costing, lead times, order changes and payment, drawing on supplier feedback. The company reports the changes made, separates completed changes from plans and tracks whether pressure on suppliers decreases.

Examples of leading practice

Coles Group (Food Retailers, Australia): A published route to review prices

Coles published a Cost Price Alteration Policy setting out how suppliers can request changes to trading terms when their costs rise and how requests are assessed. Its purchase order terms necessitate the supplier agreeing before any order changes are made, with both parties using best endeavours to agree on a price adjustment. A separate Payment Policy and Procedure sets out how Coles pays suppliers on time and within agreed timeframes. To further strengthen its disclosure, the company could state how often suppliers use the price review process and with what result.

H&M Group (Apparel & Footwear, Sweden): Suppliers rate purchasing practices

H&M views payroll as a non-negotiable cost and reports paying suppliers an average of 32 days after invoicing, including optional factoring. Through ACT (Action, Collaboration, Transformation) – an initiative of IndustriALL Global Union and several international retailers and brands – suppliers rate H&M's purchasing practices via a survey. Between 2021 and 2023, H&M improved in 9 of 16 areas; however, results show that the company could further improve its order changes and lead times.

Confirm whether grievance mechanisms lead to effective remedy

Most companies (78%) disclose grievance mechanisms for workers, yet only 35% explain the types of outcome complainants can expect and even fewer companies (21%) provide examples of remediation. These gaps in transparency leave affected people and investors with little information to determine whether a mechanism delivers remedy when needed. Even when the

number of complaints received is disclosed, a low or falling number over time should be treated with caution. This could reflect a lack of trust in the grievance mechanism and remedy process rather than a reduction or absence of harm. A stronger signal of an effective remedy process is what happens after a complaint is raised. Investors could ask companies for examples of their remedy outcomes and changes made in response to complaints received. They could also enquire whether potentially affected people helped design the grievance mechanism and trust it, as well as how their trust is measured.

Corresponding elements: E.01.A and E.01.B, E.02.A and E.02.B (mechanisms accessible to workers and affected communities), E.04.A to E.04.D (procedures, support, expected outcomes and escalation), E.07.A to E.07.C (providing remedy, changing systems and monitoring implementation).

Key questions to ask companies and what to look for

Questions to ask companies	What good looks like
Establish the foundations	
How can workers, including in the supply chain, and affected communities raise concerns, in a language they use and in an accessible format, without fear of reprisal?	Workers across the supply chain and affected communities know, trust and can access the channels, which are available in relevant languages and easily accessible formats. The company addresses barriers such as literacy or digital access, protects confidentiality and acts on reprisals.
What procedures, timescales and possible outcomes are published, and how are complainants kept informed?	Published information sets out the stages, timescales and possible outcomes, and when complainants will receive updates. Outcomes include remedy for the harm, beyond disciplinary action against a worker or supplier.
How does the company provide remedy for harm it caused or contributed to, and use its leverage where harm is linked to its business relationships?	The approach distinguishes harm the company caused, contributed to or is directly linked to, and sets out roles, steps and timeframes for each. Affected people help decide what remedy is appropriate.
Test implementation and results	
How have intended users shaped the mechanism's design and review, and how can complainants challenge the process or the outcome?	Users or their legitimate representatives help design and periodically review the mechanism, and the company shows how their feedback changed it. Complaints are handled by people with the competence and independence the case needs. Complainants can escalate to a more senior body or an independent third party. Using the mechanism does not require complainants to waive access to courts or other judicial and non-judicial mechanisms.
In recent cases, what remedy did affected people receive, and how did the company check that it was delivered and met their needs?	Dated cases across the salient issues set out the harm, the company's role and what remedy was provided, including the number of people who received it and any amount repaid. Remedies fit the harm, such as reinstatement, rehabilitation or compensation for community impacts, not only fee and wage repayment. Delivery is checked with recipients or independently, including whether the remedy met their needs. The company reports remedy delivered separately from remedy promised.
What changed in the mechanism or business practices to prevent harm from recurring, and what performance information is public?	Lessons from complaints lead to specific changes in the practices that caused harm, with checks on whether harm recurs. Reporting covers case types, handling times and outcomes. Low complaint numbers are read alongside evidence of trust.

Examples of leading practice

Freeport-McMoRan (Metals & Mining, United States): A community grievance mechanism at each site

Freeport-McMoRan runs a grievance mechanism at each of its sites through which community members, including Indigenous Peoples, can raise complaints in their local language. Reports may be raised anonymously or not, in person, in writing, by phone or by email. Grievance officers confirm receipt within two business days and aim to respond within 30 days. High-impact cases are escalated to site and corporate managers. Feedback from interviews with external stakeholders during human rights impact assessments is used to improve the mechanism.

Heineken (Food Production, Netherlands): Remedy that goes beyond compensation

When Heineken learned of labour violations by a transport supplier in Brazil, it ensured that the affected workers were offered lodging, financial assistance and emotional support. After a review, Heineken ended the relationship with the supplier and tightened its supplier governance. The company also invested around EUR 3.6 million in new facilities for truck drivers at all of its breweries in Brazil. Heineken could strengthen its disclosure by stating how many workers were affected.

Taking action

The 2026 CHRB findings provide a solid evidence base for sustained investor action on human rights. Investors and other financial institutions may use them alongside company disclosures, credible reports of harm and affected people's perspectives to identify priority holdings, as well as engagement or due diligence needs. Risk prioritisation should reflect the severity of risks to people, gaps in the company's response and opportunities for investors to influence change. Investors can translate these priorities into company-specific engagement objectives with clear responsibilities, expected evidence and deadlines for reviewing progress.

To ensure that what is learned through engagement informs ongoing due diligence and stewardship decisions, investors should meaningfully integrate action within investment and stewardship teams. This helps align the asks to companies and make sure they are well heard. These teams can meaningfully gauge progress through evidence of changes in business decisions and practice, as well as whether these changes improve outcomes for affected people.

Where companies persistently fail to respond or make meaningful progress, investors can use escalation through collaborative initiatives, shareholder resolutions or votes against directors responsible for oversight, as appropriate. Sharing engagement experiences and evidence of progress with WBA and other stakeholders can also help strengthen an understanding of how companies are respecting human rights and ultimately strengthen collective action.

Moving to an Integrated Transition Assessment

The CHRB has shown what strong human rights practice looks like in five high-risk sectors. From 2027, that evidence base is being scaled: WBA will assess 2,000 companies using the Integrated Transition Assessment, which brings together climate, nature and social dimensions into a single methodology and replaces WBA's separate benchmarks. First results are expected in early 2028. As a result, while the CHRB will no longer be published as a standalone benchmark, all 2,000 companies will be assessed against its core elements as part of the Integrated Transition Assessment.

The move towards assessing companies through the lens of an integrated transition acknowledges that respect for human rights and the transitions on climate and nature are closely linked. Climate change and ecosystem degradation already threaten the rights to life, safe water, food, health and housing. Workers and communities bearing the brunt of a more unstable climate can also end up bearing the costs of the transition if it is not managed fairly. These transitions change the context in which companies meet their human rights responsibilities. Corporate human rights performance can therefore not be fully understood without considering whether companies manage these links or shift costs onto people.

The new methodology evaluates climate, nature and social performance alongside each other. Under the social dimension, it examines what companies are doing to respect human rights as well as to improve the lives of workers in their operations and value chains by focusing on aspects like health and safety, living wages, and freedom of association and collective bargaining. This brings together many aspects of our previous CHRB, Gender Benchmark and Social Benchmark. In addition, for the first time, all 2,000 companies will be assessed on whether they have a strategy for the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI), including safeguards for workers and users.

Through the planning, implementation and performance measurement areas, the Integrated Transition Assessment also responds to a persistent gap between what companies commit to and what they deliver. WBA has consistently found that policies and targets are often not matched by robust processes or measurable progress, as the 2026 CHRB results also show. The new assessment therefore puts greater emphasis on how companies are integrating sustainability in their business decisions, including their governance and investments. This kind of vertical integration within a company is necessary to move from commitment and policies, towards implementation measures and performance tracking.

The Integrated Transition Assessment builds on nearly a decade of WBA benchmarking. It will help companies better understand their impacts and risks, reduce duplication in reporting and strengthen accountability for progress. Coverage across a broader portfolio of 2,000 companies and positioning social alongside climate and nature dimensions will build an even stronger evidence base for action.

Our funding partners



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