



Side event on

# Responsible business practices: sharing practical knowledge to promote a new generation of responsible business leaders within the Arab countries

20 November 2024

8:30–11:00 a.m. | Al Rayyan Room

## Event description

Many businesses have recognized that their own sustainability is linked to the larger sustainability of society. Enhancing business respect for human rights and achieving decent work has been at the heart of numerous public and private initiatives. International corporate responsibility standards set the expectation that all companies, regardless of their size, sector, operational context, ownership and structure, shall uphold their responsibility to respect human rights, avoid and address the adverse impacts with which they are involved, and contribute to the economic, environmental and social progress of the countries in which they operate. These expectations of good conduct go beyond legal requirements. They are outlined in three international instruments that are recognized as the key reference points on responsible business: the International Labour Organization Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (ILO MNE Declaration), the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.

The implementation of international corporate responsibility standards has also become essential for businesses aiming to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By contributing to the impact of economic growth and development on people, the environment and society, businesses can become a powerful driver for achieving the SDGs. As demands for responsible business conduct (RBC) grow, companies that participate in global supply chains must be aware of the international expectations of RBC.

How are Arab companies doing in this regard? Which best practices from the Arab region can be showcased to inspire a new generation of business leaders? What support do enterprises need to become more responsible, and who can provide it? This side event aims to highlight lessons learned from Arab business leaders, and convene a technical discussion to explore effective strategies, tools and support mechanisms for promoting responsible business practices in the region.

#### ▪ Organizers/co-organizers:

This side event is organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in collaboration with the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Qatar University's College of Business and Economics (CBE).

ILO has been assisting Governments, workers and employers to advance decent work by addressing challenges and building on opportunities, including through the promotion of sustainable enterprises. With its unique tripartite composition, ILO is well placed to assist Governments, workers and employers in addressing the above-mentioned challenges, whether at the level of the enterprise or the industry, or at the national level. The ILO method of work is based on tripartism and the development of social dialogue at all levels. The principles set out in its fundamental conventions are now universally accepted as a minimum requirement for decent work. In the context of the Business and Human Rights agenda, the ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) is explicitly referenced in the UNGPs, and the ILO MNE Declaration provides more detailed guidance to both Governments and enterprises on labour and social policy.

The Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry (QCCI), established in 1963, is one of the oldest chambers in the GCC countries. Its main role is to organize business interests, represent the Qatari private sector locally and globally, and support the country's economic actors and productivity.

The Centre of Entrepreneurship and Organization Excellence (CEOE) at the Qatar University's College of Business and Economics (CBE) aims to influence the way organizations in Qatar conduct business and the way their businesses impact the country, through research and policy works, experiential learning, capacity building, and community outreach.

## Event objectives

The primary goals of this event include the following:

**Understand the context:** Learn about the key concepts, relevant international frameworks and current trends in business and human rights due diligence. Identify key challenges and opportunities for promoting responsible business practices in the Arab region, in support of decent work.

- **Explore effective approaches:** Discuss effective tools and support mechanisms to facilitate the adoption and implementation of responsible business practices. Foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing among stakeholders, including Governments, businesses, civil society organizations, international development agencies, and universities.
- **Highlight good practices:** Present success stories and best practices from Arab entrepreneurs who are championing responsible business practices.

## Topics to be covered

The event will provide a platform to explore and discuss the following topics:

- **Concepts and context:** The terms corporate social responsibility (CSR), responsible business conduct (RBC) and business and human rights due diligence (HRDD) are terms which have replaced one another or have been used interchangeably. The discussion will focus on how these concepts refer to more than philanthropic or charitable actions that companies undertake outside their core business to give back to the communities. RBC and HRDD are intrinsic to how operations are run, and are part of the strategy to maximize the positive impact of enterprise operations, both from a business and a community perspective. They become even more salient when companies operate across multiple countries and jurisdictions, and when they engage with multiple business partners in supply chains. This side event will also offer the opportunity to go over the three main international instruments on responsible business conduct and their relation to labour standards, as well as key developments in the relevant international framework, including European Union directives on corporate responsibility.
- **Approaches to implement responsible business conduct and human rights due diligence and their benefits to companies and private sector actors (business case):** Companies and private sector actors will gain valuable insights into responsible business conduct and human rights and labour principles, learn from best practices and explore support services to contribute to a more sustainable and ethical business environment in the Arab region.
  - Legal compliance: Understanding responsible business conduct in relation to labour and decent work helps companies comply with relevant domestic and international laws and regulations, mitigating legal risks and reputational damage.
  - Enhanced reputation: Adhering to ethical standards can improve a company's brand image, attract and retain talent, and foster positive relationships with stakeholders, including customers, suppliers and investors.



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- Risk mitigation: By identifying and addressing potential human rights risks, companies can protect their operations and avoid costly legal disputes and reputational crises.
- Sustainable development: Responsible business conduct contributes to sustainable development by promoting social equity, environmental protection, and economic growth.
- Global competitiveness: In today's interconnected world, consumers, investors and other stakeholders increasingly demand sustainable business practices. Companies that prioritize responsible business conduct gain a competitive advantage.

## Target audience

The event is designed to engage the following groups:

- **Primary:** Enterprises and private sector actors.
- **Secondary:** Governments, businesses, civil society organizations, international development agencies, and universities.

## Language

The core content will be delivered in English. Speakers may use Arabic, if preferred. Interpretation services will not be available.

## Contact information

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## Agenda

8:30-8:45 a.m.

### Welcoming and introduction

- **Max Tunon**, Head of ILO in Qatar

8:45-9:15 a.m.

### Fostering responsible business practices in the Arab region: perspectives, challenges and strategic opportunities

- **Badra Alawa**, Enterprise Specialist, ILO Regional Office for Arab States
- **Khaled Al Saheb**, Programme Manager, Business Advisory Services, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Jordan
- **Yasser Akkaoui**, Chairman, Capital Concept

#### Moderator

**Luigia Ingianni**, Employment Commissioner, Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) Authority

9:15-10:00 a.m.

### Case studies in responsible business practices: unpacking the details

- **Nervana Taha**, Human Resources Director GCC Countries, Qatar International Cables Company (QICC)
- **Sarah Al-Marri**, Senior Workers Welfare Specialist Employee Relations, Qatar Foundation
- **Luigia Ingianni**, Employment Commissioner, Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) Authority
- **Ahmad Idriss**, ESG Advisor, Qatar Free Zones Authority (QFZA)
- **Colin Milton**, Qatar Stock Exchange (TBC)

#### Moderators

**Marie-Jose Tayah** (ILO Qatar) and **Said El Banna** (Director, CEOE Qatar University)

10:00-11:00 a.m.

### Advancing responsible business conduct in the Arab region: institutional roles and collaborative strategies

- **Mohammed Touzani**, Confédération Générale des Entreprises du Maroc (CGEM)
- **Mohammed Saleh Al-Laeai**, Executive Director, Al-Amal Microfinance Bank, Yemen
- **Hani Kamel**, Associate Professor of Accounting, Qatar University's College of Business and Economics
- **Rania El Cherkawi**, Dean of the Faculty of Health Science Technology, Burj El Arab University
- **Ali Awdeh**, Director of Research Department, Union of Arab Banks

#### Moderator

**Badra Alawa** (ILO Regional Office for Arab States)