



Initiative of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

Report 2020. Norway

A. Commitment to the Voluntary Principles

In a letter dated August 16 2019, the Norwegian Government reconfirmed its commitment to the Voluntary Principles (VP) and to advocate their implementation.

Norway has supported the VPs through The Security and Human Rights Implementation Mechanism (SHRIM).

Since the adoption of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in 2011, Norway has made responsible business conduct a priority. We contribute to the efforts of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights as well as the annual UN Global Forum. Norway also supports the ongoing advocacy for access to remedy. This, along with our commitment to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and human rights defenders, are deemed as agendas of high relevance to the Voluntary Principles.

Our commitment to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is another logical extension of our sharing of experiences and lessons learned. EITIs secretariat is located in Oslo.

Norwegian companies have benefited from the development and implementation of the VPs. The Principles are ingrained in the activities of Equinor and Hydro, which are major Norwegian companies having signed up to the VPs. Other major Norwegian companies have signalled interest to do the same.

B. Policies, Procedures and Related Activities

The Norwegian National Action Plan - "Business and Human Rights" - for the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles was launched in 2015. The plan emphasises in chapter 2.6 "Human rights in conflict areas" that

"security personnel hired to protect Norwegian interests, whether private or public, pose a potential problem. States that hire private security guards must ensure that these comply with the state's obligation to protect against human rights violations. The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers are useful guidelines for private business enterprises on how best to ensure their security."

The same emphasis is found in the white paper "Opportunities for All: Human Rights in Norway's Foreign Policy and Development Cooperation — Meld. St. 10 (2014–2015) Report to the Storting", which was approved by the Council of State on 12 December 2014.

The white paper sets out main priorities of Norway's efforts to promote human rights in its foreign policy and development cooperation. It describes how Norway's efforts to promote and protect human rights will be mainstreamed into all aspects of our foreign policy and development cooperation. It shows how Norway's efforts will be intensified at three levels: the global level, the regional level and at country level.



The Voluntary Principles are implicitly and explicitly present in a host of policies and practices. The government funded Norwegian Investment Fund for Developing Countries (Norfund), for example, reports that they make use of the IFC's Performance Standards, which takes care of all relevant matters relating to human rights covered by the VPs in all funding decisions and management of projects, where this is relevant. Aside from Equinor and Hydro, which are VPI-members in their own right, other actors with state participation make use of the principles as a public resource. In exercising its duties of ownership, the Norwegian government will continue to engage with relevant state owned enterprises in order to promote vigilance with regard to security and human rights.

To assess the adoption of a national ethics informational law the Norwegian Ethics Information Committee was appointed by the Norwegian government in 2018. In 2019 the Committee delivered its recommendations and the proposal for an Act to the Ministry of Children and Families, concluding that mandatory legislation is necessary. The Act suggested by the Committee builds on international consensus on the requirement for responsible business conducts. The Committee's suggestion builds further on the prior statements of the Norwegian Government according to which all Norwegian enterprises are expected to act responsibly and to know and follow UNGP and OECD's guidelines. The Ministry of Children and Families has now forwarded the proposed legislation to the Parliament.

C. Implementation

The Norwegian Government expects Norwegian businesses to know and apply the UN Guiding Principles and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises in their engagement home and abroad. This expectation is explicit. The VPs are an excellent tool for companies who are facing security challenges making sure that they comply with the expectations set by the government.

Norwegian companies who are members of the VPI report that they find their commitment to implement the VPs to be an asset for their business development.

Norway has been supporting the Access to Remedy Project of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and are pleased to note that Norwegian companies, who are applying the VPs, also work hard to ensure access to remedy for potential complainants through the companies' own non-judicial processes. Norway has also given priority to establishing a well-functioning and independent National Contact Point (NCP) for the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. The NCP promotes the guidelines and supports contact points in other countries. In this context, the NCP role as grievance mechanism is of particular importance. Any serious breach of the VPs is likely to constitute a breach of the OECD Guidelines. NCPs, therefore, constitute an important implementation mechanism and non-judicial access to remedy. The OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas as well as the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement in the Extractive Sector are examples that illustrate this point.

D. Lessons and issues

The VPs have contributed to the Norwegian petroleum sector's ability to prevent possible conflicts between respecting human rights and implementing security measures in the conduct of their business. In the Norwegian society, the tripartite approach is ingrained in public life. Structuring the VPI with a corporate pillar, a civil society pillar as well as a governmental one therefore seems natural to us.



Despite the modest level of current engagement in the VPI, the Norwegian Government does not hesitate to recognize the VPs as a success. There is still work to be done in order to implement the VPs in the extractive industries, but for several reasons it is timely to consider a wider application of the VPs. The added value of the VPs is that they represent a practical and implementable framework for enterprises to apply. They should be put to wider use, beyond the extractive industries. The VPs are also of relevance to investors.