

Voluntary Principles Initiative Strategy 2023 – 2026

A. Strategic Review and Looking Ahead

1. The Voluntary Principles Initiative (the “VPI” or the “Initiative”) undertook a Strategic Review in 2022, to help develop a vision for the long-term sustainability and relevance of the Voluntary Principles Initiative. The Review explored a range of options from winding down the Initiative to exploring its evolution and growth in the current environment. The Review found solid support for continuing to grow the Initiative and strengthening its global leadership role in security and human rights.
2. Collaboration and shared learning continue to be highly valued functions of the Initiative. Nonetheless, participants want to strengthen the effectiveness of verification mechanisms and the ability to assess and evaluate the VPSHR at the project and sector level. There is strong support for strengthening and expanding the In-Country Working Groups. Participants also appreciate the increased activity of the Secretariat in developing new resource materials and undertaking outreach and communications activities.
3. Overall, the Review found solid support for continuing to grow the Initiative and strengthen its global leadership role in security and human rights. This Strategy reflects the Participants’ conclusions regarding the Initiative’s strategic direction and its priorities over the next three years, building on the achievements of the previous three- year strategy.
4. Numerous challenges remain in addressing continuing human rights vulnerabilities in the natural resource industries. VPI members are increasingly aware of the repression of human rights defenders, gender-based violence such as sexual abuse and exploitation; entrenched gender biases which can undermine women and girls’ enjoyment of their rights; and other threats to the human security and human rights of those belonging to particularly vulnerable groups, including women, children and young people. In some cases, operating environments are becoming more conflict-ridden and the broader respect for human rights is deteriorating. Violent conflict is a major driver of security-related human rights violations. Members are aware that underlying conflict drivers such as political, social and economic exclusion and lack of opportunity, the absence of the rule of law, insufficient civic space and ability to dialogue, repression, persecution of human right defenders, and poor human security, all create conditions where the risk of violent conflict increases. By helping to address such underlying issues, members are

creating an enabling environment for the realisation of human rights. Members are committed to having a positive impact on local governance, peace and stability and playing a proactive role in preventing conflict, rather than reacting to it is essential for effective implementation.

B. Mission

5. The VPI seeks to: (1) actively promote universal respect for human rights in the provision of security for the activities of companies in the industries of extracting, harvesting, or developing natural resources or energy in a manner guided by the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights; (2) strengthen implementation and accountability; and (3) increase the number of Voluntary Principles Initiative Participants.¹

C. Building On Our Strengths

6. The 2023-2026 Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI) Strategy will build on the strong foundations created over the past 23 years of the VPI. Efforts will include multi-stakeholder collaboration, sharing of lessons learned and impact on the ground, and the continuous knowledge-building required to prevent and mitigate human rights abuses and violations, implement the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPSHR) in complex environments, remedy adverse impacts if required, and evolve the VPI to meet growing stakeholder expectations, including in light of mandatory human rights due diligence legislation.
7. The previous Strategy (2019-2022) reflected the VPI's drive to modernize the Initiative and increase its utility for Participants and others implementing the VPSHR. Over the past three years, the VPI deepened its collective knowledge, launching a curated searchable library on its website and releasing Participant-driven tools and guidance, all with an aim to enable practitioners to access relevant resources and build their capacity to implement the VPSHR in the most complex contexts and environments. New tools — the Gender and Vulnerable Groups compendium to the Implementation Guidance Tool, the Conflict Analysis Tool, Human Rights Defenders Guidance and the VPs101 tool — all serve to improve practitioners' understanding of risks and offer guidance around security and human rights practices.
8. Participants continue to offer to one another their expertise, experiences, advice, and lessons learned internally in multi-stakeholder safe space sessions, discussing

¹ The Mission Statement is abridged from the VPI Governance Rules. At the 2022 Strategic Retreat, participants agreed to review the Mission, Vision and Purpose statements following the mapping exercise outlined under Objective 3 below.

operational challenges and solutions, improving policies and procedures, and engaging in frank exchanges around thematic topics.

9. Over the past three years, the VPI strengthened its in-country implementation through the creation of a funding mechanism for VPI In-Country Working Groups and the distribution of grants to fund their ongoing core activities and projects. The VPI is creating new Working Groups and is engaged in outreach in multiple languages and forums around the globe.
10. Interest in the VPI and VPSHR expanded since 2019. The VPI expanded its membership to include the agri-food sector and attracted 20 new Participants overall, including 10 corporate, 9 NGO and 1 government Participants. (It should be noted that in that period, 7 Participants left the organization due to mergers and withdrawals.)

D. The Evolving Human Rights Due Diligence Landscape

11. As certain key jurisdictions evolve towards mandatory human rights due diligence legislation, the VPI complements and advances these efforts. The VPs remain an industry standard to guide businesses in the extracting, harvesting, developing natural resources, or energy sectors (and, potentially, other sectors) on how to conduct their public and private security operations while respecting human rights. Governments and NGOs that participate in the Initiative can contribute to development of these standards.
12. The world is rapidly changing in other ways. Dramatic shifts in the energy sector towards renewables is leading to different types of complex operations such as wind and solar farms, as well as creating a very high demand for certain minerals and metals. This increased demand is driving mining to increasingly complex and challenging areas globally. While the VPSHRs have gained widespread adoption in large energy and mining operations, some smaller players and other sectors lack meaningful security and human rights frameworks. In parallel, new regulatory regimes for mandatory human rights due diligence in an increasing number of jurisdictions are changing the landscape in which companies must operate and report. A number of industry associations already have advanced assurance and reporting obligations for many VPI Member companies that include the VPSHR.
13. Participants are keenly aware that the world needs the implementation of the VPSHR more than ever.

E. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

14. The 2023-2026 Strategy is organized around three focus areas: Global Leadership, In-Country Implementation; and Growth & Sustainability.

I. Global Leadership

Strategic Objective: Full implementation of the VPSHR in the extracting, harvesting, developing natural resources, and energy sectors, and beyond, alignment of global human rights due diligence guidelines and practices with the VPSHR, and effective addressing of drivers of conflict in complex operating environments

- (a) Promote the VPs as a key guidance tool that will assist stakeholders in implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Demonstrate that by implementing the VPs, companies will meet standards set out in mandatory due diligence legislation in the extractive, energy and agrifood sectors (and, potentially, other sectors)
 - i. Map the emerging global landscape to help the VPI navigate current and emerging relationships and partnerships with relevant sectors, governments and industry associations.
 - ii. Engage with lawmakers and policy makers to promote the VPSHR as the global standard on security and human rights.
 - iii. Develop and promote VPI-endorsed security and human rights due diligence guidance, based on existing VPI tools and other international best practices, with a purpose of bringing mandatory human rights due diligence regimes and their implementation in line with the highest recognized standards for VPI implementation.
- (b) Strengthen coordination among VPI participants to better enable sharing best practices and lessons learned, including better sharing of knowledge and information within and across pillars.
- (c) Collaborate at global and local levels with international organizations, multi-stakeholder initiatives, industry associations, investor and certification bodies, and other organizations. In particular, strengthen collaboration with peer initiatives such as EITI and ICoCA at the global and local level to address the relationship between provision of security and drivers of conflict. This includes advocating for EITI to include assessment of security and human rights risk in their approach.
- (d) Develop tools to address emerging challenges linked to security-related human rights abuse based on feedback from in-country working groups.
- (e) Identify or develop mechanisms to deploy rapid support to activists and human rights defenders at risk of security-related human rights abuse.

II. In-Country Implementation

Strategic Objective: Deepen country-level implementation of the VPSHR, including through supporting the In-country Working Groups (“ICWGs”), strengthening coordination with relevant in-country processes, and connecting the VPI to broader in-country conversations around security sector reform.

- a) Provide results-based policy and programming support to the In-Country Working Groups within a context of strong encouragement for local ownership, and effective multi-stakeholder problem-solving on the ground.
- b) Proactively support the creation of new ICWGs in VPI priority countries.
- c) Create more opportunities for affected communities to engage meaningfully with ICWGs and the broader VPI membership.
- d) Assist ICWGs in developing transition plans for financial sustainability beyond initial seed funding, considering needs and operational context of each working group. Such plan should also include exit strategies for funding.
- e) Improve the dissemination of in-country learnings and good practices between In-Country Working Groups and with the wider VPI membership.
- f) Prioritize local government participation in ICWGs and engage in national level human rights initiatives, such as National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights, development and legal and policy discussions, to ensure that the Voluntary Principles are included in a meaningful way.
- g) Provide cross-Pillar solutions and support for Corporate Participants experiencing challenges in high-risk, complex environments.
- h) Broaden in-country conversations to address root cause of conflict and security sector reform.

1. Growth and Sustainability

Strategic Objective: To expand membership as practicable into new sectors beyond the extractive and energy sectors, including high-risk agri-food, forestry, and green and renewable energy, and to attract new Participants, particularly among governments, and retain existing Participants through multi-stakeholder outreach and engagement that targets Governments, Companies and Civil Society Organizations

- a) Evaluate and evolve VPI's reporting, assessment and accountability mechanisms (e.g., verification, reporting and grievance processes) to ensure that they are efficient, effective, support access to remedy, and that they complement external requirements where appropriate.
- b) Improve the application process, by implementing necessary changes to enhance transparency, efficiency, and scalability. Grow in-house capacity to conduct due diligence on prospective members and engaged members applying for full membership.
- c) Mainstream gender considerations into the VPI, such as including security policies and procedures related to gender, and in Participant annual reporting requirements.
- d) Invest in practical changes that can be made to strengthen VPI governance and the Secretariat's support to the VPI with a view to reducing the administrative burden on the Steering Committee and improving the efficiency of the VPI decision-making and activities.

Implementation and Review

- 14. The Steering Committee is responsible for implementing this strategy, supported by the Secretariat.
- 15. With direction from the Steering Committee, the Secretariat will prepare an annual work plan, including communications and outreach, to support implementation of the strategy.
- 16. The Steering Committee will review progress against this strategy on an annual basis and report back to the Annual Plenary Meeting.

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