

Key intervention: Human rights economy

Thematic Area of the Coalition	<p><i>Realizing human rights and related labour rights, ensuring human dignity and meeting basic needs</i></p> <p>Human rights and related labour rights underpin the realization of social justice. Using them as guardrails in policymaking, business and investment decisions and consumer choices, as well as a compass for navigating the multiple transitions and crises facing the world today, will leave no one behind. Work in this area seeks to further the implementation of the norms, standards and principles that are part of the universally endorsed United Nations legal framework and include the international labour standards giving effect to human rights in the world of work. In pursuance of the implementation of the SDGs, this intervention will contribute to strengthening the rule of law and good governance and to ensuring that people's basic needs are met, thus supporting human dignity and agency. This includes promoting and ensuring effective access to services that fulfil basic human needs that are crucial for well-being, social inclusion and active participation in society at the local and national level, such as healthcare, education, adequate nutrition, housing, water and sanitation, and energy, with special attention to the most vulnerable. Actions in this area will be carried out with full respect for cultural diversity, guided by a commitment to mutual understanding and collaboration across countries and regions. The collective ambition of partners contributing to this thematic area is to bridge the gap between economic growth and social justice and to harness the full potential of the universally endorsed international norms, standards and principles that are part of the United Nations framework, ensuring that progress is not only made but also accelerated to achieve SDGs 8 and 16. These efforts will also exert a multiplier effect conducive to tackling global challenges like poverty, inequality, and labour exploitation more effectively thereby also contributing to the realization of SDGs 1, 5 and 10, among others.</p>
--------------------------------	--

1. Background and context

The human rights economy (HRE), initiated by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, aims to have human rights treated as part of the rule of law in policies and economic activity, thereby creating guardrails to protect “people and planet”. The human rights economy focuses on securing more equitable, just and sustainable development, and as decent work and social justice are essential to rights enhancing inclusive economic development. This initiative includes the provision of economic policy advice that is firmly guided by human rights and labour rights and undertakes a national context-specific and evidence-based approach with a view to ensuring that development, economic, industrial and trade laws and policies, investment decisions, consumer choices, business models are firmly guided by human rights standards.

The human rights economy is fundamentally anchored in international human rights norms and standards of the UN, which provides a normative framework that obligates States to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. HRE emphasizes a legal and ethical commitment for States and international organizations to upholding human dignity and rights, guiding economic policies and systems through human rights – and related labour rights - obligations, which can be one powerful lever for States to use for addressing the challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda. The human rights economy framework is aimed to provide actionable tools to embed human rights principles in economic governance and policies, for example, related to fiscal policy (tax policy, budgets,

corruption and illicit financial flows, ringfencing human rights from creditors). These tools will help to achieve social justice and redistribution by realizing human rights and labour rights, and other economic, social and cultural rights as well as SDGs and addressing inequality, including promoting redistributive policies.

2. Collective ambition and rationale

This key intervention aims at developing a framework for the promotion and implementation of a human rights economy that steers sustainable development and economic growth. The human rights economy is a powerful tool for advancing the 2030 Agenda. The Agenda's vision of justice, sustainability, and inclusion aligns closely with the HRE, providing a clear pathway for their mutual reinforcement. In particular, it serves as a critical lever to implement the SDGs by ensuring that human rights are integrated into the broader economic and social policies that can drive sustainable development. HRE helps to translate the Agenda commitments into tangible actions. It directly contributes to the leaving no one behind by addressing economic inequalities and promoting inclusive growth. HRE provides a framework for countries to reform economic policies in ways that meet their human rights obligations, addressing pressing issues such as lack of protections for workers, declining share of labour income in the economy, amid the rising cost of living and income inequality, among other issues. At the same time, it also provides a framework for the promotion of economic growth, sustainable enterprises and development together with the need to create an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, to advance human rights. In doing so, the human rights economy plays a vital role in fostering a just, inclusive and equitable economy - one that ensures all people, regardless of their background, are empowered to thrive.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) prioritized seven strategic areas to leverage human rights obligations in economic policies, providing technical and policy support to duty bearers and rights holders. These include: human rights enhancing fiscal policies, including taxation and budgets, enhancing anticorruption and fiscal transparency, care and support systems anchored in human rights, mitigating the social impacts of austerity measures linked to International Financial Institutions' recommendations and other creditors, by ringfencing economic social and cultural rights, human rights impact analysis of debt restructuring, ending the imposition of human rights cost and negative externalities through environmental and leave no one behind analysis to inform policy.

The value added by placing this intervention under the Coalition lies in its ability to mobilize and leverage the expertise and influence of diverse stakeholders, including governments, workers and employers' organizations, civil society, including migrant workers. The Coalition provides a platform to amplify efforts to integrate human rights into economic policymaking across different levels, from international frameworks to national/country-level implementation, giving a prominent role to the social partners. By unifying these efforts, the Coalition strengthens the potential for the human rights economy to reshape global economic systems in ways that are more equitable and aligned with the principles of human rights and labour standards.

3. Actions and expected results

An initiative under the auspices of the Coalition will promote and support the implementation of concrete actions at the global and country levels. It will include advocacy and research to support the provision of evidence-based policy advice that is firmly guided by human rights and related labour rights. The focus will be on fostering economic governance and policies rooted in human rights to place "people and planet" at the centre and ensure inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. This will motivate policy coherence and international cooperation, thereby driving structural economic changes designed to improve the lives of people.

The initiative will build on, and expand, existing projects, notably the [Surge initiative](#) led by OHCHR, and create synergies with existing multilateral initiatives, such as [Alliance 8.7](#), and ILO projects that have related objectives, including [From Ship to Shore](#). Synergies with the ILO Global Business Network on Forced Labour, the Child Labour Platform and the ILO Global Business Disability Network will be fostered. In its initial phase, the initiative will be rolled out in pilot countries. At global level, it will prioritize advocacy and the development of tools and research, including on the economic impacts of labour rights and human rights. The specific actions to be undertaken will be determined through consultations with partners interested in supporting and participating in the intervention.

Expected results (2025-2026):

1. The human rights economy is anchored in global policy discussion, influencing global policymaking decisions, especially by international financial institutions and policy bodies.
2. Broader constituencies for HRE are built through the Coalition and its partners, developing greater understanding and use of the HRE.
3. HRE is operationalized through country and subnational-level engagement.
4. HRE buttresses Coalition partners' efforts to advance the SDGs through enhanced implementation of economic, social and cultural rights, including international labour standards.

4. Partners' contributions

Partners of the Coalition play a pivotal role in building constituencies and advancing the Human Rights Economy, especially in promoting social protection and addressing inequalities. This is through raising awareness among a broad range of stakeholders, including governments, employers' organizations and businesses, workers' organizations and civil society. The Coalition provides an excellent platform for reaching these diverse groups to explain that human rights are not a new concept, but a foundational principle that must be applied in all parts of society, including the economic sphere. Contributions can be made through communication, advocacy, knowledge generation, and the exchange of best practices. Each category of partner has a unique role, and examples of successful interventions provide valuable insights into how these partnerships can be effectively structured and executed.

Governments are key stakeholders in operationalizing the human rights economy at global, regional and national levels, as the main duty bearers under international law with a role to provide the legal, and institutional infrastructure enabling all stakeholders, including businesses, to respect these rights. One of the primary ways governments can contribute is by expressing their commitment to the initiative and

volunteering to become pilot country. For example, governments may nominate relevant departments or institutions to lead the operationalizing of HRE. These institutions would be responsible for coordinating the participation of various ministries, the social partners and other public and private stakeholders in the process. The UN, including OHCHR and the ILO, will provide the technical support.

For example, in Southeast Asia, OHCHR supported a government-led effort to assess informal sector workers' access to social protection, focusing on vulnerable groups such as street vendors, domestic workers and tuk-tuk drivers. Despite the existence of social protection programmes, approximately 90% of informal sector workers remained excluded. OHCHR conducted surveys to identify access barriers and gauge workers' willingness to contribute to a health insurance scheme. Preliminary findings revealed low social assistance coverage and limited willingness to pay, underlining the need for increased awareness and equitable access to protection. These insights are intended to guide government efforts in making social protection more inclusive and sustainable, ensuring that vulnerable workers are not left behind.

Employers' and workers' organizations play an essential role by bringing expertise and practical experience to the initiative. They also play a key role in advancing human rights and in the implementation of labour rights and international labour standards at the national level by engaging in social dialogue with Government to advance inclusive economic and social policies. Their involvement and buy-in ensure that the approach is grounded in the real-world needs of workers and employers, which is critical to ensuring that human rights economy interventions are effective, relevant and successful.

Academic institutions are also vital in contributing to knowledge generation and the exchange of practices. These institutions can assist by conducting research on national and regional challenges to using human rights as guardrails for economic activity, such as identifying effective policy responses to inequality or undertaking national diagnostics of sources inequality in the world of work.

International and regional organizations and coalitions can serve as platforms for knowledge exchange and advocacy. Through collaborations with national governments and stakeholders, they can amplify the impact of successful initiatives.

Civil society organizations also contribute significantly by advocating for the implementation of human rights economy principles, raising awareness among governments, businesses and communities. These organizations, along with other stakeholders, can leverage platforms like the Coalition to advocate for the application of HRE.

The specific contributions of partners to advance the HRE will be determined based on their interest in supporting and participating in the intervention.