



1st Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

“Making human rights a priority for business”

SIDE EVENT: “From voluntarism to obligation: business and human rights in South-eastern Europe”

24 November, 13.00-14.30 CET/Online

Summary

The corporate responsibility to respect human rights was set out in the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNGPs) that were unanimously endorsed by the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2011. This has led to a growing momentum worldwide, especially in Europe, towards improving corporate human rights performance through mandatory human rights due diligence (HRDD) measures, as witnessed by the European Commission’s latest [legal initiative](#) for legislation to require companies in the European Union (EU) to carry out human rights and environmental due diligence is underway for 2021.

Nonetheless, this positive trend has largely bypassed South-eastern Europe to date. Only Slovenia (a country that is only occasionally included in the region by various observers and academics) has adopted a National Action Plan on [business and human rights](#). This reflects the slow uptake on the subject by governments in the region, which have frequently stressed the need to attract foreign direct investment as justification for reducing labour and environmental protections. It also demonstrates the still prevailing attitude of businesses that lack awareness of their obligation to respect the human rights of their workers and of the communities that they impact.

However, there have been some positive developments on the ground, largely driven by civil society organisations, along with social entrepreneurs and other committed individuals. This panel will explore those nascent efforts; panellists will reflect on how businesses can be prompted to change their engagement with society from the ethos of Corporate Social Responsibility, characterised by voluntarism and philanthropy, to one of Business and Human Rights, that sees businesses recognise their obligation to respect internationally human rights and address the risks and impacts of their activities.

Participants:

- Jernej Letnar Černič, Graduate School of Government and European Studies (Ljubljana and Kranj), Associate Professor of Human Rights Law;
- Ana Dangova Hug, Inter Partes Law Firm;
- Tamara Puhovski, Impact House Consulting, Founder;
- Nevena Dičić Kostić, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Business and Human Rights expert;
- Adil Rehman, ASOS, Ethical Trade Manager;
- Kemal Özkan, Assistant General Secretary, IndustriAll Global Union;

Moderated by: Siniša Milatović, Business and Human Rights Specialist, UNDP.