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Part 3

Putting Respect for Human Rights into Practice

Understanding Human Rights Due Diligence

Before exploring each of the six elements of the responsibility to respect in detail in the rest of this Guide, there are some important points to note about the concept of human rights due diligence.

- **Why is human rights due diligence important?** Human rights due diligence helps a company understand how its human rights risks can change over time and how to respond. It provides processes for looking at both external and internal factors that may raise human rights risks, and at external and internal resources that can help address them.
- **When should human rights due diligence happen?** Human rights due diligence should start at the earliest stages of entry into a new country/market, and at the pre-contract stages of new business relationships and recruitment processes. It should continue throughout the course of the business relationships and recruitment and employment processes. It is about on-going processes, not one-off events such as a formal impact assessment upon entry into a new country context, or an annual report.
- **How does human rights due diligence relate to a company's existing due diligence systems?** E&R agencies are likely to have existing due diligence systems they can draw or build on to develop their human rights due diligence processes. Examples include candidate screening processes, client company/user enterprise screening processes, systems for handling discriminatory requests, and health and safety systems. It is up to E&R agencies to decide whether to have a stand-alone due diligence process for human rights, or to integrate human rights into their existing processes. Either way, respect for human rights needs to be driven into the company's systems and culture, as discussed in [Section I](#).

How does the Responsibility to Respect Apply to Smaller Companies?

Smaller E&R agencies will typically have simpler management systems and need less complex human rights due diligence processes. Moreover, issues such as internal communication will usually be less challenging. However, those that operate in challenging contexts, such as where the state fails to meet its duty to protect, will still need systems that can manage the greater level of risks present. In any situation, smaller agencies will still need to include the same six elements of the responsibility to respect in their management systems.

The European Commission has published [guidance for small and medium-sized enterprises](#) on applying the UN Guiding Principles available in multiple languages and with accompanying case studies.