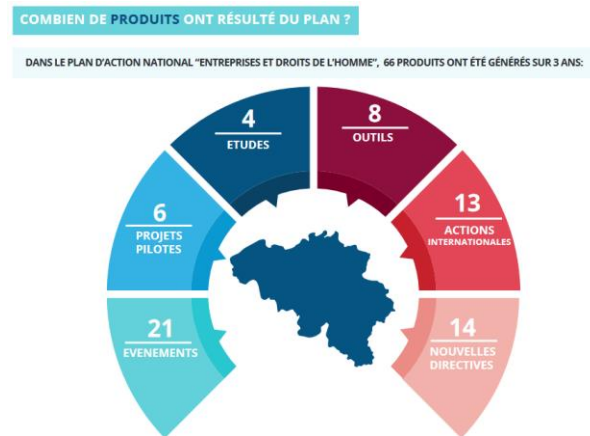


## The Belgian approach towards Business and Human Rights



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In 2011, the UN Human Rights Council unanimously endorsed the "UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights".

These guidelines for states and companies are based on three pillars:

- I. The state's obligation to protect human rights;
- II. The corporate responsibility to respect human rights; and
- III. Remedy for victims in case of violations, and access to effective remedies.

At the instigation of the European Commission and the Council of Europe, Belgium embarked on the development of a national action plan "Business and Human Rights". In doing so, it followed the lead of its neighbours and other European countries. In June 2017, the Belgian Governments adopted the first National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAP).

The Belgian NAP contains 33 actions that aim to stimulate Belgian and international companies active in Belgium to respect and promote human rights not only in their own activities, but also within their sphere of influence. The content of our first NAP is mainly aimed at informing and raising the awareness of companies and organisations on the complex and often sensitive issues related to the respect and protection of human rights.

The importance of an international approach and framework to identify, prevent and mitigate human rights risks in business operations and relationships cannot be understated. This is linked to the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, and the OECD Guidelines.

An overview of the main outputs of the implementation of the 1<sup>st</sup> NAP is available in [French](#) and [Dutch](#).

The follow-up process of this first NAP included an evaluation within three years, in close cooperation with our Belgian stakeholders. In 2019, experts from government, business and civil society evaluated the implementation of the first NAP, where they discussed the form, content, and process for a second NAP. Stakeholders were almost unanimous on the need to continue the work to develop a second NAP on Business and Human Rights. There was also a consensus on the need for a National Baseline Assessment on business and human rights in Belgium.

In 2020, a National Baseline Assessment (NBA) on Business and Human Rights was commissioned by the Belgian Federal Institute for Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in order to track the progress made by the Belgian authorities and companies since the adoption of the first National Action Plan. The researchers assessed the extent to which Belgian authorities and companies are implementing the NAP and the 31 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), which were unanimously endorsed by UN Member States in 2011.

The NBA aims to provide an accurate and comprehensive picture of the degree of implementation of the UNGPs in Belgium. This includes both legislative and policy instruments, but also voluntary initiatives. It should provide an overview of where Belgium is doing well and where there is room for improvement.

The results of the NBA will be used to inform the Belgian Government and our stakeholders on the

## ESDN Blog

commitments to be made and the actions to be implemented in order to comply with the UNGPs B&HR. The assessment is thus the source of reference for the construction of an ambitious and relevant second NAP to align our policy, legal and strategic frameworks with the UN Basic Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

[Belgian NBA Business & Human Rights.](#)

In spring 2021, the Government gave the green light to start work on a second National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, planning an inclusive and participatory process for an ambitious and relevant content. Our timeline is to have this be done by spring 2022.

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