

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) — General

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to how companies integrate social, environmental, and economic concerns into their values and operations. CSR goes beyond corporate charitable donations, it is about companies taking responsibility for their impact on society, but it does not refer to charity. CSR emphasizes sustainable aims, engaging with stakeholders, and respecting international norms. The Harvard Business Program's terms of reference state that CSR "encompasses not only what companies do with their profits, but also how they make them."

CSR and the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

CSR is linked to the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) through four areas: travel / tourism, media industries, new technology, and the financial sector. Corporate actions can affect children in various ways. Children can be affected as employees, family members of employees, consumers, or viewers. These sectors have tried to address CSEC through initiatives such as codes of conduct, training programs, and the development of new technologies such as filtering and rating systems.

Members of the international community gathered to discuss CSEC at three world congresses. These took place in Stockholm (1996), Yokohama (2001), and Rio de Janeiro (2008). In 1996, the private sector was invited to join the conversation linking CSR to CSEC for the first time. The first World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children highlighted the role of the Internet as an emerging concern. In 2001, ISPs joined the second World Congress and in 2008 representatives from the financial sector were present at the third World Congress. This progression shows the evolution of different sectors participating in CSR initiatives targeting CSEC.

CSR and Legal Standards

The United Nations (UN) Global Compact is a strategic policy initiative for businesses committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles. The Global Compact mainstreams principles that highlight human rights, labour, environment, and anti-corruption. As of 2011, the Global Compact had over 8700 corporate participants and stakeholders from 130 countries. It is designed to help advance sustainable business models and practices. The Global Compact is a general framework from which companies can embrace and support core international values.

In 2011, the UN Human Rights Council endorsed the "Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights" as a global standard for preventing and addressing how business activity can result in adverse effects on human rights. This step followed the unsuccessful attempt at the UN to win approval for binding corporate human rights norms through the Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises with Regards to Human Rights. The Norms were abandoned in 2005 after controversy about imposing obligations directly on transnational

corporations rather than requiring states to implement legislation. This shows the difficulty in establishing international “hard law” obligations for transnational corporations.

Respecting international norms of behaviour is an important component of CSR. This means that non-state actors should respect the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This includes prioritizing the CRC’s four core principles: the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, child participation, and survival and development. International law that prioritizes the rights of children includes

- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women,
- International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
- Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children

Having corporate entities support these documents would help safeguard children.

Specific CSR guidelines have been implemented by international organizations. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has binding standards on employment contracts and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has a set of Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and a set of Principles for Corporate Governance. However, the effectiveness of such guidelines and standards is limited because they are voluntary and because they do not provide certifiable standards.

CSR Initiatives

Strong CSR responses that highlight children’s rights include addressing proper working conditions, protection of human rights, safe working environments, fair wages, good working hours, and the elimination of gender discrimination. Workplace CSR initiatives can include job related skills training and hiring older family members to allow children to attend school. Companies should also address how their advertising methods and financial structures affect children. A Save the Children report described “a strong CSR program as one that involves and empowers local communities to attain and sustain a better standard of living.”

Benefits of CSR

Both public policy and business potential drive CSR. Benefits of incorporating CSR include an improved management reputation, building ‘social capital,’ and an enhanced ability to affect change. The International Institute for Sustainable Development believes that “firms can contribute to their own wealth and to overall societal wealth by considering the effect they have on the world at large when making decisions.”

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Sources

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