

**WHY CORPORATE HUMAN RIGHTS  
COMPLIANCE NEEDS TO BE MORE THAN A  
LEGAL CHECKMARK:**

**REAL-WORLD INSIGHTS FOR REAL  
IMPACT**

**COMPLIANCE**



With **human rights due diligence obligations becoming mandatory in the EU (think. #CSDDD, #CSRD)**, more companies approach this as a purely legal duty, often bringing in lawyers to ensure compliance. But as a lawyer myself, I have **serious concerns** about the limits of this approach. Focusing solely on legal compliance risks **losing sight of the true goal** behind these laws: reducing risks to people, not merely to the company. When resources are channeled primarily into compliance fees, we have to ask—who truly benefits?

In my experience, embedding human rights in business operations goes far beyond just ticking legal boxes. It demands a practical, strategic approach that accounts for the complexities of global operations and respects local realities. After 20 years of hands-on experience in corporate responsibility and human rights, here are **some insights** I believe are crucial for making a real difference:



# 1. Human rights are not a legal checklist- they require a company-wide mindset

I'm often asked: "What's the **minimum** we have to do to meet these new standards?" The answer? Complying with human rights obligations isn't about minimums; it's about ensuring you don't cause harm across your entire supply chain. A checklist or contract won't make that happen. It requires a shift in how a company approaches risks, opportunities, and core values—from every level of the organization.



## 2. Local context must shape the global approach

Each region has its unique human rights challenges, and approaching them all the same way risks creating a **'paper compliance'** that ignores on-the-ground realities. Contractual agreements can be a start, but without local knowledge, they are unlikely to lead to real change.



### 3. Stakeholder Dialogue is a Source of Real Insight

Human rights issues often affect multiple groups—from workers and suppliers to local communities. While the law now requires stakeholder dialogue, it's essential that this goes beyond a formality. Companies need to understand **why they are engaging**: not just to check a box, interview done, but to gain real insights and build trust. For **trust** you also need to be **transparent**. In my experience, meaningful dialogue—especially with **critical stakeholders**—not only brings hidden issues to light but also helps companies develop **lasting relationships** and make more informed decisions.



## 4. Effective Remedial Action Requires More Than ‘Zero Tolerance’ Policies

Let’s be clear: **avoiding** human rights violations entirely in a global supply chain is **unrealistic**. Yet, the typical legal response of enforcing ‘**zero tolerance**’ policies in contracts or severing ties with a supplier often fails to create real **improvement**. This approach does little to address the underlying **causes** of violations. Instead, it’s about taking responsibility and exploring how your company can actively **contribute to resolving these issues**. By working with suppliers and collaborating with partners, companies can drive meaningful change rather than pushing problems out of sight.



## 5. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution

Every company, sector, and region faces **unique challenges**. Effective human rights integration means tailoring your approach in risk assessment, training, and governance to fit your company's context and priorities.

While lawyers play a role in ensuring compliance, they often lack the practical insights needed to address complex, on-the-ground issues effectively. Real human rights due diligence is about more than meeting legal requirements; it's about creating genuine impact. If you have to do it anyway, better to do it in the right way and create some impact.

**🌱 How is your organization tackling human rights in practice and how do you make sure you can make an impact? 🌱**