Security services: An overview from a human rights perspective

March 2025

Some human rights concerns in the security sector

Most businesses use security personnel in their operations, retail outlets, manufacturing and growing sites. Personnel are generally either contracted directly, or provided via 3rd party businesses.

Listed below are some of the key human rights concerns associated with security services:

- **Excessive use of force** – there have been some high-profile cases of extreme violence against members of the public by security personnel over the past few years (see below), and it is documented in the resources below that security personnel who experience poor working conditions and exploitation are more likely to commit abuses against the public.
- **Poor working conditions** – extremely long working hours, health & safety risks, very low pay, insecure work (no contacts), generally not unionised, limited breaks, inadequate equipment, shelter and protective gear, long commute to workplace, no or insufficient health care coverage are all commonly found in the sector.
- **Sexual harassment** (male and female, although significantly higher risks for females)
- **Gender and discrimination** – women in security roles are more vulnerable to age discrimination, sexual harassment/exploitation, inflexibility around taking time off for emergencies/maternity leave.
- **Lack of training** - not all personnel will receive adequate quality training on the rules on the use of force or on human rights.
- **Reputational/operational risks** for the business – in recent years there have been some high-profile cases of exploitation/abuses committed by security personnel. E.g. Camelia Plc   Del Monte Carrefour Brasil

Conducting Human Rights Due Diligence in Security

Businesses are responsible for conducting effective human rights due diligence in their operations and supply chains and this includes security personnel whether they are directly employed in own operations, or contracted-out services in lower tiers of the supply chain.

In the resources section below are organisations who have developed resources specifically targeted at conducting effective HRDD in the security sector.

FNET has developed "Top tips in including human rights in the goods and services not for resale tendering process" to help members incorporate human rights protections and good working conditions for workers when contracts go out to tender.

Case Studies – see section after Resources

Resources

The International Code of Conduct Association – ICoCA

ICoCA is a multi-stakeholder initiative formed in 2013 to ensure that providers of private security services respect human rights and humanitarian law.

- Summary of services
- Effective grievance mechanisms and remedy
- Country risk profiles: Some are online, and some are in development. They will be shared with FNET
- Contact: Chris Galvin c.galvin@icoca.ch

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPSHR)

A multi-stakeholder initiative that has produced a framework and set of guidelines to maintain security while respecting human rights in their operations.

- 10 Steps to Maintain Security in Compliance with Human Rights – A definitive guide for how to conduct HRDD with security with resource sections for further information.
- Implementation Guidance Tools A set of tools designed to help companies, their employees, contractors implement the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. The tools have been divided into four modules: stakeholder engagement, risk assessment, public security providers and private security providers.
- Contact: patricia.jacopucci@voluntaryprinciples.org

International Finance Corporation (IFC)

IFC is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in developing countries.

- Use of Security Forces: Assessing and Managing Risks and Impacts. Guidance for the Private Sector in Emerging Markets. The handbook provides practical, project-level guidance for companies to better understand and implement the requirements outlined in Performance Standard 4. Chapters focus on risk assessment, managing private security, managing the relationship with public security, preparing a security management plan, and assessing allegations or incidents related to security personnel. Page 97 includes examples of what to include in Service Level Agreements with private security firms.

Security & Human Rights Knowledge Hub

One stop shop for tools & guidance on security, human rights and business hosted by the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

- Has an extensive resource section with relevant publications, toolkit and guidance on how to implement the Voluntary Principles. Also some additional work on security in complex environments.

UNI Global

Global union representing more than 20 million workers in the services sectors in 150 countries. They conducted a survey of workers in the security sector in 2024 and the report and summary points are below.

Insecurity in Security work: A Global Survey of working conditions in the security sector (June 2024)

- Over 11,000 security workers from 35 countries responded to the survey
- 57% of security workers said they are dissatisfied with their pay, and workers reported forced overtime, underpayment and irregular pay
- One in five security workers feel "very unsafe" in their jobs - around half have experienced at least one form of harassment or discrimination on the job.
- Women experience harassment at even higher rates than men, and significantly more reporting feeling "very safe" in their jobs.
- A large proportion of reported discrimination and harassment experienced by security workers is in retaliation for union activity.

Stronger Together

An impact driven, not for profit organisation that provides businesses with practical training, resources, business services and collaborative programmes.

Some possible relevant resources are listed below:

- Construction and property specific toolkit which includes a case study looking at fraud undermining workplace security (page 16) -

Sector-neutral resources that could be applied to the context of risks to security personnel and in the community:

- Tackling Modern Slavery in UK Businesses Toolkit - Stronger Together

- New animation video on spotting the signs of labour exploitation

- Worker posters and multilanguage leaflets/posters that are applicable to all sectors

ETI and FNET webinar on security (November 2024)

The objectives of this webinar were to:

- Provide an overview for members on the key human rights concerns for security services in the UK and internationally
- Share some case studies to illustrate how some businesses are conducting human rights due diligence for security operations within their operations and supply chains.

The presentation slide deck can be accessed <u>here</u>

The recording of the webinar can be accessed <u>here</u> Passcode: m2QWF=f# (this will be deleted 3 months after the event)

The agenda can be found <u>here</u> and it featured speakers from ICOCA and the VPSHR as well as the two case studies shared on this summary.

A follow-up meeting was held in the Raw Materials and Services working group on 21st January 2024 and a presentation shared by Uni Global Union outlining their report on <u>Insecurity in Security work: A Global Survey of working conditions in the security sector</u> (June 2024). The slidedeck can be accessed <u>here</u>

Case study – Fresh produce supplier in Kenya

Security can be the most front-facing element of a company's operations, therefore it is essential to invest in working with communities and in developing the correct approach to providing security. Security is necessary and not inherently bad, and businesses need to see it as core function that represents the company which requires investment.

Risk assessment process

The business had already identified some risks in its operations so they decided to do a thorough risk assessment using a specialist consultancy. The consultancy could have used either the Voluntary Principles (VSPHR), or the IFC Performance approach because both are very similar. The risk assessment process was fairly standard with a strong focus on implementation and monitoring.

Scope

It was key to look at the issue from many different angles, not just focus in on the "physical security" and to include how the business engaged with the local community, the reputational risk to the company and also the risks to people in the local community. Robust stakeholder engagement was essential for the work around understanding risks to the community.

The first stage of the risk assessment was to conduct a desk review using information from an existing human rights impact assessment and CSR reports, then field research was conducted in all the operations. The aims were to identify both

the threats to people and company, and the assets in scope. After the research phase, multistakeholder workshops were held to discuss a range of scenarios in order to better understand risk and to develop context-specific mitigation steps. In hindsight increased community engagement would have been welcome.

From the workshops, recommendations and mitigation measures were developed to comply with international human rights standards.

Private and public security

It is important to include public security (police) in the scope of the assessment because many businesses will also use some type of public security. The business will generally have more leverage and control over their own private security, but there are opportunities to collaborate closely with public security. The Voluntary Principles and IFC do have information on this and it was highlighted in the webinar that public security can be the points of greatest vulnerability for a business.

Implementation

The business received a lot of support to implement changes and see it as an ongoing process of development. The following actions were implemented:

- The security guards were renamed "watchkeepers" and the direct reporting for security personnel was reallocated within the business to a more appropriate function.
- Watchkeepers earnt a living wage (not just minimum), workers have rest days, and have the same benefits as others employed by the company – e.g. medical insurance.
- Many more female watchkeepers were recruited because they are seen as less threatening and they work during the day (not at night) because of gender-based vulnerability.
- The increased use of technology - e.g. installation of CCTV cameras at strategic points rather than watchkeepers.
- The uniform was "demilitarised" as it had been quite "police-like" and it was redesigned to look more "friendly/safari style" to changes the optics to the local community so security was not seen as a threat.
- The rules of engagement of the watchkeepers were changed. Their main aim is to "detect, defer, delay" and their function is to observe any issues and then report them internally or to the police.
- Ongoing training is given to the watchkeepers to adapt to working in a fundamentally non-confrontational way. This can take time to adapt to changes.

- A multi-stakeholder steering group was established to monitor the security function and a smaller group set up to deal with any serious allegations. There is also enhanced communication with the local community, a community liaison officer and more robust grievance mechanisms.

Case study - Manufacturing sites in the UK

The business identified some of the following issues relating to security personnel provided by a security provider:

- Low pay/underpaid workers
- Overtime not paid
- Personnel are charged for their uniforms
- Personnel are charged for training and to be members of the professional security body
- Many security firms were not open to collaborating because of lack of leverage, and the smaller businesses could be cheaper but not necessarily better.
- Even when companies agreed to pay the minimum wage and overtime, it was checked by the business and it hadn't been implemented.

The business found that putting stipulations into contracts really helped to embed change. Contractual stipulations included access to audit and ensuring that GDPR rules are respected i.e. work permits are shared annually with the business by the security company and an NDA agreement signed, and payslips can be requested for monitoring purposes. Sometimes there can be a high turnover of staff in security firms so having an agreement in-place at the beginning of a contract is very helpful.

The IFC and Voluntary Principles have developed resources to demonstrate what to include in contracts.

Some FNET member concerns

How can businesses ensure the right balance between having security on-site, but also ensure that workers are not under "surveillance" especially if there is worker accommodation on-site.