

Human rights



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world

Human rights

We base all our relevant BT policies and procedures on the principles set out in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which sets a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.

Our Business Principles include a commitment to protect and enhance the human dignity of every BT employee, and everyone who has dealings with us. This is communicated to our employees around the world in eight different languages.

Here we describe our approach to the human rights issues, under these headings:

- Principles
- BT products and services
- Supply and use chains
- Privacy
- Freedom of expression.

Principles

We use the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) to ensure all our policies enhance human dignity. But new challenges and opportunities arise all the time, and we can't rely on policy alone to make sure we address human rights issues properly.

All our employees have access to the Universal Declaration on our intranet, and an outline of our approach is included in the guidance document accompanying our statement of business practice.

We are in contact with expert groups and information sources that can help us implement our commitment to human dignity and improve our procedures if necessary.

For example, we are a signatory to the UN's Global Compact, an initiative that strives to motivate business and industry around ten principles on corruption, environment, labour and human rights. BT participates in the Global Compact Learning Forum. We report on our progress and performance against the Global Compact principles - see [Global Compact Site Index](#). Through the Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI) we engage with ICT service providers and suppliers, and alliances focused on improving supply-chain working conditions, such as the Ethical Trading Initiative. Representatives at a GeSI supply-chain working group meeting in April 2005 discussed ways in which companies can ensure quality compliance with labour laws and the implementation of monitoring codes.

During the 2005 financial year, we improved the performance aspect of our ethics indicator by adding these two questions to our annual employee survey: Is BT trustworthy, and is it safe to speak up in BT? For more information see [Business Principles](#).

BT products and services

The best way to implement our commitment to human dignity is to enhance the positive impact our products and services can have on human rights.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, and a critical means to promote human rights in general. Greater access to information and communications technology (ICT) can be a source of openness in otherwise closed societies. ICT provides an extremely fast, efficient and safe way to disseminate information and can be invaluable to organisations dedicated to promoting human rights.

However, we recognise that worldwide respect for human dignity is more than just a click away.

During the 2005 financial year we launched a new website for BT employees, called 'CSR Countries At Risk'. This website provides a straightforward risk assessment of the top CSR risks of doing business in 153 countries, including a specific assessment of the Human Rights risk. It helps managers make decisions on new and existing business acquisitions, purchasing and other deals or partnerships. We aim to include this risk assessment in key global business cases from 2006.

Like many of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, new technological advances bring new challenges to, and interpretations of, free expression.

Our stakeholders have identified the misuse of the Internet by criminals as a major concern. We address this issue in two of our independently written Hot Topics:

- [Abuse of the Internet](#), by Solitaire Townsend of the consultancy Futerra, considers issues of the extreme abuse of the Internet.
- [Virtual Vice](#), by James Wilsdon and Paul Miller of UK think-tank Demos, examines BT's approach to issues such as hacking, copyright infringement and spamexamines BT's approach to issues of concern such as hacking, copyright infringement and spam.

We hope that the economic potential of e-commerce and the increased transparency brought about by new technologies will have an overall positive impact on human rights. Our Hot Topic [Modern Communications and Quality of Life](#) explores this potential in more detail.

Supply and use chains

We have the potential to affect human rights in two ways:

- The working conditions of those who make the products we buy - supply chain
- How our products and services are used by others - use chain.

Supply chain

We want working conditions in our supply chain to meet the standards of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labour Organisation Conventions. This commitment is one of BT's top seven CSR risks. See more at [Human rights in the supply chain](#). We believe - and it is part of our business case for CSR - that improving working conditions in our supply chain means the products we purchase are of better quality.

The feedback received from workers interviewed during ad hoc assessments of our suppliers is collated in reports provided to both suppliers and the relevant BT buyers.

Use chain

The main concern is the misuse of our products and services, for example using the Internet for crime. Our Hot Topics, [Abuse of the Internet](#) and [Virtual Vice](#) cover these issues. We will continue to monitor and address these concerns where possible. Other issues are [privacy](#) and [freedom of expression](#).

We balance our support and investment in new technologies with research into their implications for our customers, for example on [privacy](#).

Privacy

Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states

“No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor attacks upon his honour and reputation.”

Privacy is not a new challenge. But developments in ICT, such as the ability to tailor services to meet personal needs, have created fresh dilemmas.

Protecting online customers

We have to find a balance between offering tailored customer service with protecting the privacy of our customers.

For example, if our customers in the UK wish to use our website to manage their account, check their bill and buy various products or services, they have to register first - which involves the disclosure of certain personal information. We have a specific [privacy policy](#) covering this situation.

BT also has a detailed [Acceptable Use Policy](#) that shows how we protect the privacy of our on-line customers. This is balanced with our expectations of customers' behaviour towards each other when using our services.

Customer preferences can be tracked on-line to offer personalised services and special offers. Customers can opt out of this service.

Protecting all customers

We know that privacy is very important to all our customers, not only those on-line. BT complies with, and is registered under, the Data Protection Act in the UK, and we take all reasonable care to prevent any unauthorised access of personal data.

BT's Caller Display and Call Return services in the UK can make customer numbers available to the people they are calling. Dialling 141 before calling can prevent this and we also offer to withhold numbers permanently, free of charge.

Customers are able to screen out most direct marketing calls by registering with the [UK Telephone Preference Service](#). British Telecommunications plc (BT) operates under a licence granted by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, under section 7 of the UK Telecommunications Act. This means we only use personal details for the reason that they were entrusted to us and don't pass them on to other parts of the business.

Sometimes personal details do have to be disclosed - for example, in the prevention or detection of a criminal offence.

We address trade-offs between advancements in networked technologies and the risks to personal privacy rights in our most recent Hot Topic - [Privacy in the Digital Networked Economy](#). The researchers considered the views of BT's stakeholders, including anti-tagging lobbying groups.



Human rights continued

BT employees

We have several policies and codes relating to the use of BT telephones, email and the Internet by BT employees.

All employees have been made aware that email and Internet access may be monitored and that certain types of message and use of the Internet are considered inappropriate while at work and using our system. This is common business practice. BT does allow reasonable use of personal email.

During the 2005 financial year we have developed guidelines for all employees on how to manage the new risks and challenges to privacy posed by the digital networked economy. Examples include the technology and process of radio frequency identification (RFID) tagging and the location registration of mobile communication devices.

Freedom of expression

Article 19 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and a critical means of promoting human rights in general.

But technological advances bring new challenges to the right to freedom of expression and new interpretations of it.

We offer easy feedback channels for stakeholders, such as the [Your Views](#) email address.

Freedom of expression vs child protection

A key challenge is to balance the right to freedom of expression with the need to protect children on-line.

BT is a board member of the [Internet Content Rating Association \(ICRA\)](#), an international organisation that aims to protect children from potentially harmful material and protect free speech on the Internet.

The ICRA asks web authors to give details of what is and is not present on their site. From this, the organisation generates a content label (a short piece of computer code) which the author adds to the site. It enables users, especially parents of young children, to set their Internet browser to accept or reject access to certain types of content. The key point for freedom of expression is that ICRA does not itself rate Internet content - the content providers do so if they wish to participate.

Our own programme, [BT Safe Surf](#), gives detailed information for parents and provides user-friendly training for children.

Content provision

BT acts on complaints about content hosted on our servers. We sit on the funding council of the [UK Internet Watch Foundation](#), which notifies us of illegal content stored on our servers and website.

We have contributed to the work of [Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services \(ICSTIS\)](#). Part of ICSTIS's remit involves registering certain types of phone services in the UK, such as dating services, betting, fundraising and services of a sexual nature. This safeguards the right to freedom of expression while ensuring protection of users, legality and quality.

We have published two Hot Topics that explore the problem of misuse of the Internet:

- [Abuse of the Internet](#), by Solitaire Townsend of the consultancy Futerra, considers issues of the extreme abuse of the Internet.
- [Virtual Vice](#), by James Wilsdon and Paul Miller of UK think-tank Demos, examines BT's approach to issues such as hacking, copyright infringement and spam.

To address the problem of child abuse on the Internet, BT has introduced CleanFeed, a software filtering system that automatically blocks access to websites blacklisted by the Internet Watch Foundation. This includes those sites considered 'illegal to view' under the 1978 Child Protection Act.

