







Recommendations for effective operational grievance mechanisms

Effective grievance mechanisms are essential to protect labour rights, prevent exploitation and abuse, enable the provision of remediation, enhance organisational accountability, ensure legal compliance, mitigate risk, protect brand reputation, engage stakeholders, and drive continuous improvement and innovation throughout the supply chain. By prioritising the implementation of effective grievance mechanisms, companies can build more resilient, ethical, and sustainable supply chains while realising the corporate responsibility to respect human rights.

While many companies report the existence of grievance mechanisms, there is often little evidence that these are used by workers, demonstrating a gap between policy and practice, and calling into question the effectiveness of existing processes in facilitating access to remedy for workers.

With the aim of promoting improved practice and policy among our members and other relevant stakeholders, ETI has produced:

-  [Access to Remedy Guidance](#) 
-  [Access to Remedy Principles for Migrant Workers](#) 
-  [And four background research papers](#) 

To complement these guidelines and tools, ETI has outlined some practical recommendations for buyers and employers on issues to consider when designing, implementing, and reviewing effective workplace grievance mechanisms.

Buyers should:

- ✎ Assess gaps in grievance mechanisms in their own operations and along the supply chain, and work on every level, and with relevant partners, to strengthen their availability and effectiveness against [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights criteria](#)¹. Particular attention should be paid to the need for mechanisms at the operational level, based on engagement and dialogue with workers and their representatives.
- ✎ Review grievance mechanisms through contextualised risk assessments. Workers' perspectives and expectations must be central to understanding whether a grievance mechanism is working or not. Workers must be at the centre of the design and implementation of mechanisms, as they are the ones who best understand their conditions and have the strongest interest in ensuring that their rights are respected.
- ✎ Reach out to producers in your production countries to assess their needs and offer support and training on grievance mechanisms and effective handling of workers' complaints.
- ✎ Ensure that the presence of grievance mechanisms does not become a tick-box exercise for legal and/or audit purposes by actively monitoring producer commitment, mechanism availability, use, and impact.
- ✎ Ensure that supply chain grievance mechanisms implemented or supported by lead buyers do not undermine the need for grievance mechanisms at producer-level, based on meaningful engagement, representation, and dialogue.
- ✎ Commit to supporting supply chain actors to investigate and resolve issues and to enabling sectoral efforts to overcome and respond to systemic risks including developing effective channels and escalation procedures for grievances that cannot be resolved by individual employers.
- ✎ Review the contexts surrounding your business purchasing practices to increase understanding of the link between your practices and work conditions identified in your supply chains.

Employers should:

- ✎ Ensure that time and capacity are set aside to familiarise the company with the objectives, establishment and effectiveness of grievance mechanisms using available operational grievance mechanism toolkits.²
- ✎ Assess the use and effectiveness of existing grievance channels including focusing on workers' knowledge, understanding, trust and access to available channels. Receiving no grievances is often a red flag that the system is not working.
- ✎ Ensure all those who interact with or oversee the grievance mechanism process are adequately trained on the process, expectations, and safeguarding requirements.
- ✎ Ensure workers and their representatives have a genuine opportunity to shape the design of grievance mechanisms and tailor them to workers' needs including by customising channels to accommodate language needs, diverse literacy levels. Ensuring anonymity and privacy, providing alternative communication methods, and addressing power dynamics between workers and management.
- ✎ Enforce a zero-tolerance approach to retaliation or reprisals and build trust to ensure that workers do not fear reporting issues.
- ✎ Ensure a gender-sensitive perspective in the design and implementation of grievance mechanisms including a 'protect the victim/survivor' approach to mitigate the harm caused and prevent it from occurring again.
- ✎ Collaborate with trade unions and civil society organisations to design comprehensive training programmes focusing on workers' rights, contract comprehension, and grievance mechanism processes; including accessing support where they live, delivered in languages that workers understand.
- ✎ Clearly and regularly communicate the grievance mechanism process to relevant stakeholders, ensuring it is transparent and timely. Monitor and demonstrate effective and efficient resolution of issues to build trust in the mechanism.
- ✎ Actively monitor grievance data to assess trends and recurring issues and address these as part of ongoing efforts to improve working conditions.
- ✎ Assess the status and experience of groups of workers (seasonal, migrant, workers with disabilities) with the cross-cutting theme of gender and address their specific challenges by improving their representation in management roles and trade unions, to create safer and more supportive work environments.

¹ OHCHR, OHCHR Accountability and Remedy Project: Meeting the UNGPs' Effectiveness Criteria. Summary of ARPIII Guidance (2021) Available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/orp-note-meeting-effectiveness-criteria.pdf> [Accessed on 21 Dec 2023].

² For example, the Oxfam Business Advisory Service Grievance Mechanism Toolkit developed for Reckitt, available from <https://www.oxfamapps.org.uk/grievance-mechanism-toolkit/> and AIM-Progress Grievance Mechanism Maturity Framework & Guidance 1.0 available from: <https://aim-progress.com/-/33>.