

MEP Briefing Document

This document aims to provide information to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) about sustainability and human rights violations in ICT supply chains (Information Communication Technology), and discuss what MEPs can do in the EP term 2019-2024 to push for EU policies to address these issues.

The production of ICT has a huge impact on the environment, climate change, human rights and working conditions along global supply chains in the Global South.

Mining of minerals, used in ICT equipment, are associated with risks and impacts concerning human rights abuse, socio-ecological conflicts and violations of labour, social and environmental rights. Moreover, ICT devices contain so-called conflict minerals (tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold), the extraction of which risk contributing to armed conflict and severe human rights abuse.

Workers in ICT manufacturing are at risk of being unknowingly exposed to hazardous chemicals that damage their health, as well as excessive overtime and wages that fail to satisfy their basic needs. They are often denied fundamental labour rights, as defined by the ILO and national labour legislation. The risk of child labour, discrimination, denied freedom of association and collective bargaining as well as forced labour and debt bondage is high in electronics supply chains.

Coal-powered manufacturing contributes to rising global temperatures and the devastating impacts of climate change. Almost four percent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from the ICT sector.

Transparency and traceability in the ICT supply chain is low, making it difficult to hold companies accountable for their actions along the ICT supply chains, which may lead to corporate impunity and infringements of regulations.

The short life span of ICT devices exacerbates the toll these devices take on the planet's finite resources and the life of workers along the whole supply chain. According to the World Economic Forum, e-waste is now the world's fastest-growing waste stream, reaching 48.5 million tonnes in 2018. Much of it ends up (or is dumped) in developing countries. Hence, the life-cycle costs of production of new computers and technology equipment are not reflected in the retail prices of these products.

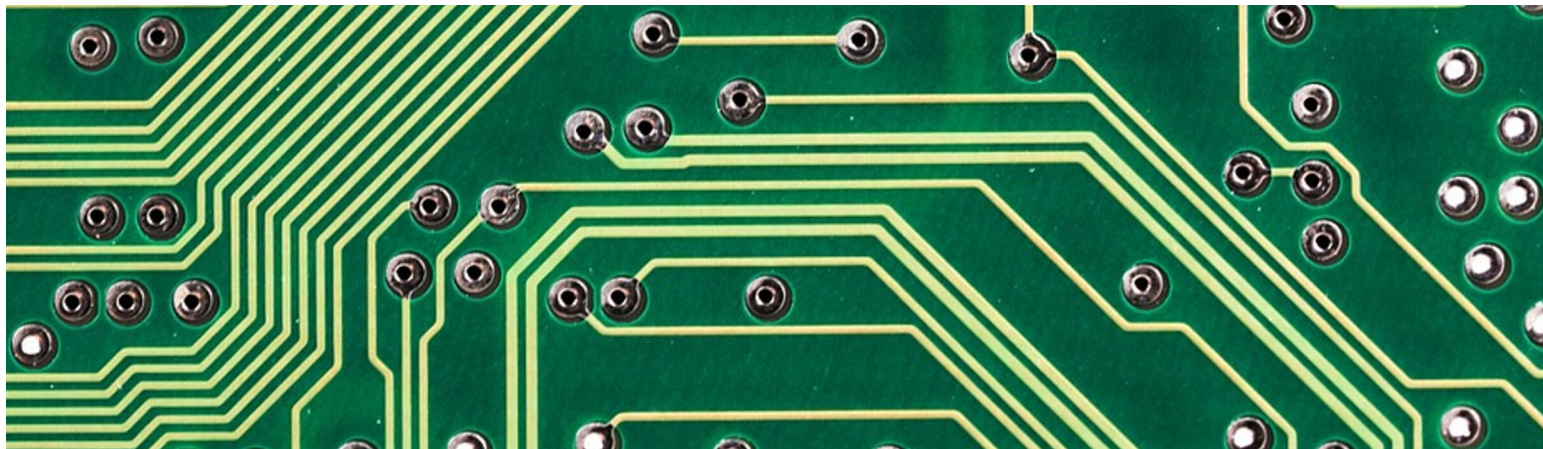
Multilateral Development Banks, such as the European Investment Bank ("the EU bank") and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), still don't have proper tools nor the sufficient will to prevent their project promoters from causing significant and sometimes irreversible environmental damage and greatly impact human health, settlements and livelihoods.

Role of the European Union policies and the MEPs in particular

The European Union, and the European Parliament in the EP 2019-20214 term in particular, can play an important role in reducing the negative impacts of the production of computers and technology equipment on the environment, climate change, human rights and working conditions in Europe and in the Global South.

Topic 1: Human Rights Violations in Supply Chains

Window of opportunity: The United Nations are currently negotiating a possible Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with respect to human rights. The current European Parliament has been supportive of this process, while the EU Member States have been blocking the process. In parallel, a group of Members of the European Parliament (EP Working Group on Responsible Business Conduct) recently published a “Shadow EU Action Plan on the Implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights within the EU,” proposing a systematic and coherent approach on the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) in all relevant policy areas for the 2019 – 2024 period. The Plan included measures such as adopting EU legislation on corporate due diligence and access to remedy for victims of corporate abuse, and ensuring EU's positive engagement in the negotiations for a UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights, among others.



What MEPs can do:

Action 1: Support an EU legal binding framework to require EU companies to carry out Human Rights Due Diligence to prevent human rights violations and support a United Nations Binding Treaty on “Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with respect to human rights”.

This action is particularly relevant for MEPs in the EP Legal Affairs (JURI) Committee but all MEPs are invited to take action.

Action 2: Join the global interparliamentary network in support of a binding treaty on business and human rights and the EP Responsible Business Conduct Working Group (RBC) in its work to push for EU human rights and environmental due diligence legislation, which also improves access to remedy for victims of corporate abuse.

This action is particularly relevant for MEPs in the EP Legal Affairs (JURI) Committee but all MEPs are invited to take action.

Topic 2: Development Banks

Window of opportunity: Multilateral Development Banks, in particular the European Investment Bank (“The EU bank”) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) can also be instrumental in promoting and implementing best practice in public procurement standards from leading EU countries. Through their investments and policy dialogue, MDBs can help the improvement of standards in the new EU member states as well as non-EU countries. Upgrading their own policies in this direction can ensure improved environmental and social standards and better implementation of projects. While supporting the projects being a part of the ICT supply chain (and all others), these financial institutions have to carefully seriously prioritise the protection and promotion of human rights.

The existing social safeguards neither sufficiently prevent intimidation, threats and forced evictions nor protect the existence and well being of the most vulnerable local communities, especially in the mining areas.

What MEPs can do:



Photo: Suedwind

Action 3: Ensure stronger EP oversight over Development Banks such as the European Bank for Reconstructions and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) and require a Human Rights Due Diligence before providing financial loans to projects that may cause human rights violations or environmental degradation, especially in the Global South. The Banks need to adopt overall human rights strategies and reinforce their due diligence at project level via human rights due diligence and Human Rights Impact Assessments to ensure the projects they support respect the core values of the EU external action and do not directly or indirectly contribute to human rights violations.

This action is particularly relevant for MEPs in the EP ECON (Economic Affairs) Committee but all MEPs are invited to take action.

Topic 3: Procurement by the European Parliament of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment

Following the “practice what you preach” principle, it is essential that the European Parliament leads by example by upgrading their own internal procurement policies addressing strategic, sustainable and socially responsible public procurement approaches.

Action 4: Support the European Parliament putting in place a social and environmental public procurement policy and action plan for ICT procurement that involves social responsibility considerations along the supply chain as well as approaches to reuse, repair, refurbish and recycle ICT equipment (circular procurement). The European Parliament procurement department is invited to join the Make ICT Fair pilot phase, joining leading public authorities from across Europe piloting socially responsible public procurement using upcoming tenders for ICT equipment and making use of the rich advice given by Make ICT Fair partners Electronics Watch and ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability.

Action 5: Support the European Parliament joining an independent Monitoring Organisation to advance in social responsible public procurement of computers and technology equipment, such as Electronics Watch.

Topic 4: General

Action 6: In addition to the specific proposed actions above, we also call on MEPs to join an informal group of “MEP friends of Fair ICT” to keep abreast of relevant findings, raise parliamentary questions to the EC and have occasional informal meetings to exchange on the progress of the above-mentioned EU policy asks.

For more information about the Make ICT Fair Project, please contact the project lead partner:

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