GLOBAL CHILD FORUM IS INITIATED BY
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CORPORATE RESPONSES TO
PROTECTING CHILDREN’S RIGHTS
IN THE NORDIC REGION
INTRODUCTION

Companies impact children directly as well as indirectly. Likewise, children impact companies: for example, as consumers in their own right and as citizens and employees of tomorrow. And because today’s children are often skilled in their use of technology, they have the tools to be informed and to take action on issues of interest to them.

In an effort to provide insights on how businesses protect – or fall short in protecting – children’s rights in the Nordic region, this report draws on one of Global Child Forum’s essential research products: The Corporate Sector and Children’s Rights Benchmark.

In 2016, Global Child Forum, in partnership with Boston Consulting Group, published a benchmark study of the 299 largest companies in the Nordic region.¹ This report is a follow-up to that 2016 study. An updated benchmark analysis has been conducted on 20 of the region’s largest companies.²

Insights are provided across three areas where the corporate sector impacts children’s rights:

- **THE WORKPLACE**: decent work for young workers, parents and caregivers, and prevention of child labour
- **THE MARKETPLACE**: marketing and advertising, online abuse and exploitation, and product safety
- **THE COMMUNITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT**: access to health, education and social services, as well as use of natural resources, damage to the environment as a result of land acquisition, and the impact of conflict and emergencies

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1 “The Corporate Sector and Children’s Rights in the Nordics” can be downloaded from Global Child Forum’s Knowledge Centre.

2 The Benchmark takes into consideration only publicly available information and does not measure impact or performance. The data used in this study is based on publicly available information as of 31 December 2017.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall results from the Global Child Forum benchmarking of the 20 largest companies in the Nordic region demonstrate that companies score fairly high, especially when it comes to having policies in place and mechanisms for implementing those policies.

When looking at the overall company structures governing responsibility and accountability, it is clear that children’s rights issues are high on the agenda at the board level for the majority of the companies in the study. In addition, 13 companies include children’s rights in their assessment of material issues, which shows that they see the importance of addressing the impact of their business on children.

The companies typically score higher in the Workplace and Community & Environment areas than in the Marketplace area. A more detailed look at where these companies focus their efforts reveals that greater attention is given to having policies and implementation mechanisms in place rather than to following up on their impact in a transparent way.

Compared to the 2016 Nordic benchmark report, the notable improvements shown by the 2018 study are board accountability and materiality, whereas performance reporting continues to be an area where companies struggle.

In summary, businesses in the Nordic region have great potential to optimize their efforts to protect children’s rights in light of the insights presented in this report, especially in relation to:

1. reporting on actual and potential impacts on children’s rights in operations and supply chains,
2. recognizing children as stakeholders in regard to product safety and marketing, and
3. taking potential negative community impacts into account and addressing them.

This report is based on information from 20 companies and uses a more detailed methodology (20 indicators versus 7) than the 2016 report, which covered 299 companies. Given these differences, a detailed comparative analysis cannot be made.
CHILDREN’S RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE

Companies have an important impact on children’s rights through their operations and supply chains; for example, regarding child labour, decent working conditions for minors and parents, and whistleblower mechanisms.

In the Nordic region, almost all of the 20 companies in the study have a policy against child labour and conduct regular supplier assessments that address potential impact on children’s rights. However, only about a third of the companies report transparently on the results of assessments, audits and follow-ups. Thus, Nordic companies largely have policies and processes in place, but increased attention needs to be paid to the actual outcomes. This is crucial in order to ensure that policies and frameworks are actually implemented and produce the intended results.

All companies lead programmes related to improving working conditions of employees in their own operations and/or supply chains but only 30% of those are focused specifically on children’s rights. There is thus room for improvement in this area. Examples of children’s rights programmes in the workplace include initiatives to reduce the risk of child labour and to improve the working conditions for young workers, parents and caregivers.

CHILDREN’S RIGHTS IN THE MARKETPLACE

Companies affect children through their products, services and marketing, both directly as consumers and users, and indirectly through exposure to products and marketing aimed at adults and considered unsafe or unsuitable for children.

In this area, Nordic companies have considerable room for improvement. Although 16 or the 20 companies have policies related to product safety, only three companies refer explicitly to children; for example, by expressing a responsibility for products and services likely used or consumed by children. The numbers are slightly improved when considering company-run programmes on product safety: 16 companies have programmes related to product safety, six of which focus specifically on children.

Including children as a stakeholder group when addressing marketing and product safety issues has great potential. In most cases, children are either direct consumers of the companies’ products and services or can suffer from direct or indirect consequences – in the real world as well as online.
Corporate impact extends beyond a company’s operations and can be experienced by a community in a myriad of ways, including how a company interacts with and invests in the local community. Examples include the way in which a corporation manages environmental impacts, such as pollution, or actively builds capabilities and partnerships within the larger community.

All companies in the study demonstrate a commitment to reducing environmental impacts, and with one exception have committed to contributing positively to the surrounding community. However, only half are also actively aiming to reduce potential negative community impacts.

Similarly, none of the companies report on the actual or potential impact of operations and suppliers on children in the local communities. This means that Nordic companies must improve in the area of reporting back on their policies in order to fully ensure that children’s rights in the community and environment are protected and supported. A positive note is that all companies in the benchmark have programmes supporting local communities, 14 of which focus specifically on children.
TELENO**R** - PROVIDING A SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEM

Telenor is a Norwegian multinational telecommunications company with operations in Scandinavia and Asia. Telenor has identified human rights and child online safety as material issues for their business. Given that they are present in markets with significant human rights challenges, they recognize the importance of comprehending the complexity of the local context in order to mitigate potential negative impacts and continuously improve. They see children as a particularly vulnerable group requiring special attention.

**A SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEM**

In relation to child online safety, Telenor aims to stimulate a supportive ecosystem which addresses risks, puts preemptive measures into place and engages all local operations in this work. They have identified five main focus areas in accomplishing this work.

- Outreach to schools to grow awareness among children, parents, guardians and teachers
- Guidance on relevant parental controls
- Access to toll-free child helplines that can support children who have been exposed to harm
- Effective mechanisms for reporting illegal and harmful content
- Effective mechanisms to prevent the spread of child sexual abuse material

‘Children and young people are eager explorers of the online world. At Telenor we provide connectivity that enables them to share, play and learn. However, children also face threats online and we believe we share a responsibility for preventing those threats from turning into harm. By 2020 we shall provide meaningful training in how to be safe online to more than four million children.’

Mai Oldgard, Senior Vice President and Head of Telenor Group Sustainability

For additional Nordic company examples, reference the Global Child Forum Case Studies and Deep Dives on IKEA, ISS, Norsk Hydro and Stora Enso, all of which can be found in Global Child Forum’s Knowledge Centre.

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4 This case is provided as an example of good practice pertaining to how companies report on ways in which they address children’s rights issues. It is not within the scope of this study to evaluate the impact of these initiatives.

5 All Global Child Forum publications are available in our Knowledge Centre: https://www.globalchildforum.org/knowledge-centre/
COMPANY BENCHMARK SCORES PER IMPACT AREA

The scores range from 1 to 10, with 10 being the best. Both area and total scores are calculated as a weighted average: Workplace (WP) 60% / Marketplace (MP) 10% / Community & Environment (C&E) 30% of the total score. More information about the methodology can be found here: https://www.globalchildforum.org/other/benchmark-methodology/

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