

Protecting the environment, communities and workers in UK supply chains

June 2026

Introduction

This briefing explains why new measures are needed to address harms caused by UK companies' supply chains, how the UK regulatory regime should be improved and what MPs can do to help.

The Department for Business and Trade's current review of Responsible Business Conduct is an opportunity for new legislation that prevents human rights abuses and environmental harms being perpetuated by UK companies' and the public sector's supply chains.

What's the problem?

Human rights abuses and environmental destruction take place throughout the global supply chains that provide our everyday goods and services, such as:

- Destructive logging in Malaysia for timber certified as "sustainable".
- Modern slavery and trade union-busting in factories producing fast fashion, electronics and PPE.
- Exploitation of Costa Rican banana workers supplying our schools and hospitals.
- Clearing of Indonesian forests for palm oil used in biscuits and bread, harming communities and wildlife.

Loss of forests and wider biodiversity is a threat to UK national security. Recent publication of the suppressed Joint Intelligence Committee report on the risks to national security from biodiversity breakdown is a stark reminder of humankind's dependence on the resilience of the natural world.

The UK regulatory regime isn't fit for purpose. The role of businesses is rightly under scrutiny. The current regulatory regime is patchy and voluntary industry action isn't working. The government must step in to ensure that UK companies are proactive in identifying, preventing and remedying such harms in their global value chains.

What's the solution?

The government should introduce a new Business, Human Rights and Environment Act to put in place comprehensive mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence. Such a law would ensure that UK growth and prosperity are built on foundations that uphold human rights, treat workers fairly and safeguard our environment.

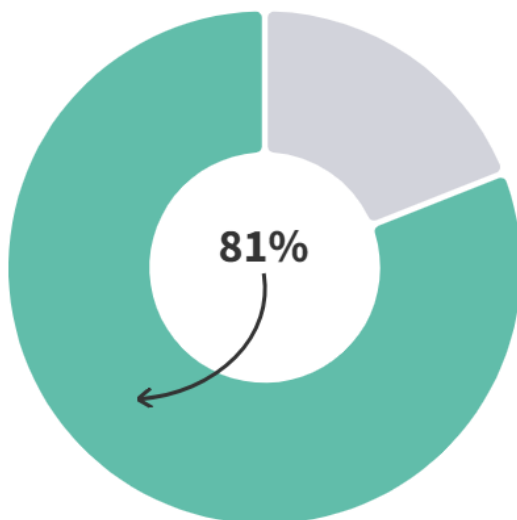
A new law would:

- Require companies and the public sector to prevent human and labour rights abuses and environmental harm in their operations and value chains.
- Ensure access to justice for affected people through UK courts.

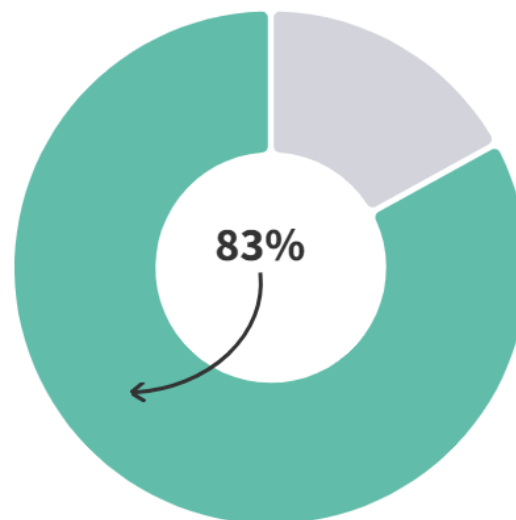
- Create a level playing field for responsible businesses.
- Align the UK with advances in other countries and show global leadership.

A new law has wide-ranging support. It is called for by [80 parliamentarians](#) and by UK civil society organisations and trade unions. There is also strong public backing, with a [145,000 strong petition](#)¹ and YouGov polling² showing strong public support for new laws requiring UK companies to prevent human rights abuses and serious environmental damage in their operations or supply chains.

Support new laws requiring companies to prevent human rights abuses in their supply chains



Support new laws requiring companies to prevent environmental damage in their supply chains



YouGov – April 2024

Legally feasible and practical. Such a law can work in practice. It would be based on a “failure to prevent” approach, modelled on the existing UK Bribery Act. This law has successfully shifted corporate behaviour on bribery, and in 2017 Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights recommended using this model for a new UK law on human rights and the environment.

The UK must not be left behind. Such legislation, based on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, is being brought forward in other countries, including France, Germany and the EU. The UK risks being left behind if it fails to act.

What’s the opportunity?

The Department of Business and Trade is carrying out a review of Responsible Business Conduct, which is expected to be published soon. The review is the result of acknowledgement in the [2025 Trade Strategy](#) that “...concerns continue to be raised regarding the effectiveness of the UK’s regime in preventing human rights, labour rights and environmental harms in supply chains.”

This is a key opportunity to call for urgently needed new legislation to ensure that UK companies’ supply chains do not perpetuate human or worker rights abuses or environmental harm, here or overseas.

In the short term, and to complement a more systemic Business, Human Rights and Environment Act, the government also needs to implement robust secondary legislation enacting Schedule 17 of the Environment Act on Forest Risk Commodities, to ensure that products of illegal deforestation do not enter UK markets.

What can MPs do?

- Join 80 parliamentarians in signing the [Good Business Matters pledge](#) in support of a new UK Business, Human Rights and Environment Act.
- Write to Sir Chris Bryant, Minister for Business and Trade, asking him to champion the introduction of a Business, Human Rights and Environment Act as part of the government response to his department's review of Responsible Business Conduct and as a priority for the next King's Speech.
- Raise the issues in Parliament, by asking Parliamentary Questions and attending and intervening in relevant debates, such as the upcoming Westminster Hall debate tabled by Bambos Charalambous MP on "The need to safeguard human rights in supply chains to the UK" on 18 June.

For more information, contact clare.oxborrow@foe.co.uk

¹ 145,000 people call for a new law: <https://corporatejusticecoalition.org/news/the-picnics-over-its-time-for-stronger-uk-laws-to-hold-companies-accountable-for-harm-to-people-and-our-planet/>.

² YouGov Polling: <https://corporatejusticecoalition.org/news/press/press-release-four-in-five-uk-adults-support-new-laws-to-tackle-environmental-harm-and-human-rights-abuses-in-company-supply-chains/>.