

# Human rights

Better World  
BT's Social & Environment Report



# Human rights

We have based our 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”.

We are committed to protecting and enhancing the human dignity of everyone who works for the company and everyone who has dealings with it.

This section of the Better World site examines a range of human rights issues relevant to BT and how we manage them.

## 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 don't rely on policy alone to make sure we handle human rights issues well.

All our employees have access to the Universal Declaration via 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 many expert groups and information sources that can help us maintain our commitment to human dignity and evolve 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 nine principles of environment, labour and human rights. BT participates in the Global Compact Learning Forum, and you can read about our performance and progress in relation to these principles in the Global Compact Site Index.

## BT products and services

We have learnt that one of the best ways for us to fulfil 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 of promoting human rights in general. Greater access to communications technology can be a source of openness in otherwise closed societies; it provides an extremely fast, efficient and mainly safe means of managing and communicating information, and can be invaluable to organisations dedicated to human rights.

However, we recognise that world-wide respect for human dignity is more than just a click away. Equally, 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.

We hope that the economic potential of e-commerce and the increased transparency brought about by new technologies will have a positive impact upon human rights. Our hot topic, Modern Communications and Quality of Life, explores this potential in more detail.

This document examines BT's approach and activities in our supply and use chains, and the issues of privacy and freedom of expression.

## Supply and use chains

Our impact on human rights has two aspects:

- The supply chain – the working conditions under which the products and services purchased by BT are produced
- The use chain – the effect of the use of our products and services, after they have been sold, on human rights.

### Supply chain

It is our aspiration that the working conditions in our supply chain meet standards based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labour Organisation Conventions. More details are available in the Ethical trading section of the Better World site.

### Use chain

A principal concern here is the misuse of our products and services, for example the use of the internet to undertake illegal activities. Our 'Hot Topic', Misuse of the Internet, describes how BT addresses these issues. Other use chain issues are privacy and freedom of expression.

The Modern Communications and Quality of Life 'Hot Topic' addresses the question of whether communications technology has made life better or worse.

On the positive side, communications technology offers new opportunities for education, learning and development – issues that are examined in more detail in the Digital Inclusion section of the Better World site.

These are complex issues. With so many different national approaches to censorship and access to information, companies such as BT have to balance their support for free expression with their commitment to abide by the law, wherever they operate.

But we believe that, ultimately, developments in information and communications technology will have a beneficial impact on human rights. BT will continue to play a key part in the debate.

## 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.*

While privacy is not a new challenge, developments in information and communications technology have given rise to some new dilemmas.

### Protecting online customers

We have to balance giving a tailored customer service with protecting customer privacy.

For example, if BT 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 Openworld also has a detailed Acceptable Use Policy that shows how we protect the privacy of approximately 1.75 million customers who use our online services.

Customers' preferences can be tracked on-line in order to offer them personalised services and special offers. However, an 'opt-out' option is available for those who prefer.

### Protecting all customers

We know that privacy is very important to all our customers, not just those online. 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 to 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 are also able to withhold numbers permanently free of charge.

Customers are also 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.

### BT employees

We also have several policies and codes relating to the use of BT telephones, e-mail and the internet by BT staff.

All staff have been made aware that e-mail 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, and BT does allow reasonable use of personal e-mail.

## 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.

However, as we mentioned in our introduction, new technological advances bring new challenges to and interpretations of free expression.

### Protecting children

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

BT is a board member of the Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA), which aims to “protect children from potentially harmful material; and to protect free speech on the internet.”

The ICRA asks web authors to give details of what is and isn't present on their site. From this they generate a content label (a short piece of computer code) which the author adds to the site. Parents can then 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.

We have our own programme, BT Safe Surf, which gives detailed information for parents and user friendly training for children themselves.

### Content provision

BT acts upon complaints about content hosted on our servers. We sit on the funding council of the Internet Watch Foundation, who notify us of illegal content stored on our servers and webspace.

We have also contributed to the work of The Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS).

Part of ICSTIS' remit involves registering certain types of phone service in the UK, such as dating services, betting, fundraising and services of a sexual nature. This allows for free speech while ensuring protection of users, legality and quality.

