

SPECIFIC INSTANCE

"Veolia in the United Kingdom"

27/08/2025

Statement from the French National Contact Point

As the complainant withdrew its referral and the initial assessment stage was not completed, the NCP closes the specific instance.

The French National Contact Point (NCP) for the implementation of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises received a referral on February 14, 2025, from the British trade union Unite the Union. The specific instance concerns the alleged failure of the French multinational Veolia to exercise due diligence in relation to the activities carried out by its British subsidiary at its site in Sheffield, United Kingdom. The referral is based on allegations of breaches of the OECD Guidelines on Employment and Industrial Relations (Chapter V) and Consumer Interests (Chapter VIII).

The NCP referral procedure is confidential. The NCP shall endeavor to complete its initial assessment of a referral within an indicative period of three months after acknowledgment of receipt, but an additional period may be granted if necessary to gather the information essential for an informed decision (Article 29). It then prepares a statement on the admissibility of the referral (Article 19). If the initial assessment is positive, it offers its good offices to the parties to help them resolve their dispute and examines the referral. It endeavors to finalize its examination within twelve months of receiving the referral (Article 31). The NCP publishes a statement announcing its decision on the initial assessment of the case and then a report or statement at the end of the procedure (Article 35). It may decide to follow up on its recommendations (Article 32) and to communicate on this matter.

1. Procedure followed by the NCP in accordance with its rules of procedure

◆ Receipt and acknowledgment of referral (February 2025)

On February 13, 2025, the NCP secretariat received a referral file consisting of a main document and a document containing 12 annexes. It acknowledged receipt of the referral on February 14, 2025, and forwarded all documents to the NCP members on February 20, 2025.

◆ Formal admissibility of the referral and notification of the company (March–April 2025)

Article 16 of the Rules of Procedure stipulates that "referrals to the NCP must be precise" and "must detail the identity of the company concerned, the identity of the complainant, the facts alleged against the company, and the elements of the Guiding Principles on the basis of which the NCP is being referred."

The referral concerns "*Veolia Environment, Veolia Group, Veolia UK Limited, Veolia Environmental Services UK Ltd, and Veolia ES UK Limited.*" For the French multinational Veolia Group, the referral refers to the exercise of its due diligence obligation towards its subsidiary in the United Kingdom in relation to its activities in Sheffield.

The referral was addressed to the French NCP because the Veolia Group's head office is located in France. All multinational companies operating in France must comply with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct.

The specific case was submitted by Unite the Union, a multi-sector trade union representing workers in various industries in the United Kingdom, including workers affected by the multinational's alleged behavior in the specific case.

Furthermore, the referral explicitly mentions the OECD Guidelines, Chapter V (Employment and Industrial Relations) and Chapter VIII (Consumer Interests).

On April 8, 2025, the NCP deemed the referral formally admissible. It therefore informed Veolia Group France and began the initial assessment. The NCP notified the referral and sent information on the procedure to the company on April 18, 2025, inviting it to respond.

◆ **Start of the initial assessment and withdrawal of the referral (April–June 2025)**

When a referral meets the formal admissibility criteria, the NCP conducts an initial analysis of the referral (Articles 18, 22, 23, and 25) to determine whether the referral falls within the NCP's remit and whether it merits further examination.

On April 22, 2025, the PCN received an email from the complainant informing it of their withdrawal from the procedure.

The NCP instructed the secretariat to prepare a press release announcing the closure of the referral by the NCP, setting out the reasons for this decision. The NCP adopted the draft press release on July 18, 2025 and consulted the parties on the draft. The NCP adopted the statement on August 27, 2025. The NCP Secretariat then notified the OECD Business Conduct Center of the referral for inclusion in the NCP database of specific instances.

2. Content of the specific instance

The specific instance, as presented by the complainant, concerns the alleged failure of the Veolia group to exercise due diligence in relation to the activities carried out by its UK subsidiary at the Sheffield site in the United Kingdom. The issues raised relate to employees working under the public waste management contract between the City of Sheffield and Veolia UK.

The referral concerns allegations of breaches of the OECD Guidelines in relation to:

- Chapter V (Employment and Industrial Relations): according to the complainant, Veolia UK has infringed on workers' freedom of association by refusing to recognize the union chosen by those workers ("Unite the Union") between 2015 and 2024. In particular, the company allegedly made this recognition conditional on a prior agreement between Unite the Union and a union supposedly favored by management (GMB) with the alleged aim of delegating to it the representation of Unite the Nation and its bargaining rights.
- Chapter VIII (Consumer interests): according to the complainant, Veolia UK is contributing to the disruption of the public waste collection service in Sheffield or its potential interruption by refusing to take reasonable measures (an agreement with Unite the Union) that would guarantee the quality and reliability of this service.

The referral linked these alleged breaches to the Veolia group's duty of care towards its UK subsidiary and its activities in the city of Sheffield.

The complainant requested the good offices of the French NCP to initiate a dialogue with the Veolia group to ensure its compliance with the OECD Guidelines.

◆ **Company position**

The Veolia group refuted Unite The Union's allegations. The group considered the case to be an inter-union dispute between Unite the Union and GMB, the majority union among Sheffield employees for the past 20 years. According to Veolia, Unite was putting pressure on the company to obtain recognition at the Sheffield site, which would be contrary to the existing agreement between Veolia and GMB.

On the basis of several documents sent to the NCP secretariat on May 13, 2025, Veolia pointed out that the Central Arbitration Committee of the United Kingdom, the administrative court with jurisdiction over this type of dispute, had rejected Unite's request for recognition in Sheffield on April 4, 2025, based on the existence of an agreement in force with GMB.

3. Analysis of admissibility and reasons for the NCP's decision

The referral concerned Veolia's activities through its subsidiary in the United Kingdom. The Guidelines apply in and from the territory of each State that adheres to them, including France. Therefore, all French multinational enterprises with activities abroad must comply with the Guidelines. The referral was addressed to the French NCP because Veolia's head office is located in France. The French NCP was therefore competent to deal with this referral. Following an exchange with the British NCP on April 14, 2025, it was agreed that the French NCP would retain responsibility for handling the specific instance.

The referral met the formal admissibility criteria set out in Article 16 of the French NCP's internal rules of procedure. It included the identity of the company concerned, the identity and contact details of the complainant, details of the allegations made by the complainant, and the elements of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on behalf of which the NCP was being referred.

Given the complainant's decision to withdraw from the procedure at the start of the initial assessment, just three days after the NCP notified the company, the NCP found that it could not begin its substantive analysis of the specific instance.

4. Conclusion

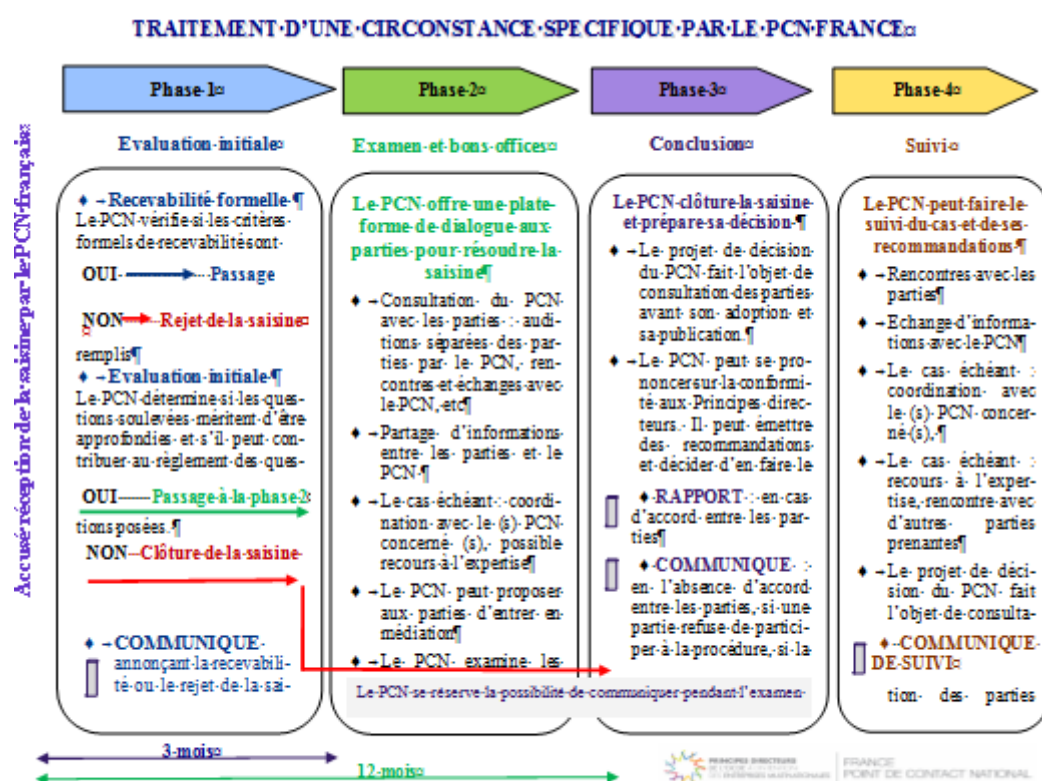
As the complainant withdrew their referral at the initial assessment stage and the NCP did not start to analyze the specific instance in any substantial way, the NCP is closing the referral. The NCP secretariat specifies that any new referral based on the same allegations submitted by "Unite the Union" to the NCP will not be subject to further examination by the same NCP.



Appendix:

Excerpt from the French NCP's internal rules on the initial assessment of a referral (Title IV, Articles 16 to 26)

Diagram of the French NCP's procedure for dealing with specific instances



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Excerpts from the French NCP's internal rules (April 4, 2023)

IV– REFERRAL TO THE NCP – INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Form of referrals

- **Article 16.** A referral to the NCP for RBC must be precise. In this regard, it must stipulate: the identity of the enterprise in question; the identity and contact details of the complainant; details of the facts of which the enterprise is accused; elements of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises in respect of which the referral to the NCP for RBC is being made.

Processing referrals: evaluation of admissibility

- **Article 17.** 17. Upon receiving a referral, the NCP for RBC Secretariat shall send the referring party an acknowledgement of receipt, through the post or electronically, and shall forward copies of any items submitted in support of the referral to NCP for RBC members
- **Article 18.** In examining the admissibility of a referral, the NCP for RBC shall begin by analysing the formal admissibility provided for by Article 16 and then carry out the initial assessment in order to assess the importance of the issues raised to ascertain whether they merit further examination as provided for in Articles 22, 23 and 25. The NCP for RBC shall contact the parties and may ask them for further information so as to finalize its initial assessment.
- **Article 19.** 19. Following its initial assessment, the NCP for RBC conveys its response to the parties involved. The NCP for RBC shall issue a statement announcing the admissibility of the specific instance, which shall stipulate the identity of the parties, the country or countries concerned by the referral and a summary of its initial assessment. With due regard to the confidentiality incumbent on the NCP for RBC, the complainant may inform its principal(s) of the decision taken by the NCP for RBC with regard to admissibility.
- **Article 20.** When the NCP for RBC notes that a specific instance does not meet the formal criteria for admissibility set out in Article 16 and/or it notes that it is not competent to handle it, it shall declare the referral to be inadmissible. It informs the complainant of its decision and sends the referral to the enterprise. It then publishes a statement of inadmissibility after having informed the complainant and the enterprise. In this statement, the NCP for RBC shall outline the issues raised and set forth the reasons for its decision. The statement shall not disclose the identity of the enterprise in question.

Admissibility criteria

- **Article 21.1.** A referral shall be declared admissible if it fulfils the formal conditions stated in Article 16. referral shall be declared admissible if it meets the formal requirements set out in point 16.
- **Article 21.2.** When the NCP for RBC notes that the formal criteria for admissibility provided for by Article 16 have not been met, it shall ask the complainant to reformulate the referral within a certain timeframe which shall be set by the NCP for RBC.
- **Article 21.3.** When the NCP for RBC duly notes the formal admissibility of the referral, it shall begin the initial assessment provided for in Articles 18, 22, 23 and 25. The NCP for RBC shall inform the complainant of the formal admissibility of the referral and the start of the initial assessment. The NCP for RBC shall inform the enterprise of the existence of the specific instance, send it a copy of the file and ask it to respond to the referral as from the initial assessment stage. The NCP for RBC publishes an initial assessment statement in which is sets out the issues raised by the specific instance and provides the reasons for its decision. The parties and, where applicable, the supporting NCP for RBC, are consulted concerning the statement.
- **Article 22.** The NCP for RBC shall also ascertain whether the issue in question has been raised in good faith and in accordance with the Guidelines.
- **Article 23.** In assessing the admissibility of a referral to it, the NCP for RBC shall consider: the identity of the party concerned and its interest in the case; the significance of the issue and the supporting items provided; the apparent connection between the enterprise's activities and the issue raised in the specific instance; the relevance of the applicable laws and procedures, notably jurisdictional proceedings; how similar issues are being (or have been) examined at national or international level.



- **Article 24.** A referral submitted by any NCP for RBC member shall be presumed admissible if it meets the above conditions.
- **Article 25.** The NCP for RBC shall strive to ascertain whether, in making an offer of good offices, it could make a positive contribution to the resolution of the issues raised and if this would not create serious prejudice for either of the parties involved in other proceedings, or cause a contempt-of-court situation. It may then decide either to pursue or to renounce its consideration of the specific instance.
- **Article 26.** The NCP for RBC shall endeavour to conclude an initial assessment within three months of acknowledging receipt of the referral, although additional time may be granted, if need be, in order to collect essential information necessary for an informed decision

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