

UN Sustainable Development Goals in Practice



United Nations
Global Compact

RIBA 
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Foreword

Royal Institute of British Architects

The RIBA, by Royal Charter, seeks the “general advancement of Civil Architecture”. In becoming a signatory to the UN Global Compact, the RIBA has publicly made its commitment to sustainability and professionalism. The RIBA has also enshrined this in its strategic vision as “a global professional membership body... being ethical, inclusive, environmentally aware and collaborative”.

The RIBA aims to share this vision with its membership and to support both Chartered Practices and individual members to practice ethically. The RIBA encourages its membership to become leaders within the architectural profession, driving forward ethics, professionalism and sustainability in an increasingly international context. The RIBA is excited by the opportunities presented to its membership and to the organisation through the UN Global Compact.

Foreword

UN Global Compact Network UK

The UN Global Compact (UNGC) was launched in 2000 by then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and 40 business leaders with the goal of creating “a more sustainable and inclusive global economy.” It has grown into a global movement with over 12,500 signatories in 160 countries. The UNGC calls upon companies to operate responsibly and take strategic actions in alignment with universal principles and the UN's sustainable development agenda.

The UNGC Principles – covering human rights, labour standards, the environment and corruption – are derived from UN treaties (ratified by most countries around the world) such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. They represent a truly global standard that is relevant and applicable in every market.

UNGC supports companies by providing thought leadership, learning opportunities, and platforms for collaboration and collective action. The Royal Institute of British Architects has been a [UN Global Compact](#) signatory and member of the [UN Global Compact Network UK](#) since 2015.

We are pleased to be collaborating with the RIBA on this publication.

Role of the Architect

The Royal Charter recognises architects have a significant role in shaping communities and society as a whole.

The impact of an architect's work extends beyond the physical structures he or she designs – architects are uniquely placed to influence how places are shaped, how they function and who they engage in the process. They have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to ensure that this influence is positive.

Balancing the sometimes conflicting aspects of a building project – environmental, social and economic – along with myriad other requirements, is fundamental to the role of the architect.

RIBA Charter 1837

“the general advancement of Civil Architecture, and for promoting and facilitating the acquirement of the knowledge of the various arts and sciences connected therewith; it being an art esteemed and encouraged in all enlightened nations, as tending greatly to promote the domestic convenience of citizens, and the public improvement and embellishment of towns and cities...”

Global Standards and Best Practice

Along with the RIBA Code of Professional Conduct and Code of Practice, the RIBA Plan of Work reflects the very best principles in project and design management, and is an excellent starting point for setting the scope of best 'ethical' practice.

The global sustainability agenda has been evolving and best practice now consists of a more holistic approach that incorporates various social and economic considerations alongside more traditional environmental concerns. For example, best practice now involves consideration of the impact of construction and buildings on people through inclusive design and health, safety and wellbeing.

Through this collaborative piece with the UNGC, the RIBA is seeking to engage with its membership by: providing some guidance on implementing the UN Global Compact principles and Sustainable Development Goals in architectural practice; encouraging discussion and debate about ethical issues and stimulating the sharing of information and ideas within the construction industry.

RIBA Professional Code of Conduct and Code of Practice

Principle 1: Integrity

Members shall act with honesty and integrity at all times.

Principle 2: Competence

In the performance of their work Members shall act competently, conscientiously and responsibly. Members must be able to provide the knowledge, the ability and the financial and technical resources appropriate for their work.

Principle 3: Relationships

Members shall respect the relevant rights and interests of others.

The Sustainable Development Goals

In September 2015, after an unprecedented three-year consultation, all 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted a plan for achieving a better future for all ([Agenda 2030](#)). At the heart of the plan are the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** which clearly define this vision.

The SDGs consist of seventeen high-level goals backed up by 169 more specific targets.

The RIBA is one of over 12,500 companies which have signed up to and support the UNGC and have undertaken to make its principles and the SDGs part of organisational strategy, culture and daily operations. The RIBA, together with many other signatories, has committed to engage in collaborative projects which advance the SDGs in particular and the work of the UNGC more broadly. The RIBA and its membership are part of a diverse group of stakeholders, working as a global partnership to achieve the goals and to champion ethical practice within business.

Agenda 2030 and the SDGs are well aligned with long-term business interests and present many opportunities for businesses to thrive through ethical practice.



Four Overarching Issues



Human Rights



Labour Laws



The Environment



Anti-corruption and Bribery





Influencing Sustainable and Ethical Practice

From the strategic definition and briefing stages onwards, architects can influence the sustainability of project outcomes by integrating traditional creative and technical skills with an up-to-date understanding of environmental, social, and economic impacts.

It is becoming more common to find ethical and sustainability criteria included in project briefs – such as social usefulness or value and lifecycle costs. There are many reasons why clients might wish their projects to exceed the minimum standards for sustainability, inclusion and health, safety and wellbeing – such as demonstrating social value, engaging with the community or furthering a policy of corporate social responsibility.

Architects are uniquely placed to raise awareness of these issues and influence clients and other construction industry professionals – from setting aspirations at the initial strategic project stage through to delivery, post-occupancy and the full lifecycle of the building. They should therefore be prepared with knowledge of the various more [ethical options](#)¹ open to their clients.

Many planning conditions and building regulations require certain sustainability and ethical standards to be met such as the [Equality Act 2010](#) and [CDM 2015](#). Integrating sustainability, inclusion and health, safety and wellbeing into practice enables architects to provide, at the very least, the service that clients need to meet industry standards. Beyond this, architects can enable clients to reap the benefits from design that results in the best possible outcomes for people and the environment, while future-proofing their own practice.

¹ Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012: “For service contracts above EU thresholds, the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires a procuring authority to consider at the pre-procurement stage how its proposals and the procurement process itself might improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of its area, and ensure its approach is proportionate and relevant to the project being procured.”



The Basics of Applying the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Practice

Below are some suggestions of what architects might do in practice to better engage with the ethical considerations raised by the Sustainable Development Goals, together with some valuable resources for information and ideas. While ethical practice has positive impacts on people and the environment, it also benefits architects and their clients. There is inevitably some overlap between the four overarching issues; they should therefore be considered alongside each other.

The following are ideas for the ‘basics’ of applying the UN Sustainable Development Goals in practice. They are the starting points within each of the four overarching areas. There are numerous references to developing a strategy or policy on specific topics. To be effective, this development must involve full consideration of, and engagement with, each topic; more practically, ‘developing’ a policy or strategy entails committing it to writing so that it can be referred to, distributed and relied upon.



Human Rights

WHAT ARCHITECTS CAN DO

Develop and promote a policy statement establishing and affirming your practice's commitment to respecting and upholding human rights throughout your business operations and relationships.

Engage in pro bono work to support human rights by engaging with charities, community groups, and schools, employee engagement, and other charitable fundraising activities.

Develop and promote a human rights due diligence strategy, dealing with a spectrum of human rights issues, from poverty and education to health, safety and wellbeing.

RESOURCES

- Consider how other companies have approached developing policies: '[Companies with human rights policies](#)'
- UNGC guidance: [How to Develop a Human Rights Policy \(UNGC, 2015\)](#)
- Specific engagement in architecture and human rights focussed initiatives, such as [Article 25 or Architecture for Humanity – UK](#)
- UNGC guidance: [Guide to Human Rights Impact Assessment and Management](#)

THE BENEFITS

- Reassuring stakeholders and creating strong working relationships
- Fostering better relations with the local community - more easily securing a 'social licence to operate'
- Becoming a more attractive employer, particularly to millennials
- Securing higher employee engagement and retention figures
- Minimising the risk of complicity in human rights abuses



Labour Laws

WHAT ARCHITECTS CAN DO

Review business and employment policies to ensure that the practice is addressing key labour laws, regulations and standards, as an absolute minimum.

Implement standards and guidance such as: RIBA Chartered Practice Employment Policy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Codes of Conduct.

Develop construction strategies which take labour issues into account, including health, safety and wellbeing and working conditions.

Commit to supporting an ethical supply chain and ethical sourcing of materials.

Produce a slavery and human trafficking statement engaging with the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act and encouraging and influencing other construction industry professionals to examine their own practices.

RESOURCES

- UNGC guidance: [The Labour Principles of the UN Global Compact: A Guide for Business](#)
- [UK Modern Slavery Act 2015](#)
- CIOB guidance: [Building a Fairer System: Tackling Modern Slavery in Construction Supply Chains](#)
- Webinar: [Safety and health in the construction sector – overcoming the challenges](#)
- RIBA CPD: [Health, Safety and Wellbeing](#)
- [Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority](#)
- [Stronger Together Construction Toolkit](#) (tackling modern slavery in the construction sector)
- [Modern Slavery Charter](#) (in progress)
- [RIBA Chartered Practice Employment Policy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#)

THE BENEFITS

- Safeguarding reputation
- Developing strong relationships with contractors and subcontractors
- Procuring best outcomes for clients
- Minimising the risk of complicity with poor working conditions



The Environment

WHAT ARCHITECTS CAN DO

Review business policies to determine how environmental stewardship is currently being addressed and how it supports local regulations and guidance.

Develop sustainability strategies addressing sustainability considerations at all stages of projects, taking into account global issues as well as any particular focus of the local community.

Promote greater environmental responsibility through training and selection of staff, and through exchanging information with other construction industry professionals, contractors and clients.

Enter awards related to environmental sustainability, raising awareness and gaining knowledge and expertise.

Assist local charities and community groups on sustainable building projects in a pro bono capacity.

Explore and recommend sustainable building solutions.

RESOURCES

- [The Paris Agreement, the historic climate agreement adopted by 195 countries in Paris in December 2015](#)
- [ISO 14001](#)
- [RIBA Awards](#)
- Sustainability: [Plan of Work Guide 2013](#)

THE BENEFITS

- Reducing client operational energy costs
- Improving reputation
- Engendering positive interactions with the local community
- Harnessing a 'social licence to operate'
- Increasing sustainable architectural design in practice
- Minimising the risk of complicity in adverse environmental impacts



Anti-corruption and Bribery

WHAT ARCHITECTS CAN DO

Review existing anti-bribery and corruption policies to ensure the practice is up to date with relevant legislation, regulations, standards and guidance and is working towards establishing best practice principles.

Train staff in how to avoid situations of alleged bribery and corruption and what to do if they become aware of such practices.

Develop risk registers for particular locations and/or projects, engaging with your client base and business strategy.

RESOURCES

- [Bribery Act 2010](#)
- UK Ministry of Justice: [The Bribery Act 2010: Guidance](#)
- UNGC guidance: [A Guide for Anti-Corruption Risk Assessment](#)
- [International Ethics Standards Coalition](#)
- [Data Protection Act 1998](#)
- [Money Laundering Regulations](#)
- [ICE Say No toolkit](#)

THE BENEFITS

- Reducing corruption improves the local and national economy, increases trust in society and reduces human rights violations – ultimately strengthening the market for architectural services
- Safeguarding reputation
- Minimising the risk of complicity in corruption and bribery

UN Global Compact Ten Principles



Human Rights

- 1 Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and
 - 2 make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.
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Labour

- 3 Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
 - 4 the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
 - 5 the effective abolition of child labour; and
 - 6 the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.
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Environment

- 7 Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
 - 8 undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and
 - 9 encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.
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Anti-Corruption

- 10 Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

UN Sustainable Development Goals in Practice

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