



## How the SDGs help SMEs grow

In today's world, responsible and sustainable consumption is everyone's business. Amid rising concerns over climate change and energy security, no organization can afford to remain indifferent to the environmental issues that affect us all.

Launched by the United Nations (UN) in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) act as a shared framework for managing sustainable development on a global scale. As SMEs make up more than 90% of all businesses worldwide, these growing organizations have a critical role to play in advancing the 17 goals outlined in the UN's SDGs. Using International standards, smaller enterprises can take action, scale up their impact and become part of the solution. Integrating business planning with the goals unlocks valuable new opportunities, promotes higher levels of productivity and increases innovation, contributing to powerful economic growth.

By taking a standards-based approach to sustainability, smaller firms will be better equipped to adapt and develop suitable internal policies, as well as communicate their performance to external stakeholders.

To begin, it's important to prioritize the goals and understand which might help your business make the biggest positive impact, and which could be addressed to minimize any negative impact.

ISO 14001 provides guidance for business owners to scrutinize and evaluate their business' sustainability day-to-day, then implement the changes needed to improve across all areas.

The standard specifies conditions for an effective environmental management system (EMS), offering a framework that any business can follow to enhance resource efficiency, reduce waste and cut costs.

ISO 14001 directly addresses eight of the 17 UN SDGs, including those related to affordable and clean energy (SDG7), decent work and economic growth (SDG8) and responsible consumption and production (SDG12). The business gains that result as a consequence of these broad environmental benefits are significant.

Committing to renewable energy sources and less in-house waste leads to more efficient and cost-effective production, leading to the reduction of disposal and off-site processing costs.

In addition to ISO 14001, small business owners could look to standards like ISO 50001 and ISO 26000.



ISO 50001 empowers organizations to improve their energy performance, efficiency, use and consumption which reduces energy costs. Both standards can inspire external confidence to strengthen your SME's position in the international market by considering expectations from stakeholders and international regulations. The world's first standard designed to help organizations implement circular economy principles, BS 8001, challenges small businesses to dissociate economic growth from consumption. Following the flexible framework of BS 8001, SMEs can secure small quick wins, while rethinking how they manage their resources. It tackles several challenges the SDGs present, allowing SMEs to manage climate and environmental pressures whilst unlocking new business opportunities.

Sustainability also requires consideration of economic and social responsibilities. Appropriate management of occupational health and safety (OH&S) is strongly connected to sustainable development, mapping seven of the 17 UN SDGs. An ethical and socially responsible workplace puts employee safety and wellbeing at the centre of its operations. ISO 45001 makes it easy to integrate OH&S management with your SME's overall sustainability strategy, improving safety, reducing workplace risk and creating healthier working conditions.

Certification to ISO 45001 demonstrates that your business truly cares about its people, increasing transparency and organizational trust. It also has a huge impact on employee engagement and productivity: put simply, looking after your staff is critical to long-term business success.

ISO 20400 extend this level of consideration to the entire supply chain. As the worldwide guidance standard for sustainable procurement, it supports businesses in improving their supply chain security and preventing potential financial, environmental and reputational risks.

Establishing sustainable purchasing policies allows SMEs to further promote employee wellbeing and bolster their environmental credentials. This ensures a sustainable supply chain, offering greater opportunity to innovate and opening new markets to gain your business a competitive advantage in international trade. Ultimately, a strategic plan for sustainable development in accordance with the SDGs is key for business growth and success. Connecting with the goals will save your SME time and money, enhance your brand image, motivate employees and build resilience against uncertainty. But more than this, it's now every SME owner's responsibility to build a business for the future they want – shaping a world in which economic, social and environmental sustainability prevails.



## Summary

- Climate change is transforming the global economy. No matter its size or sector, your business has a responsibility to reduce its environmental impact.
- The UN SDGs offer a framework to how your SME can become part of the solution and contribute to sustainable development.
- Integration of the goals into your core business strategy can help grow your SME, save time and money, engage employees and create a strong competitive advantage in the global marketplace. A standards-based approach to sustainability equips smaller firms with the knowledge and tools required to establish efficient and ethical practices:
  1. Begin by using ISO 14001 to prioritize which goals will help your business make the biggest positive impact. A handbook for SMEs also exists to make the most of your EMS.
  2. Standards like ISO 50001 and ISO 26000 create solutions that support the SDGs while driving growth, helping you to reduce your energy consumption and to operate in a socially responsible manner. BS 8001 provides a flexible framework to help organizations implement circular economy principles.
  3. ISO 45001 makes it easy to integrate OH&S management with your SME's overall sustainability strategy. Certification to this standard demonstrates a commitment to integrity and transparency, enhancing brand reputation and increasing employee engagement.
  4. ISO 20400 provides guidance on delivering sustainability objectives through the entire chain, driving innovation and efficiency.
- Any small business can use the SDGs to turn environmental issues into opportunities for growth. But more than this, in today's world every organization has a responsibility to build a business for the future they want – one in which economic, social and environmental sustainability prevails.

For more information on our business improvement standards, visit:

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