

## Supplier Guidance: Ethical Supply Chains

This document aims to help you ensure the delivery of Ethical Supply Chains requirements in contracts that you hold with the public sector in Northern Ireland.

Ethical Supply Chains requirements in public contracts contribute to the Northern Ireland Executive's vision to "have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect".

Here we outline:

- The fundamental concepts behind maximising social value in public contracts
- NI Executive commitments, policies and procedures related to Human Rights
- What social value clauses ask of suppliers regarding Ethical Supply Chains
- Tools and resources to ensure supply chains are ethical
- How to contact the Social Value Unit for advice

### Maximising social value in public contracts

Social value is about maximising the social, economic and environmental benefits delivered through public procurement. The social value model used across the public sector in Northern Ireland is built upon 4 key themes:

- Increasing secure employment and skills
- Building ethical and resilient supply chains
- Delivering zero carbon
- Promoting Well-being

By including social value in procurement we can:

- Create job opportunities for people who face barriers to work
- Invest in skills
- Support Social Enterprises and new businesses
- Support Voluntary and Community organisations
- Reduce poverty
- Promote equality and diversity
- Reduce our carbon footprint
- Improve mental health and wellbeing

### Why does social value include Ethical Supply Chains requirements?

Social value requirements addressing Ethical Supply Chains are included on contracts where it has been identified that the supply chain includes an increased risk of modern slavery, human rights abuses and/or illegal or unethical employment practices within the supply chain. This could be because the contract's supply chain includes vulnerable workers or countries with an increased risk of modern slavery and human trafficking, or the sector as a whole has historical issues, for example.

While the language of Ethical Supply Chains may be unfamiliar to some businesses, most companies have policies and procedures that cover some of these issues. Examples include ethical employment practices for those involved in the recruitment and deployment of workers or policies prohibiting the use of child labour or forced labour. Ethical Supply Chains ensure that approaches such as these are applied beyond an organisation's direct employees so that Human Rights are respected and protected throughout the contract's supply chain.

Since 2011, the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNGP) have been viewed as the authoritative global reference on business and human rights. The UNGPs are clear that the duty to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for adverse human rights impacts extends across a company's value chains and business relationships (including suppliers). The UNGPs recommend that businesses should expand what they already have in place to develop a Human Rights due diligence approach, through which they will be able to assure stakeholders that they are taking reasonable steps to avoid infringing upon the rights of others and tackling infringements where they occur.

Here is [a useful overview of the UN Guiding Principles](#), as well as a short video and answers to some Frequently Asked Questions.

The key to ensuring Ethical Supply Chains in public contracts is good communication and sharing of information between Suppliers and the Contracting Authority, so that any negative impacts on Human Rights throughout the business' supply chains are addressed and prevented. This is what the Ethical Supply Chains requirement aims to deliver.

## NI Executive commitment to Human Rights

The [European Convention on Human Rights](#) (ECHR) came into effect on 3 September 1953. The ECHR contains 17 key articles relating to rights and fundamental freedoms which include the right to life, the prohibition of slavery and forced labour, and the right to liberty and security.

In the United Kingdom, the [Human Rights Act 1998](#), which came into force in October 2000, incorporates the majority of rights set out in the ECHR into domestic law. The Act requires all public authorities to respect and promote Human Rights.

[Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998](#) provides that Northern Ireland Departments may not commit any acts that are incompatible with the Convention rights.

More recently, the [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) was designed to tackle slavery in the UK, its businesses and their supply chains, and consolidates previous offences relating to trafficking and slavery. Every large company<sup>1</sup> has a responsibility under the Act to publish a statement detailing what it is doing to prevent slavery in its business and supply chain. This will in turn require smaller sub-contractors to feed in details of their relevant policies and practices.

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<sup>1</sup> The Act applies to all organisations with a turnover, or group turnover - that is, the total turnover of a company and its subsidiaries - of £36 million or more which are either incorporated in the UK or carry on a business in the UK.

Contracting Authorities have a duty to ensure Human Rights are respected when they enter commercial transactions with Suppliers.

[PPN 05/21 Human Rights in Public Procurement](#) was endorsed by the NI Executive with effect from 22 November 2021 to mandate the actions that Departments must take to incorporate human rights considerations into contracts when conducting a procurement process.

## Social value contract clauses re: Ethical Supply Chains

Ethical Supply Chains clauses require suppliers to:

- Undertake a supply chain mapping exercise to ascertain where ethical sourcing risks exist within the supply chain of goods being used on or produced for the Contracting Authority's contract
- Submit a written Supply Chain Strategy to the Contracting Authority on actions taken to ensure that in practice slavery and human trafficking are not taking place in any part of the supply chain
- Submit an annual progress report in writing to the Contracting Authority, detailing the progress made in relation to the Supply Chain Strategy, as well as setting out quarterly actions for the year ahead.

**(Note:** Make sure to check the specific clauses included in your contract, including timeframes, as Contracting Authorities can edit clauses to meet their strategic priorities and the needs of the particular contract.)

These clauses are included by the Contracting Authority in order to:

- Reduce the risk of modern slavery, human rights abuses and/or illegal or unethical employment practices within the supply chain.
- Take an active role in respecting, protecting and fulfilling Human Rights.
- Help to influence the behaviour of companies competing for public contracts.

## Helpful Tips and Resources

To learn more about respecting and protecting Human Rights throughout supply chains:

- Watch econsense's short [video on Respecting Human Rights in your Supply Chain](#)
- Read the Northern Ireland Business & Human Rights Forum's [Guide for Businesses in Northern Ireland](#).
- Complete the [UN Global Compact Academy E-learning Course](#) on Human Rights
- Access practical advice, experiences and insights via the [Doing Business With Respect for Human Rights guide](#).

At Contract Award/Commencement:

- Check your contract to find out how many days from contract award/commencement within which your organisation has to complete your supply chain map.

- Check your contract to find out the time period within which your organisation needs to submit your written Supply Chain Strategy to the Contracting Authority's Project Manager.
- Check your contract to find out when the annual progress reports need to be submitted in writing to the Contracting Authority's Project Manager.

### How do I map my supply chain?

Supply Chain Maps are live documents that need to be updated regularly, for example - when suppliers change. What you are trying to establish and answer through a supply chain map is 'Where are the most vulnerable workers in my supply chain?'

In order to answer this question, you need to know:

- The red flags of labour exploitation, forced labour and slavery
- Where the highest risks are in terms of countries and sectors
- Who your suppliers are, how much you spend with them and the length of the relationship you have with them

This brief [summary document from Walk Free Foundation](#) is an overview on what modern slavery is, what the red flags are, why business should act, where the risks are and how business can respond.

A supply chain map doesn't need to be complicated. It can be a spreadsheet which lists all of your suppliers and helps you record:

- What country they are located in and the [Global Slavery Index](#) rating for that country
- What you buy from them and if that includes high risk goods or services
  - The US State Department's [Trafficking in Person's report \(TIP\)](#) highlights the main risk sectors and industries in their country narratives
  - The US Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) maintains a [list of goods and their source countries which it has reason to believe are produced by child labour or forced labour](#) in violation of international standards
- If they have a higher risk employment type, e.g. seasonal, agency or low skilled labour
- How much you spend with them per annum
- When your business relationship with them started
- Any contextual information that you know about them, i.e. have any had poor Health and Safety audits recently? Are they difficult to deal with? Are they responsive to enquiries? Have they made a commitment to tackle modern slavery, for example through a code of conduct or CSR report?

When you have this information, you can then prioritise which suppliers to engage with first based on risk and/or opportunity.

You can find more detailed information about mapping supply chains through the following sources:

- Walk Free's [Business & Investor Toolkit](#)
- Stronger Together's [Tackling Modern Slavery in Global Supply Chains Toolkit](#)
- Ethical Trading Initiative's [Managing Risks Associated with Modern Slavery: A Good Practice Note for the Private Sector](#)

### What should be in my Supply Chain Strategy?

The Supply Chain Strategy is a written document which sets out the actions your organisation has taken to ensure that in practice slavery and human trafficking are not taking place in any part of the supply chain.

The Strategy must at least include and address among other things:

- mechanisms to empower staff to raise suspicions of unlawful and unethical employment practices and criminal activity within the Contract's supply chain
- training on modern slavery and ethical employment practices for those involved in buying/ procurement and the recruitment and deployment of workers and a record of those that have been trained
- a commitment to ensure that undue cost and time pressures are not applied to suppliers if this is likely to result in unethical treatment of workers and that suppliers are paid on time – within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice
- procedures for investigating any supplier identified as high risk, by direct engagement with workers wherever possible, and working with suppliers to rectify any issues of illegal or unethical employment practice
- quarterly actions designed to continually ensure unlawful and unethical employment practices are eradicated and to ensure all workers at every stage of the supply chain are treated fairly
- consideration been given to joining appropriate networks or other initiatives to tackle supply chain abuse, combat anti-trafficking etc.
- any work done towards continuous improvement in supply chain knowledge and to sharing best practice where appropriate

The following resources may be useful in the development of your Supply Chain Strategy:

- Walk Free's [Business & Investor Toolkit](#)
- Stronger Together's [Tackling Modern Slavery in Global Supply Chains Toolkit](#)
- Ethical Trading Initiative's [Managing Risks Associated with Modern Slavery: A Good Practice Note for the Private Sector](#)

### At Contract Review Meetings:

- Update the Contracting Authority on your progress against the contract's Ethical Supply Chains requirement.
- Update the Contracting Authority on any direct or indirect Human Rights/Modern Slavery risks, e.g. changes in the labour market or supply chain. Good communication and sharing of information between Suppliers and the Contracting Authority is key to ensuring ethical supply chains.
- Use the Social Value Monitoring report to draw the Contracting Authority's attention to what you've delivered to date.

## Supply Chain Strategy Annual Progress Report

The Annual Progress Report should be submitted to the Contracting Authority on the anniversary of contract/award commencement. It should be in writing and detail the steps you have taken, including with subcontractors (if any), to implement your Supply Chain Strategy in practice. The Annual Progress Report should set out the progress made in relation to the Supply Chain Strategy and set out quarterly actions for the year ahead.

Describing supply chain risks and how they are managed often requires contextual and qualitative information. It may be useful to ask the questions set out in the table below when writing your Annual Progress Report, which are based on the [key quality indicators identified as part of the UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework](#):

### *Quality indicators of good corporate reporting on Ethical Supply Chains*

1. **Governance:** Does the reporting explain how the company's governance structures support the management of supply chain risks?
2. **Specific processes:** Does the reporting go beyond high-level statements of policy and commitment and discuss specific processes for implementing respect for Human Rights?
3. **Specific impacts:** Does the reporting refer to specific impacts that occurred within the reporting period and are associated with the company's operations or value chain?
4. **Clear examples:** Does the reporting provide clear, relevant examples of how the company's policies and processes have influenced practice and outcomes within the reporting period?
5. **Stakeholder perspectives:** Does the reporting explain how the company gains the perspective of stakeholders who could be negatively impacted?
6. **Challenges:** Does the reporting discuss complex or systemic supply chain challenges and how the company grapples with them?
7. **Metrics:** Does the reporting include specific data, key performance indicators or other metrics that offer clear and relevant evidence to support the narrative?
8. **Forward focus:** Does the report include information about the company's plans for advancing its efforts to ensure that in practice slavery and human trafficking are not taking place in any part of the supply chain?
9. **Strategic initiatives:** If the reporting references particular initiatives, for example, projects, third-party assessments or participation in industry or multi-stakeholder organisations, does it make clear how these initiatives help the company advance its own management of supply chain risks?
10. **Improving disclosure:** Where this is not the first year of Ethical Supply Chain reporting for the company, does the reporting show improvements in the quality of its disclosure in comparison with previous years, taking into account the indicators set out above?

All organisations are at different stages of their journey to having more Ethical Supply Chains but Suppliers should demonstrate continuous improvement in how they mitigate the risk of modern slavery, human rights abuses and/or illegal or unethical employment practices within the supply chain.

We are conscious that this type of monitoring and reporting may be new to Suppliers. Whilst the contract requirements must be met, we recognise that Suppliers may need support and advice in their

delivery of the Ethical Supply Chains requirements. We hope that this document offers a number of useful resources. If you require further assistance, you can speak to the Contracting Authority's Contract Manager and/or [contact the Social Value Unit](#).

#### Monitoring of Ethical Supply Chains requirements

You may be required to record the delivery of the Ethical Supply Chain Strategy on the Social Value monitoring system. You are not required to upload it to the system – you deliver the policy to the Contracting Authority.

You can use the Notes section of the Social Value Monitoring System to log your progress against the delivery of the requirements, e.g. completion of the supply chain mapping exercise, submission of the annual progress reports.

Both your company's and the Contracting Authority's Contract Managers will receive an automated report via email from the Social Value Monitoring System that sets out the requirements and what has been delivered against each of them to date. These reports should be reviewed regularly at contract review/progress meetings.

#### How to contact the Social Value Unit for advice

The Strategic Investment Board's Social Value Unit are available to offer support and advice to both Contracting Authorities and Suppliers who deliver contracts which include social value requirements. The Social Value Unit's Advisors can attend contract initiation and progress meetings, if required.

To contact the Social Value Unit, email [info@buysocialni.org](mailto:info@buysocialni.org)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Can I submit the company's Modern Slavery Statement?

You can refer to your Modern Slavery Statement as part of your Ethical Supply Chain Strategy but this forms part of the Strategy, it does not replace the need for one. The Ethical Supply Chain Strategy is specific to the contract you've been awarded by the Contracting Authority.

### Can I submit the company's Human Rights Policy?

You can refer to your company's Human Rights Policy as part of your Ethical Supply Chain Strategy but this forms part of the Strategy, it does not replace the need for one. The Ethical Supply Chain Strategy is specific to the contract you've been awarded by the Contracting Authority.

### We are a large corporate and there are a lot of colleagues/departments who need to sign off strategic documents, what can I do?

The clauses require a strategy which applies specifically to the contract you've been awarded by the Contracting Authority. It does not need to be a company-wide policy, although you may see the value of a company-wide policy after completing it.

As the Contract Manager, the strategy should set out the actions you can take to address the supply chain risks involved in this contract. Your strategy may include raising issues with other colleagues/departments, for example. All organisations are at different stages of their journey to having more Ethical Supply Chains but suppliers should demonstrate continuous improvement in how they mitigate the risk of modern slavery, human rights abuses and/or illegal or unethical employment practices within the supply chain.

### Do I have to upload the strategy documents on to the Social Value monitoring system?

You will be required to record the delivery of the Ethical Supply Chain Strategy on the Social Value monitoring system. You are not required to upload it to the system – you deliver the Strategy to the Contracting Authority.

### Where can I get help?

The Strategic Investment Board's Social Value Unit are available to offer support and advice to both Contracting Authorities and Suppliers who deliver contracts which include social value requirements.

To contact the Social Value Unit, email [info@buysocialni.org](mailto:info@buysocialni.org)