IPMA® international project management association

PUBLICATIONS

# IPMA GUIDE ON SUSTAINABLE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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# IPMA Guide on Sustainable Project Management

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# IPMA Guide on Sustainable Project Management

## BASED ON THE

Sustainable Project Management

ICB4 Reference Guide

Sara Bossi
Lana Lovrenčić Butković
Peter Pürckhauer
Gilbert Silvius

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# Foreword

In the current face of unprecedented environmental, social, and economic challenges, the discipline of project management is undergoing a profound transformation. Traditional models of project management success, once focused almost exclusively on time, cost, and scope, are now being reimagined to embrace broader goals – those of business excellence, social inclusivity, equity, resilience, regeneration and responsible usage of resources. In short: sustainability. Therefore, project management requires a fundamental paradigm shift in mindset from short-term success metrics, such as the 'iron triangle', to long-term value creation with sustainable results and responsible approaches. From isolated project goals to systemic impacts; from reactive problem-solving to proactive opportunity-seeking.

IPMA has started to align its standards and qualifications with these demands, by publishing the IPMA *Sustainable Project Management ICB4 Reference Guide* in 2024. The book that you are reading right now complements this Reference Guide with practical and supplementary information, providing guidance on the sustainable management of projects. This book explores the evolving field of Sustainable Project Management and its emerging and innovative practices. Most of all, this book presents a practical tool on how to apply sustainable practices in project management. The book stimulates project professionals to consider how projects – across different industries, sectors, culture and geographies – can contribute not only to organizational and project success but also to societal well-being, economic prosperity, benefits to humanity and ecological balance for a better world.

Recurring throughout the ten parts of the book is the recognition that sustainable project management is not an optional 'add-on', but a necessity and should therefore become part of everyday regular project delivery. Accordingly, in an era marked by climate change, resource scarcity, and rising social expectations, project professionals must act as change agents, guiding organizations toward practices that are not only efficient and profitable but also ethical and regenerative.

This book is intended for project professionals seeking professional development and certification, graduates of project management, and also practitioners looking for tools and methods behind sustainable project management. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the authors: Sara Bossi, Lana Lovrenčić Butković, Peter Pürckhauer and Gilbert Silvius, but also to Max Panaro and his sustainability team for driving the sustainable change in project management.



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Finally, as project professionals, unfortunately we often see project managers becoming so consumed with everyday delivery and forgetting to generate value for long-term sustainable achievements. Let us hope that this book will help society to shift from technical aspects to long-term sustainable strategies for building back a better world.

In Zagreb, May 15th, 2025

Prof. Dr. Mladen Vukomanović
IPMA President


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# Preface

This handbook is designed to support project managers in acquiring the competences necessary to integrate sustainability into project management processes and practices. If you think that ESG and sustainability are an ethical priority and an obligation towards the future generations, we have something in common. However, this book is not written to share these personal beliefs. It is written to enable project teams to achieve their goals and to achieve project success in a societal and business context that has significantly changed in the last decade.

As we move further into the 21st century, the world is facing unprecedented challenges such as resource scarcity, geopolitical conflicts, climate change, and environmental refugees. The implication of these challenges is that the basic assumptions about project scope, schedule and costs are unstable, unreliable and ultimately unsuitable for purely predictive plan-based project management. The challenges the world is facing call for a new kind of leadership that guides organizations towards a future where economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental stewardship coalesce. And for projects that are managed with the implications of this new reality in mind, by project professionals that can consider the changing business paradigm in the management of projects and the impact on society and the environment that these have. In short: The challenges of today call for sustainable projects and sustainable project management.

Sustainable project management is the planning, monitoring, and controlling of project delivery and support processes, with consideration of the environmental, economic, and social aspects of the life cycle of the project's resources, processes, deliverables, and effects. It is aimed at understanding and realizing benefits for all stakeholders, and is performed in a transparent, fair, and ethical way that includes proactive stakeholder participation. This handbook is aligned with the *Sustainable Project Management ICB4 Reference Guide, IPMA Individual Competence Baseline (ICB4)* and *Project Management by ICB4* publications and should be used together with them to integrate sustainability perspective into project management processes and practices.

The handbook starts by discussing some developments in the broader context of society and humanity, of which all of us are part. It is this societal perspective that is unique in sustainable project management. The book then discusses the role of organizations as part of society whose policies, processes, products and services impact society and the environment. Organizations also use projects as 'instruments of change' to realize their goals and strategies, that thereby shape their future impacts. The center parts of the book discuss how the considerations of societal and environmental impacts in projects, and taking responsibility for these impacts, can or should be integrated into project management. Thereby preparing the reader for leading and managing projects that contribute to the sustainability of organizations and society. The final part of the



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book discusses the individual level: how competences related to the individual project professional are changed and enhanced to foster sustainability in individual behaviors.

We hope that this handbook inspires you to become a sustainability leader in project management and to make a positive contribution to the sustainable development of organizations, societies, and ultimately, humanity on planet Earth. Not because this is easy, but because it is necessary!

Sara Bossi
Lana Lovrenčić Butković
Peter Pürckhauer
Gilbert Silvius


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# General introduction

The role of projects in society is growing. The percentage of economic activity that is organized in projects is increasing (Schoper et al., 2018), and projects shape the future of society. This 'projectification' of society brings a societal responsibility to the profession of project management. IPMA (the International Project Management Association, a federation of more than 70 Member Associations around the globe) has recognized this responsibility already in the *ICB4 (individual Competence Baseline 4*), which states that the project manager should be able to "*assess the impact of the project on the environment and society*", and "*align objectives with organizational strategy for sustainability*". In 2024, these 'sustainability competences of the project manager' have been developed further in the *Sustainable Project Management ICB4 Reference Guide*: the first global standard in Sustainable Project Management which describes the competences that project professionals require to take responsibility for the impacts of their projects on society and the environment. The *Sustainable Project Management ICB4 Reference Guide* expands the competence elements of the *IPMA Individual Competence Baseline (ICB4)*. Each competence element now also has a sustainability-related description, a definition and, in most cases, additional key competence indicators.

The competence elements described in the *Sustainable Project Management ICB4 Reference Guide* are a key component of this handbook. The Reference Guide builds upon the general project management competences described in the ICB4, by adding new competence elements, knowledge, and competence indicators, that are specific for sustainable project management. The present handbook also focuses on sustainable project management and assumes that the reader already has a solid understanding of the processes and practices of project management in general. The book, therefore, does not repeat the basic knowledge on project management that is described in project management standards and books. Specifically, this book adds the sustainable knowledge to the knowledge base already described in the IPMA publication *Project Management by ICB4* [1].

1 For general knowledge about project management, we refer to the book *Project Management by ICB4* (Hedeman and Riepma, 2023). Also, the terminology used in this book aligns with that used in *Project Management by ICB4*.



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Notwithstanding the focus of this handbook on the specifics of sustainable project management, the book can be read and understood on its own. The book represents a holistic understanding of the concepts of sustainability and responsibility, applied to the practices of project management. With this handbook, the reader can prepare for the IPMA sustainability project professional certifications

## Purpose

Projects define the future of their organizations. An organization which targets long-term success needs to be sustainable not only from an economic perspective, but also from a social and environmental perspective. Managing projects successfully therefore requires that these perspectives are proactively considered. This proactive consideration is at the heart of sustainable project management and is operationalized in the IPMA *Sustainable Project Management ICB4 Reference Guide*. This handbook is intended to illuminate the knowledge which enables project managers to develop their individual competences in compliance with the *Sustainable Project Management ICB4 Reference Guide*, and to provide practical guidance for the application of this knowledge.

At IPMA we believe that projects begin and end with the people, within and around the project. The team is acting based on their individual competences. Therefore, the competence of the project professional is the center, the heart of a successful project. This handbook therefore describes the additional sustainability-related knowledge and practices to the existing competence elements, as identified in the *Sustainable Project Management ICB4 Reference Guide*.

However, the purpose of the book is not just that of a training book for sustainable project management certifications. The main purpose of the book is to provide inspiration and guidance for project professionals on how they can take responsibility in their daily work and create successful projects that contribute to sustainability.

## Audiences and uses

As with other IPMA publications, this book is intended to be used by a broad audience and several target groups. The key audience groups, without being exhaustive, are:

- **Project professionals** – In the context of this book, a project professional is anyone who plays a role in managing the project and those supporting them; these are the (sub-)project manager, work package leader, and project support staff.
- **Sustainability responsibles** – A sustainability responsible is the person within an organization who is tasked with developing and advising on that organization's sustainability goals and strategies.
- **Students** – Anyone that prepares oneself for a (future) role as a project professional.
- **Organizations** – Any corporation, government, business or non-profit organization and especially their decision makers.


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- **IPMA Members** – All the different people engaged in one of the IPMA Member Associations. People who are running the IPMA Member Association, its certification body or engaged as assessors.
- **CCT professionals** – Following the IPMA standards, CCT is the acronym for consultants, coaches and trainers, including educators and instructors who are providing their own knowledge and expertise to develop the competences of clients or participants.
- **Researchers** – People or organizations who are expanding the knowledge base of project management, or are providing academic underpinning to new ideas.
- **Political decision makers** – People in the government who are shaping the regulations, funding frameworks, and defining national sustainability targets.

**Table 0.1.1** Possible usage of the book

| Audience | Possible use |
|---|---|
| **Project professionals** | • Expanded baseline for professional development<br>• Self-assessment<br>• Knowledge base through which one can be assessed and certified<br>• Development of competences for a (project) team<br>• Knowledge base for communities of practice |
| **Sustainability responsibles** | • Knowledge base for interaction with and understanding of project professionals<br>• Development of competences related to sustainability in projects |
| **Students** | • Knowledge base through which one can be assessed and certified<br>• Development of competences for a (project) team<br>• Knowledge base for communities of practice |
| **Organizations** | • Expanding the knowledge base for internal standards for projects and project professionals without reinventing from scratch<br>• Defining internal personnel development plans |
| **IPMA members** | • Knowledge base for assessments and certifications procedures<br>• Knowledge base for own activities within the association, or for its members |
| **CCT professionals** | • Knowledge base for own professional development<br>• Self-assessment<br>• Updating their services and/or resumes, or as a base for new services, training offerings or other products |
| **Researchers** | • Source for additional research activities<br>• Basis for papers and conferences<br>• Platform for team-based research |
| **Political decision makers** | • Source for requirements defined in regulations and funding principles |


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