

# **IKEA Social Responsibility Report**

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ACADEMIC STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

The case study has been completed in accordance with the University of Ottawa's rules and guidelines respecting academic integrity"

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### What is IKEA?

IKEA is a highly successful international furniture retail store with 422 locations in more than 50 countries. Known for its high-quality stylish furniture, and low prices, IKEA has become the world's largest home furniture retailer (Molin). The companies largest markets based on sale value are in Germany, which makes up 15%, and the United States at 13% of their revenue. The continent of Europe makes for the largest market, producing over 70% of IKEA's sales (IKEA Forbes). The invention of ready-to-assemble furniture and the creation of IKEA's cafeteria has proven IKEA to be an innovative brand that has modernized the retail industry.

## 1. What are IKEA's goals as a company?

1. 'To create a better everyday life for the many people', this is the IKEA vision. ("IKEA Vision, Culture and Values.")

IKEA continues to be the leading driving force of innovation and creativity in furniture retailing. IKEA fixates on the importance of creating a comfortable home-like environment with high-quality products and style. By using all resources at its disposal, IKEA is able to make people's visions come true, meeting consumer's preferences at an affordable price. Maintaining a wide variety of products and styles that satisfy the preferences of everyone, no matter your income.

2. "Our business idea is 'to offer a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them'." ("IKEA Vision, Culture and Values.")

The key concept to take away from this is that IKEA's focus is on offering their products at affordable, acceptable pricing. The company purposefully looks for places to regain their revenue when offering high-quality products for a more reasonable cost. One of the method's IKEA uses to establish this profit is through inventive business practices. IKEA has what is called a 'self-serve warehouse', where flat-packed furniture comes in portable cardboard boxes with instructions to build-it-yourself. This saves the consumer and company money in a unique and memorable manner. IKEA also saves money through sustainable practices such as utilizing all the resources at the company's disposal as well as buying in bulk, on a global scale. Through detailed examination, IKEA chooses the best suppliers from around the world who offer the materials needed to make it all possible. The designers and manufacturers work together to continuously find new bold ways of making furniture using existing production processes ("IKEA facts that may surprise you").

## 2. What are IKEA's Key Values?

IKEA prides itself on a plethora of key values that represent its company and employees. These values include: togetherness, caring for people and the environment, cost-consciousness, simplicity, to renew and improve, lead by example, different with meaning, and the give and take of responsibility ("IKEA Vision, Culture and Values.").

The first value of togetherness describes a cohesive work environment. IKEA as a company was built with trust and believes collaboration breeds success. Caring for people and

the environment involves a focus on future generations and making a lasting impact. IKEA ensures its products are more accessible to everyone by consistently lowering prices without compromising the integrity of the furniture. This aligns with their value of cost-consciousness. Simplicity is displayed through IKEA's strong rooted connection to their humble beginnings of Älmhult, Sweden (Lewis). Through this simplicity created a down-to-earth company that values being practical and creating a comfortable environment where you can feel at home. IKEA constantly seeks opportunities to evolve and improve as they search for solutions to impossible problems. IKEA centers itself on bettering the company and surrounding community, renewing and improving their current practices. As the top furniture retail outlet, IKEA strives to lead by example and set ethical and sustainable approaches in place to bring out the best in everyone. These methods may be seen as unconventional to many companies, but IKEA's care for its community and attention to detail has consistently separated themselves from their competitors as they dare to be different. Lastly, IKEA gives and takes responsibility, they hold their company and employees accountable and hope that through customer's input that it can maintain its supportive atmosphere.

## **History of IKEA**

## 1. IKEA's beginnings

IKEA was first founded in 1943 in Älmhult Sweden by 17-year-old Ingvar Kamprad. The name IKEA is derived from Kamprad's own initials as well as the initials of his family farm and home village. IKEA started as a company that sold small items such as pens and lighters. In 1948, IKEA made the transition to selling furniture, posting the first-ever IKEA catalogue in

1951. The innovative technology of flat-packed furniture was introduced by the company in 1956, reducing crucial costs for the company that allowed their company to become an international retailer in 1963. IKEA has held the title of the world's largest furniture retailer in 2008, quickly monopolizing the industry (Lewis).

#### 2. Social Responsibility History

IKEA's first CSR policies were developed in the 1980s and 1990s. These new policies were in response to a greater demand for CSR on a global scale, due to increased awareness of the social and environmental issues caused by companies. In 1993, IKEA introduced their first formal environmental policy, after hiring its first Manager of Environment in 1990. IKEA became entrenched with the human rights aspect of CSR after facing controversy due to its pervasive use of child labourers in countries such as India and Pakistan. IKEA has used its corporate social responsibility and long-term partnerships with organizations such as UNICEF as a contingency strategy and to right their past wrongs. Once IKEA's unethical practices were revealed, it was quick to respond and adapt the company to present the ethical image they aim for. IKEA began addressing the issues of child labour at the source, rather than simply donating funds, a method that shows commitment to growth rather than misusing CSR as a beneficial marketing strategy to maximize profits (Spraguemeister).

## What is Corporate Social Responsibility?

Before going into depth about IKEA's socially responsible activities, it must first be defined. According to David H. J. Delcorde, corporate social responsibility can be described as

"The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at any given point in time." (Delcorde 44). This broad definition helps define the most integral views of corporate social responsibility. In order for a company to be considered socially responsible, it must address economic, environmental, and social issues prevalent in today's society. Corporations are seen as their own identity and therefore are held to the same responsibilities any member of a community would be. The company is charged taxes, and can be sued, as well as held financially responsible for any debts it procures.

What began initially as a strategic choice to better an image of a company grew into a responsibility based on morals and ethics. As Guylaine Vallée, a professor of the University of Montreal stated in his article "Corporate social responsibility, therefore, consists in taking into account, in the decisions that enterprises make, the interests of other components of the enterprises—such as employees, customers, suppliers, local communities or society at large" (Vallée 22).

## 1. Classifying Corporate Social Responsibility

Geoffroy Lantos identified the three levels of corporate social responsibility to help establish the varying degrees of social responsibility that a company can conduct. These levels are ethical, altruistic, and strategic. (Delcorde 46). On an ethical level, corporations recognize that maximizing profit should not be done without regarding the impacts it would have on society. A company strives to be profitable while "avoiding harm to society". Secondly, altruism is a selfless concern for others. On an altruistic level, companies contribute to civil society whether a company stands to gain from the donation or not. Corporations who express this approach to social responsibility do so without seeking recognition and benefits. Lastly, a

strategic level of corporate social responsibility focuses on the benefits that the altruistic level does not actively pursue. The company devotes its time and resources to these activities on the basis that both society and its company will ultimately gain from their investment.

## **IKEA's Key Social Responsibility Work**

IKEA's Corporate Social Responsibility endeavors are coordinated by the Chief Sustainability Officer, Pia Heidmenmark Cook. IKEA conducts a plethora of activities to better society whether it be through charitable donations, volunteering in communities, or conducting initiatives to make their company more sustainable.

#### 1. Green Initiative

One of IKEA's key examples of corporate social responsibility is its initiative to make the company more environmentally sustainable. At IKEA, the staff is committed to fighting Climate Change and protecting the planet. As a company, IKEA supports and donates funds to programs that reduce carbon emission and ensures the immediate implementation to make a tangible difference ("Climate Action").

As a company, IKEA has made incredible strides in offering more sustainable furniture materials. A large fraction of IKEA furniture requires cotton as a raw material. Due to this fact, IKEA has become One Hundred percent committed to the use of sustainable cotton. The conventional way of producing cotton is often damaging to the environment, thus all the cotton used in IKEA products since 2015 now comes from more green producers. Sustainable cotton is either recycled, or is grown with less water, pesticides, and chemicals. This also helps contribute to the overall wellbeing of cotton farmers by ensuring fair wages and a safe workplace, rid of chemicals. Currently, IKEA is the only global retailer that uses One Hundred percent sustainable

cotton in their products. In order to encourage other companies to follow in their footsteps, IKEA, the World Wildlife Fund, and other partners conceived the Better Cotton Initiative as a way to make the international production of cotton better for the environment, workers, and the industry ("100% committed to sustainable cotton").

IKEA has set the goal to only use renewable or recyclable plastics by 2030. As it stands now, IKEA has completely disposed of all single-use plastics from the global home furnishing range early this year, including all materials used in their restaurants. The PLA plastic used in products is made from inexhaustible resources such as sugar beets, sugar cane, and corn, instead of the traditional nonrenewable resources. It is a material that IKEA has established which has enabled them to reach their ecological goal ("Only more sustainable plastic at IKEA by 2030").

Lastly, IKEA has decided to use more ethical substitutions of wood in more products. As one of the world's fastest-growing raw materials, bamboo is self-regenerating and more durable than wood, making for an excellent substitute. IKEA has a variety of bamboo-based products offered in their stores for customers trying to reduce their consumption of wood-related products ("Sustainable Bamboo Products"). Much like cotton, the wood they do use in merchandise has become sourced by One Hundred percent sustainable producers. IKEA acquires wood from over 50 countries, and within factories, the wood is cut to minimize waste. IKEA works with the Forest Stewardship Council and the World Wildlife Foundation to protect the wildlife and their habitat(s). IKEA is one of the largest buyers of FSC certified wood in the retail sector. The suppliers for IKEA's wood must meet the strict IWAY Forestry Standard. IKEA also works with WWF to combat illegal logging and promote the ethical trade of timber. With the help of the FSC and WWF, IKEA has been able to improve forest management in Europe and

Asia and has increased FSC certified forest areas by 35 million hectares ("Circular & Climate Positive").

## 2. Commitment to Equality and Diversity

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are all ingrained within IKEA's key values and vision as an organization. In hiring management and staff, IKEA searches for diversity and unique cultural backgrounds to bring new and innovative perspectives. IKEA's goal is to maintain an inclusive work environment where co-workers can be recognized and valued for their distinctive talents. Many industries still have predominantly male managers within their companies, but at IKEA Canada, 51% of the managers and 52% of staff consist of women. As a modern organization, IKEA recognizes the necessity for gender equality regardless of the leadership position. Beyond making staffing decisions based on a fair evaluation of gender and ethnicity, IKEA also understands the importance of creating an inclusive atmosphere where everyone's contributions are valued equally. For over a decade, IKEA has worked with a gender agenda and was involved in the first UN high-level panel on Women Economic Empowerment. IKEA's gender equality includes a commitment to equal pay, transparent reporting, and collaboration with the government. Along with the concerns of equality for women, IKEA supports LGBTQ+ inclusion. The company aims to produce a fully responsive, interactive work environment where all LGBTQ+ co-workers feel respected and safe. Every year, on May 17th IKEA celebrates IDAHOT (International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia) to show support to the LGBTQ+ community both inside and outside the organization ("Diversity & Inclusion"). IKEA Canada has officially become members of the Work Pride Foundation and Stonewall, organizations pertaining to the significance of the inclusion of LGBTQ+ within the workplace. IKEA U.S has also launched a new pride collection of reusable bags, donating a portion of the

proceeds to LGBTQ+ homelessness relief initiatives. Overall, IKEA has had a long history of supporting the equality of the LGBTQ+ community, including being the first brand to feature a gay couple in mainstream advertising over 20 years ago, as well as the support and empowerment of women in the retail industry ("IKEA U.S. Launches New Pride Collection").

## 3. Improving labour conditions

IKEA's vision as stated previously is "to create a better everyday life for the many people" ("IKEA Vision, Culture and Values."). This includes the lives of co-workers, producers, customers, and the communities IKEAs reside in and operates in. IKEA abides by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human rights and ensures all producers follow the strict supplier code of conduct, named the IWAY standard. This code of conduct helps support equal opportunities for workers as well as fair treatment regardless of ethnicity, gender orientation, physical ability, sexual preference, or religious standing. IKEA regularly monitors and protects the ethical recruitment of immigrant workers. Again, through the IWAY code of conduct, IKEA prevents forced labour, human trafficking, child labour, and any other unethical practices. Suppliers must offer transparent employment terms with good working and living conditions for migrant workers. IKEA has joined other companies such as HP, Hewlett Packard Enterprises, the Coca-Cola company, and others to provide a positive change in migrant employee recruitment and retention. Together, the organizations advocate for the "Employer Pays Principle" which requires hiring fees to be paid by the employer rather than the employee. IKEA has a clear ban on child labour, introducing a child labour code of conduct in 2000, developed with the advice of Save the Children, the International Labour Organization, and UNICEF ("People & Communities").

IKEA's work with Civil Society Organizations

Operated in the Netherlands, the Stichting IKEA Foundation is an independent philanthropic foundation that helps manage IKEA's humanitarian ventures. Funded by the INGKA Foundation, the IKEA foundation invests in dozens of large and small scale programs to make the lives of children who live in poverty better. This includes giving the children access to opportunities and resources to build themselves and their families a more promising future. This work includes the efforts from civil society organizations such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and many other NGOs and nonprofit organizations ("The IKEA Foundation").

#### 1. The IKEA Foundation and Half the Sky Foundation

The first way the IKEA Foundation helps the global community is through its movement to empower girls and women. The foundation became aware of the startling, disconcerting fact that Seventy percent of the world's most poor people are women, and wanted to make a change. Partnering with the Half the Sky Movement, the IKEA Foundation is raising awareness of the ramifications of women oppression. Women in certain developing countries do not have access to education, the workforce, and experience violence in their everyday lives. Using different media, such as; TV, film, and the internet, the foundation is encouraging others to intervene and stand against this discrimination, supporting charities that fight for the rights of these women. The movement has helped raise \$5 million dollars, contributing to 31 separate organizations. IKEA has been a strong supporter of the movement since early 2012 and continues to support the rights of women and girls everywhere ("Become part of the movement").

#### 2. The IKEA Foundation with UNICEF & Save the Children

Another initiative the IKEA foundation prides itself on is the fight against the root causes of child labour in Pakistan. The IKEA Foundation specifically funds projects that will provide

education to children, reach out to local communities to change the perspective on child labour, and help support families to find better methods to economically support themselves. The foundation has partnered with UNICEF and Save the Children and has given over 16 million children in 25,500 villages across India and Pakistan direct admittance to programs that prevent child labour. The project emphasizes helping the cotton-growing industry in Pakistan become less reliant on child labourers, helping combat the root causes of child labour in Pakistan. "Since 2000, the IKEA Foundation donated 60 million dollars in support of these programs to extinguish child labour in Pakistan and India, where IKEA's textile products are sourced" ("IKEA Foundation helps fight child labour in Pakistan").

#### 3. The IKEA Foundation's response to COVID-19

The IKEA Foundation has been quick to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, collaborating with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) to ensure the safety of healthcare workers. Competition for medical supplies and equipment is at unprecedented levels since the pandemic and has caused a drastic fluctuation in price and a widespread shortage. MSF reached out to the IKEA Foundation, asking for help in producing medical masks and gowns and within hours, the IKEA foundation initiated the dialogue. The MSF was able to order a few million gowns to be shipped to MSF mission countries, allowing for the continuation of MSF's lifesaving response to the pandemic in areas it hit the hardest. In addition to helping the MSF, the IKEA Foundation has committed 10 million euros to help fund programs to help people affected with COVID-19 ("A unique collaboration protects MSF").

IKEA's Key Stakeholders and their stakes in the context of CSR

IKEA has a countless number of stakeholders that have direct and indirect impacts on their company. The key stakeholders who have an influence on IKEA's corporate social responsibility are the owners, customers, and employees. Corporate social responsibility is important to a plethora of different stakeholders for various reasons. IKEA's main pressure to conduct socially responsible activities come from external stakeholders. This is mainly due to the fact that IKEA outsources labour and production in developing countries to develop a cost-effective business model. In particular, IKEA has been scrutinized by non-governmental organizations in regard to working conditions and child labour in Eastern Europe and Asia, as well as their supply of wood from Russia and Indonesia (Lindgreen et al.).

#### 1. The owners

Though shareholders are key stakeholders in most companies, IKEA is not owned by shareholders. It is instead operated by numerous companies and non-profit foundations, partially in response to Swedish taxation (Lewis, Robert). IKEA's brand is controlled by two separate owners. The IKEA group is run by the IKEA group INGA holding B.V, which manages the centers, retails, customer fulfillment, and all the other services related to IKEA products. The Stichting Ingka Foundation supports innovation and donates to charity (Pendleton). Its concerns with Corporate social responsibility revolves around upholding their stated purpose in its founding statute. The second owner, INTER IKEA Systems B.V oversees the international franchising of IKEA, distribution of products, training of its staff, and other related activities in line with the franchising agreements (Cuofano).

While owners of a company's main stake may be the return on investments and maximizing profit, IKEA holds a "stakeholder viewpoint" when conducting business. This view was proposed by Charles Handy, and it states that the purpose of a business goes beyond simply

maximizing profits and consider their civic responsibility when making decisions. Businesses have caused an abundance of social, environmental, ethical, and moral issues and have an obligation to fix them as it operates as a sole identity under the law. According to Delcorde, the stakeholder viewpoint states, "a company exists to satisfy the needs and wants of society, and that same society, through its laws, provides the legal authority for a company to exist" (Delcorde 132). IKEA's owners demonstrate this perspective by conducting CSR activities outside of the gaze of their marketing, instead of focusing on making a difference.

#### 2. The customers

A key stakeholder can be described as an individual or group that is capable of exerting and sustaining a positive or negative effect on an organization. (Delcorde 137). Key stakeholders are described as those with high power to influence an organization, a considerate level of urgency, and a significant interest (Delcorde 138). One example of a key stakeholder that holds true to nearly any organization is the customers. Customers encourage retail companies like IKEA to improve the quality, value, and production of their products. IKEA has always put an emphasis on putting the customer's needs first, dedicating time and resources to create a positive atmosphere to shop in. IKEA's commitment and loyalty to its customers set it apart from competing furniture retailers, believing without a strong customer base there is no room for a company to grow (Pontefract). Customers feel more comfortable investing their time and money into a company they feel shares similar priorities in regards to civic duties. By having IKEA's social responsibility achievements and aspirations easy to find, their brand equity will increase, which in turn, establishes a positive reputation. Customer's who appreciate the company's transparency and involvement often then become devoted buyers, building a loyal customer base.

### 3. The Employee

Employees' stakes within any retail industry including IKEA is to maintain a consistent and fair wage, but just as customers prefer to purchase products from socially aware enterprises, employee retention increases when a company exhibits care for the community and environment. This means a company can maintain a diversely talented, and experienced staff while improving its bottom line ("CSR - Types and Business Benefits"). CSR activities help foster a healthy stable work environment, where co-workers can feel motivated to eagerly engage in work. As David Delcorde stated in the pros of corporate social responsibility, "business exists to provide society with goods and services and to increase society's quality of life" (Delcorde 45). Increasing quality of life involves not only contributions to the community but providing beneficial and collaborative working conditions.

#### Interaction with Government

#### 1. Government's stakes and pressures

Though the Government can be considered to have a low interest in IKEA's operations, it still maintains high power and a level of legitimacy that garners its title as an important stakeholder. The government's stakes in companies such as IKEA are represented by sources such as tax revenue. IKEA, as a strong company contributes to the economy and donates large funds to socially responsible initiatives. The government puts pressure on companies like IKEA to be ethical and conduct CSR activities and often offers benefits to companies that do so through the use of tax breaks.

#### 2. IKEA's organizational structure flaws

IKEA's complex structure uses this benefit to their advantage. Despite the criticism of exploiting the jurisdictions of creating a charity, IKEA's structure continues to minimize tax and disclosure to make IKEA immune to takeovers. IKEA's founder Ingvar Kamprad was known to have a strong animosity against taxes and composed IKEA's corporate structure with this same perspective. The controversial structure questions the image of IKEA's corporate social responsibility; it is in the realm of possibility for IKEA to be labeled a "tax evader", much like Starbucks when the European Commission assessed Starbucks maintained an unfair tax advantage (Jurgen).

### 3. IKEA's international expansion strategies

IKEA initially expanded their products using an ethnocentric strategy; not paying close attention to other countries' governments, the overall economic climate, or the preferences of the given country. This changed as IKEA gained funds and was given the opportunity to specialize in products in their industry. An example of a misstep IKEA has had in the past was its expansion into Japan in the 1970s. After just 12 years of opening the first IKEA in Japan, the company has to close it dealing in the country. This was due to the fact that IKEA did not research Japan's culture and sold large products, not taking into account the fact that houses in Japan are much smaller than that of the United States. This along with the fact the Japanese were reluctant to build their own furniture made that expansion a failure, proving a company must do the correct research and accommodate a country's preferences to be successful. Another example of IKEA facing controversy for not conducting proper research was in its expansion to Israel. In an attempt to appeal to the strict orthodox population, IKEA sold versions of catalogs that had no women, resulting in a lawsuit for discrimination. The main headquarters was unaware of this

marketing attempt, proving the importance of communication throughout a global company ("IKEA facts that may surprise you").

#### Overall Effectiveness and improvements

### 1. Positive changes

The sheer size of the typical IKEA warehouses inevitably gives the organization a substantial carbon footprint. IKEA has addressed this issue and has the initiative to become climate positive by 2030. In late 2019, IKEA announced an investment of 200 million euros to accelerate the process of becoming climate positive, adopting a new people and planet positive strategy (Peters). Despite their challenges, IKEA has overcome an abundance of obstacles throughout the years and continues to be a leader in the furniture retail industry. IKEA has an extensive corporate social responsibility portfolio and is one of the largest contributors to the charitable causes they support, donating millions every year. IKEA proves even large companies have to care about their duties as a company to society in order to expand.

## 2. Areas needing improvement

Many critics of IKEA and its cost-effective model of business question whether it is truly possible to ever become a socially responsible company while offering such low prices. With a company as large as IKEA, with such a far global outreach it becomes nearly impossible to monitor the standards and quality of all of its suppliers and manufacturers. IKEA has also been scrutinized for its past controversies involving the wood industry and child labour. The amount of primary resources used to maintain production is often depleted faster than it can be

regenerated, destroying ecosystems and causing harm to the environment. IKEA also has pressures by consumers to offer continuously lower prices which often comes at the cost of quality. The balance between quality, price, and ethical manufacturing processes has been a consistent problem for IKEA. Lastly, IKEA has been accused of tax evasion as the company is confusingly labeled as a charity, and has a degree of secrecy in regards to its organizational structure and owners.

#### 3. Final thoughts

Though IKEA has flaws like any organization, the sheer amount of resources and effort that the company puts toward showing its willingness to improve. A company showing such genuine care for the world will always ultimately result in positive outcomes, regardless of issues that are presented alongside the positives. The importance of CSR is growing the further the world develops, and as the public becomes more aware of the environmental concerns of the near future companies will find themselves having extreme pressures from society to embark on a CSR path and protect our earth. Unlike many conglomerates with large monopolies, IKEA has started this process by organizing a well thought out plan on how to be a sustainable company. IKEA has a large enough customer base to be successful without the use of any CSR, yet IKEA chooses to continue these activities. This fact alone proves the fact that IKEA has a genuine concern for the community that more majority of companies should adopt.

#### PERSONAL ETHICS STATEMENT

### **Individual Assignment:**

By signing this Statement, I am attesting to the fact that I have reviewed the entirety of my attached work and that I have applied all the appropriate rules of quotation and referencing in use at the Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa, as well as adhered to the fraud policies outlined in the Academic Regulations in the University's Undergraduate Studies Calendar Academic Fraud Webpage

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