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Royal London Global Sustainable Equity Fund (IRL)

Quarterly Investment Report

31 December 2023



Quarterly Report

The fund as at 31 December 2023

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Royal London Global Sustainable Equity Fund (IRL). The report has been produced by Royal London Asset Management. The report starts with a summary dashboard showing key information about the fund. A glossary is located at the end of the report covering the description of some of the more technical terms used within the report. All data is as at the report date unless otherwise stated.

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The fund

Fund performance objective and benchmark

The fund's investment objective is to achieve capital growth over the medium term, which should be considered as a period of 3-5 years by predominantly investing globally in the shares of companies listed on Recognised Markets that are deemed to make a positive contribution to society. The fund's performance target is to outperform, after the deduction of charges, the MSCI All-Countries World Net Total Return Index USD (the "Benchmark") by 2.5% per annum over rolling three year periods. Investments in the fund will adhere to the Investment Manager's Ethical and Sustainable Investment Policy, as detailed further below and in the "Responsible Investment" section of the Prospectus.

Benchmark: MSCI All-Countries World Net Total Return Index USD

Fund value

	Total \$m
31 December 2023	59.72

Fund analytics

	Fund
Fund launch date	13 July 2021
Base currency	USD
Number of holdings	44

Performance and activity

Performance

	Fund (%)	Benchmark (%)	Relative (%)
Quarter	14.01	11.03	2.98
1 Year	30.00	22.20	7.80
3 Years (p.a.)	-	-	-
5 Years (p.a.)	-	-	-
10 Years (p.a.)	-	-	-
Since inception (p.a.)	1.70	1.73	(0.03)

Past performance is not a guide to future performance. Please refer to the Glossary for the basis of calculation and impact of fees. Performance and since inception date based on Royal London Global Sustainable Equity Fund (IRL) M USD (Acc). Source: Royal London Asset Management; Gross performance; Since inception date of the shareclass is 13 July 2021.

Performance commentary

The fund outperformed the MSCI All-Countries World Index (ACWI) benchmark during the fourth quarter. Generally supportive macroeconomic data, and more recently in December, the first signs of a pivot by the US Federal Reserve in terms of the interest rate narrative have meant that the fourth quarter has been one of the strongest for global equity markets for a long time. The best performing sectors in the quarter were information technology, real estate and industrials. The tech sector continues to benefit from the excitement around artificial intelligence (AI) and real estate is a sector that stands to benefit from falling interest rates. Industrials experienced a tailwind from a resilient macro backdrop combined with government stimulus towards infrastructure spending. The only sector that was negative in the quarter was energy, where we have zero exposure given our sustainable approach.

Our top contributor to performance was TopBuild which provides insulation to the US residential housing sector. This company has benefited from strong execution by the management team, accretive acquisitions and from US housing being seen as a key beneficiary of a resilient economic backdrop and falling interest rates in 2024. Dutch distributor of specialty chemicals IMCD had been facing headwinds due to its customers holding excess inventory and we saw evidence in the quarter that those inventory levels were now starting to normalise, benefitting the company's share price.

A key detractor during the quarter was Rentokil, the global leader in pest control and hygiene, where its share price declined after it reported a surprising slowdown in growth in its US business.

There have been several macroeconomic headwinds through 2023 but these have turned out to be better than expected. This has driven a lot of the market performance and the portfolio has been on the right side of that. Furthermore, we've had some strong share price moves that have driven outperformance. Going into 2024, we have a portfolio exposed to some exciting and powerful multi-year structural growth themes – the key ones being the ongoing digitalisation of society through things such as cloud computing and AI, which we think we're incredibly early in. We also have exposure to companies enabling the development of a more sustainable and resilient physical world. These include areas such as HVAC, building electrification and more sustainable transport such as rail. We also continue to be excited by the opportunities in the healthcare sector where we observe advancements in computing are accelerating new drug discovery combined with new large disease categories such as obesity emerging.

Performance and activity

Top 10 holdings

	Weighting (%)
Microsoft Corporation	4.29
Schneider Electric SE	3.41
Texas Instruments Incorporated	3.23
Westinghouse Air Brake Technologies Corporation	3.15
HDFC Bank Limited Sponsored ADR	3.07
AstraZeneca PLC	3.02
Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc.	3.01
Visa Inc. Class A	2.97
SSE plc	2.78
Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., Ltd. Sponsored ADR	2.72
Total	31.65

Fund activity

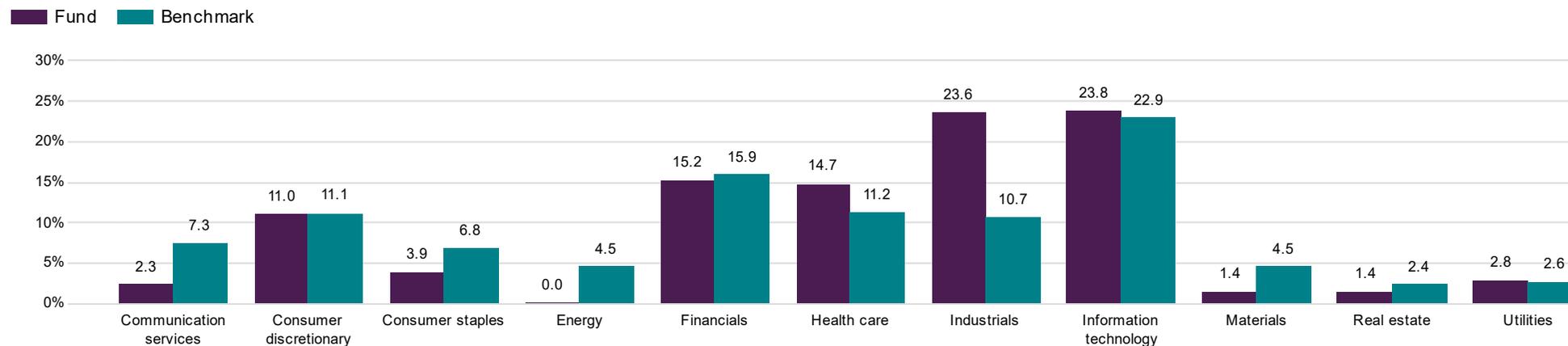
Our sustainable strategies are orientated to those companies that have a net benefit to society and create value for investors through their products and services and the way they manage environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues. Areas such as healthcare and technology remain at the core of the equity portfolios, complemented by engineering, utilities, selected financial services, and companies that lead their industries in ESG performance. This means that we do not invest in some sectors, such as oil & gas, extractive industries or tobacco. We believe that the exposure to those sectors which offer a positive contribution to society is consistent with outperformance over the medium term. While the sustainable funds have different mandates, risk profiles, asset mixes and geographical exposures, equity exposure is driven by the same underlying team, philosophy and process. Many of our key stocks will be held across several portfolios.

We started a position in Hologic, a diagnostics company that focuses on Women's Health. Hologic was a big beneficiary of the Covid-19 pandemic as it saw growth accelerate as it placed a greater number of its diagnostics machines and has since seen its core growth accelerate too. We believe its valuation underappreciates higher growth going forwards. We also started a position in Core and Main, a leading distributor of water infrastructure products in the United States.

Combined with ongoing macroeconomic uncertainty one thing likely to continue through 2024 is heightened geopolitical tensions around the world. That said, though, these tensions might be a tailwind to some of our construction and infrastructure related investments, as it will likely serve to only accelerate these trends towards onshoring and near shoring. The macro environment remains complex and confusing but we continue to have high conviction in the underlying drivers of the companies in which we are invested and in many cases find valuations to be undemanding. We consider our portfolio to be more diversified and lower risk than 18 months ago and would it to be relatively more resilient if we do enter a period of slowing economic growth or recession.

Fund breakdown

Sector weights



Characteristics and climate

ESG characteristics rationale

The Fund focuses on the sustainability of the products and services of the companies it invests in, as well as their standards of environmental, social, governance ("ESG") management, alongside financial analysis. The investment approach is fundamentally based on positive screening; identifying companies that are making a positive contribution towards a cleaner, healthier, safer and more inclusive society, through assessing both what a company does and how it does it, and through active engagement to encourage continual improvement. The fund will not invest in companies that undertake business activities deemed to be detrimental to society and that breach our Do No Significant Harm principle. Further details of the Funds Sustainable Investment process can be found in the ethical and sustainable investment policy at www.rlam.com

ESG characteristics

	Yes	No
ESG integration	✓	
Promotes environmental or social characteristics	✓	
Sustainable fund objective	✓	
Additional exclusions	✓	

Additional exclusions

Exclusion criteria that make sure a fund does not invest into a specific service or product. Royal London Asset Management has a controversial weapons exclusion across all investments.

Adult entertainment	✓	High environmental impact	✓
Alcohol	✓	Human rights issues	✓
Animal welfare	✓	Nuclear power	✓
Armaments	✓	Nuclear weapons	✓
Controversial weapons	✓	Tobacco	✓
Fossil fuels	✓		
Gambling	✓		

Climate metrics

	Fund	Benchmark	Difference (%)
Financed emissions (tCO2e)	720	n/a	n/a
Financed emissions coverage	100.00%	n/a	n/a
Carbon footprint (tCO2e/\$M invested)	12.16	49.92	(75.64)
Carbon footprint coverage	100.00%	98.11%	1.93
Weighted average carbon intensity (tCO2e/\$M sales)	44.64	112.60	(60.35)
Weighted average carbon intensity coverage	100.00%	98.16%	1.87

All climate metrics presented above are for Scope 1-2 emissions. Unless specified in the objective, the data is for information only and should not be taken to mean they are being managed to/controlled.

Implied temperature rise

	Fund (%)	Benchmark (%)	Difference (%)
Implied temperature rise (ITR) coverage	97.57	96.41	1.20
% of portfolio below 2°C ITR	61.65	66.72	(7.59)
% of portfolio below 1.5°C ITR	53.55	42.02	27.42

SBTi net - zero

	Fund (%)	Benchmark (%)	Difference (%)
SBTi Net-Zero committed	39.08	26.53	47.31
SBTi Near-Term committed	8.39	13.78	(39.15)
SBTi Near-Term targets set	49.80	38.61	28.98

Fund Engagement

Engagement definition

Engagement is active dialogue with investee companies (or other entities). There are two types: engagement for information, which is dialogue as part of investment research or ongoing monitoring, without specific objectives for change, and engagement for change, which is purposeful dialogue to influence positive change, with defined objectives and demonstrable outcomes.

Engagements

Engagement activity	Fund 3 months	Fund 12 months
Number of entities engaged	11	33
Number of engagements	16	72

This is an estimate. Some engagements at the issuer level may not have been attributed to the specific bond held in the fund, resulting in a lower number of engagement activities.

Total engagements by theme and topic



Climate	1
Climate - Transition Risk	1
Governance	7
Remuneration	5
Board	1
Corporate Governance	1
Social & Financial Inclusion	6
Social & Financial inclusion	4
Just transition	1
Labour & Human Rights	1
Technology, Innovation & Society	2
Cybersecurity	2

Engagement focus

Firm-wide engagement activity is centred around six themes which we have identified in consultation with our clients. These are: climate change; biodiversity; health; governance and corporate culture; social and financial inclusion; innovation, technology and society. Portfolio level engagements are not thematic and are focussed on issues specific to managing the portfolio and meeting the investment objective.

Engagement data represents all engagements undertaken at both firm and portfolio level across Royal London Asset Management, and may not be limited to those undertaken solely for the purpose of managing the fund.

Fund Engagement

Engagement outcomes

Standard Chartered

Purpose:

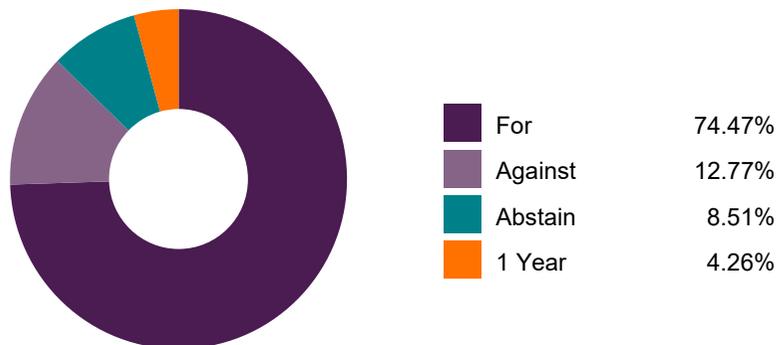
In a collaborative engagement on cybersecurity led by Royal London Asset Management, we engaged with Standard Chartered about its performance against our investor expectations. We used the opportunity to further understand its cybersecurity governance and risk management to assess whether it aligns with best practice.

Outcome:

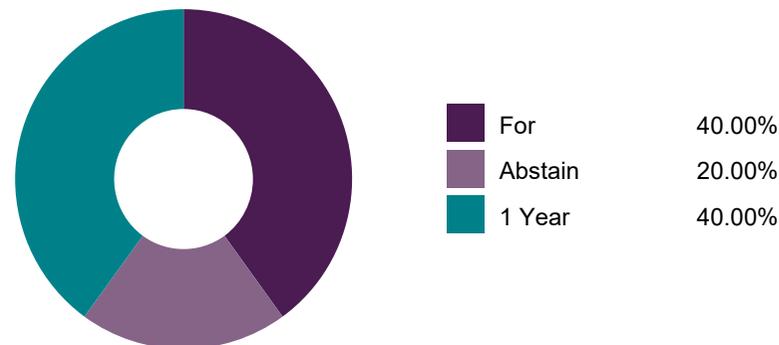
Our conversation with Standard Chartered was positive and the company welcomed our feedback on how its practices and disclosures could be improved. Standard Chartered demonstrate best practice on the governance and risk management processes surrounding cybersecurity. We were satisfied that appropriate improvements have been made following a 2021 fine for failure to report breaches and encouraged related public disclosures. The security of the information perimeter is another area for improvement, and we gained comfort that the company was focused on this area.

Fund Voting

Total proxy voting activity



Executive remuneration voting activity



Notable votes

Microsoft Corporation

Elect Satya Nadella - against: Combined roles of chair and CEO.

Advisory vote on executive compensation - against: We noted some improvement in disclosures of certain performance targets; however, concerns remained over the short performance period of long-term incentive awards.

Report on median compensation and benefits related to reproductive and gender dysphoria care (Shareholder Proposal - SHP) - against: Given the company's existing disclosures and due to some concerns over the ultimate aims of the proponent, we were not minded to support the proposal. Further, we acknowledged the company's broad-based policy approach in supporting new parents and women across their workforce and supply chains.

Risks of developing military weapons (SHP) - For: Given the substantial reputational and human-capital-related risks that come from operating in this area, we felt that further disclosure and consideration was warranted.

Report on AI misinformation and disinformation (SHP) - abstain: We noted the company's existing disclosures and Microsoft's commitment to publish an annual transparency report on its AI governance practices by next year.

Market commentary

Market overview

Economic attention over the quarter has been on inflation. At the start of the quarter investors focussed on the persistence of large price increases and central bank messaging on rates being held higher for longer. Yet, as headline inflation fell, sentiment swung dramatically towards the end of the quarter, pushing markets to price in interest rate cuts in 2024. The Federal Reserve (Fed), European Central Bank (ECB) and Bank of England (BoE) all left rates unchanged over the quarter, maintaining official rates at multi-year highs. The Fed has now held rates unchanged at its last three meetings. There has however been a significant shift in messaging, with the US central bank now indicating that it expects to cut rates by 0.75% in 2024. The ECB has similarly kept rates steady at its two most recent meetings, but central bankers in the eurozone said that no rate cuts have yet been discussed.

In tune with the other major central banks, and potentially marking the high point in the UK interest rate cycle, the Bank of England left interest rates unchanged over the period. The Monetary Policy Committee continued to be split – at the December meeting three of the nine members were still voting for a rate hike. UK inflation has fallen significantly, with the annual inflation rate falling to 3.9% in November. This is the lowest rate of increase in over two years. However, this remains well above the BoE 2% target, with core and wage inflation significantly higher than the headline rate.

Going into December, equities had sharply rebounded from their October lows as investor sentiment recovered thanks to the goldilocks scenario of falling inflation combined with generally resilient growth, with the fall in inflation and a change in narrative from the US Federal Reserve leading to hopes of rate cuts in 2024.

Outlook

As fund managers, we create our own investment identity which we imprint on markets. This identity can be a function of objective evidence as to what delivers performance in the long run, beliefs such as the importance of sustainability and the strengths and weaknesses of the people who are enacting it. Done thoughtfully and applied consistently, we believe this is the path to long-term investment success. Alongside this we are market observers. Each day there is messaging from within and across asset classes as to what is occurring in the global economy. Sometimes this is right, and sometimes this is wrong, but it is always worth paying attention to. What are the trends in the global economy markets are pointing to today?

One message we've been giving consistently through 2023 has been that whilst the macro-outlook for the economy and markets is unclear, the micro-outlook for industries and companies is much more certain. There are many definable societal and investment trends (the two often go hand in hand) which we believe will occur regardless of whatever path interest rates, inflation and the economic cycle take.

The first of these is digitisation. This is an area which was supercharged by the pandemic as working from home and hybrid working became more embedded in society. As this has lessened as a driver of future digitisation, generative artificial intelligence has come along to increase investor interest in this area again. Like all forms of new technology, hype and fact need to be carefully separated, but it seems likely to us this form of AI will be transformative.

The first reason for this is the speed in which it has been released. It took seven years to reach 100 million internet users, while it has taken two months for generative AI. Never has such a powerful piece of technology been scaled so fast. Although there will inevitably be concerns about this, the productivity and skills improvement that will come along with it could solve many of the problems, including inflation and shortage of labour, that we see today.

The second area is decarbonisation. On some levels this has seen something of a setback as the war in Ukraine and subsequent withdrawal of Russian gas has meant more coal has had to be burnt to create the energy will all need. The recent roll back of net zero initiatives by some governments has also increased the sense that decarbonisation is being put on hold. At the corporate level though, nothing could be further from the truth.

Carbon is an expensive commodity. Most corporates see this through the energy they use. Energy efficiency, and cheaper forms of energy such as solar, are effective cost saving mechanisms regardless of the environmental implications of carbon burning. Also, many companies will only deal with other companies which are committed to their own decarbonisation, due supply chain carbon emissions impacting calculations of the carbon intensity of their own businesses. These factors and others are creating a strong drive to decarbonisation whatever the political backdrop.

Finally, healthcare outcomes are on a defined and improving trend. This is not new, but there are new disease categories, such as obesity and Alzheimer's, which are now becoming treatable. This adds to the increasing treatability of other areas such as cancer, which could lead to this disease becoming a chronic, rather than fatal one, within the next decade or so.

Perhaps the only certainty for 2024 is it will turn out differently to how we expect. Our solution is to follow the greater certainty of industry and company trends, which should remain robust whatever happens to broader economic trends.

Further Information

Please click on the links below for further information:



Find out more

Royal London Asset Management's Outlook 2024 document and podcasts are both available on our website. In this year's Outlook document, our fund managers assess the challenges and opportunities in their respective asset classes for 2024. With an environment of falling inflation and modest recession, the benefits or risk for equities or credit is not so clear cut and knowing your companies is key. We analyse the areas of concern and potential growth within this environment.

In our Outlook 2024 podcast, Piers Hillier, CIO, looks ahead to 2024 and discusses the issues he believes will be prominent over the next 12 months, and where the key investment risks and opportunities may lie.

Articles, videos and webinars explaining our investment thinking can be found in the Our Views section of www.rlam.com, including regular updates from our Fixed Income, Global Equity, Sustainable and Multi Asset teams.

Disclaimers

Important information

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This is a financial promotion and is not investment advice.

Telephone calls may be recorded. For further information please see the Privacy Policy at www.rlam.com.

Issued in January 2024 by Royal London Asset Management Limited, 80 Fenchurch Street, London EC3M 4BY. Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, firm reference number 141665. A subsidiary of The Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Limited.

The Fund is a sub-fund of Royal London Asset Management Funds plc, an open-ended investment company with variable capital (ICVC), with segregated liability between sub-funds.

Incorporated with limited liability under the laws of Ireland and authorised by the Central Bank of Ireland as a UCITS Fund. It is a recognised scheme under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.

The Management Company is FundRock Management Company SA, Registered office: 33 rue de Gasperich, L - 5826 Hesperange, Luxembourg and is authorised and regulated by the Commission de Surveillance du Secteur Financier (CSSF).

The Investment Manager is Royal London Asset Management Limited.

For more information on the Fund or the risks of investing, please refer to the Prospectus or Key Investor Information Document (KIID), available via the relevant Fund Information page on www.rlam.com.

Most of the protections provided by the UK regulatory system, and the compensation under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme, will not be available.

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Risks and Warnings

Investment Risk

The value of investments and any income from them may go down as well as up and is not guaranteed. Investors may not get back the amount invested.

Concentration risk

The price of Funds that invest in a reduced number of holdings, sectors, or geographical areas may be more heavily affected by events that influence the stockmarket and therefore more volatile.

EPM Techniques

The Fund may engage in EPM techniques including holdings of derivative instruments. Whilst intended to reduce risk, the use of these instruments may expose the Fund to increased price volatility.

Exchange Rate Risk

Changes in currency exchange rates may affect the value of your investment.

Liquidity Risk

In difficult market conditions the value of certain fund investments may be difficult to value and harder to sell, or sell at a fair price, resulting in unpredictable falls in the value of your holding.

Emerging Markets Risk

Investing in Emerging Markets may provide the potential for greater rewards but carries greater risk due to the possibility of high volatility, low liquidity, currency fluctuations, the adverse effect of social, political and economic instability, weak supervisory structures and accounting standards.

Counterparty Risk

The insolvency of any institutions providing services such as safekeeping of assets or acting as counterparty to derivatives or other instruments, may expose the Fund to financial loss.

Responsible Investment Risk

The Fund can only invest in holdings that demonstrate compliance with certain sustainable indicators or ESG characteristics. This reduces the number securities in which the Fund can invest and there may as a result be occasions where it forgoes more strongly performing investment opportunities, potentially underperforming non-sustainable funds.

Performance to 31 December 2023

Cumulative (%)

Annualised (%)

	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	3 Years	Since Inception	3 Years (p.a.)	Since Inception (p.a.)
Fund (gross)	14.01	7.98	30.00	-	4.25	-	1.70
Fund (net)	13.78	7.53	28.92	-	2.16	-	0.87

Year on year performance (%)

	31/12/2022 - 31/12/2023	31/12/2021 - 31/12/2022	31/12/2020 - 31/12/2021	31/12/2019 - 31/12/2020	31/12/2018 - 31/12/2019
Fund (gross)	30.00	(24.74)	-	-	-
Fund (net)	28.92	(25.36)	-	-	-

Past performance is not a guide to future performance. The impact of fees or other charges including tax, where applicable, can be material on the performance of your investment.

Source: RLAM as at 31 December 2023. All figures are mid-price to mid-price in GBP for the Royal London Global Sustainable Equity Fund (IRL) M USD (Acc); Since inception date 13 July 2021.

Glossary

Carbon footprint

Exposure to high emitters in the portfolio, expressed in tCO₂e/\$M invested. Financed emissions (explained above) are divided by the portfolio value, the same approach for listed companies and private issuers is applied in this metric.

ESG Integration

The systematic and explicit inclusion of environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors into investment analysis and investment decisions.

Exclusions

Explicitly prohibits investing in a particular company, sector, business activity, country or region.

Financed emissions

The emissions from activities in the real economy that are financed through lending and investment portfolios, expressed in tCO₂e. Emissions are attributed to a portfolio based on the portion of the company's value the portfolio holds, and using different accounting values for public and private corporates. We provide financed emissions for scope 1 and 2 emissions.

Fund restrictions definitions

Adult Entertainment: Companies which own or produce adult entertainment services, or engage in the distribution or sale of adult entertainment services.

Alcohol: Companies which have involvement in brewing, distillation or sale of alcoholic drinks.

Animal Welfare: Companies that conduct animal testing (other than for purposes of human or animal health and/or where it is required by law or regulation).

Armaments: Companies who manufacture armaments or nuclear weapons or associated products.

Controversial Weapons: Weapons which have an indiscriminate and disproportional impact on civilians or weapons that are illegal and prohibited by international conventions and treaties.

Fossil Fuels: Companies involved in the exploration, extraction or refining of oil, or gas, or coal, plus any activity relating to thermal coal.

Gambling: Companies who promote irresponsible gambling which includes betting shops, casinos or amusement arcades.

High Environmental Impact: Companies which have a high environmental impact, and which have 'no evidence' of appropriate environmental management systems.

Human Rights Risks: Companies with a strategic presence operating in countries of concern and which have 'no evidence' of policies or systems to manage human rights risks.

Nuclear Power: Companies who generate energy from Nuclear Power.

Nuclear Weapons: Companies that manufacture, nuclear; or are involved in the production of intended-use parts, whole weapons systems, or exclusive delivery platforms.

Tobacco: Companies which are growing, processing or selling tobacco products.

Fund value

Total value of the fund as of the last business day of the calendar month. The fund value is as at close of business and on a mid-price basis.

Implied temperature rise (ITR)

ITR aims to measure the global warming outcome from the emissions trajectory of a company, if the whole economy followed the same trajectory.

Number of holdings

Total number of unique holdings of the Fund excluding cash, currency and derivatives.

Performance

Performance is calculated using the daily end of day NAV per share produced by HSBC based on the mid price.

Promotes environmental or social factors

An ESG Fund promotes, among other characteristics, environmental or social characteristics, or a combination of those characteristics, provided that the companies in which the investments are made follow good governance practices.

SBTi

The Science-Based Targets initiative is a consortium of organisations that set up the definition and promotion of science-based target setting.

Sector weights

Breakdown of holdings by GICS (Global Industry Classification Standard) sector relative to the benchmark index.

Glossary

Sustainable fund objective

A product that has sustainable investment or a reduction in carbon emissions as its objective.

Top 10 holdings

Top 10 assets held by market value, excluding derivatives and cash.

Weighted Average Carbon Intensity (WACI)

Portfolio's exposure to carbon-intensive companies, expressed in tCO₂e / \$M revenue. Scope 1 and scope 2 GHG emissions are divided by companies revenues, then multiplied based on portfolio weights (the current value of the investment relative to the current portfolio value). The WACI is calculated as a weighted average sum of the holdings with carbon intensity coverage.