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SHIFT

ESG Impact Index in Higher Education

Environment, social and governance strategy

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Introduction

WP2 – Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) Strategy aims at establishing the foundations on which the next work packages will be based. It can be considered as the research stage, where existing policies and procedures will be analysed and the **SHIFT approach** will be developed. The main objective is to provide a **guidebook** with a **systematic and holistic approach** that can serve as a tool for **higher education institutions (HEIs)** to adjust to their needs in their efforts to set and achieve **ESG goals**. (*Erasmus+*, 2023, p. 58).

Aim and objectives of the ESG strategy

The **ESG strategy** is a long-term plan an HEI develops to operate successfully. It serves as a roadmap to address key ESG issues within the institution (Blocher et al., 2024). The ESG strategy serves multiple purposes (Friede, 2019). Its primary aim is to consider environmental impact, social responsibility, and governance practices in the operations of HEIs. It seeks to enhance stakeholder value by addressing the concerns and expectations of various stakeholders, including partners, customers, employees, communities, and regulators (Deegan, 2023). It also aims to identify and manage ESG risks while leveraging opportunities associated with sustainable practices. Furthermore, the ESG strategy helps build resilience and ensure the long-term success and competitiveness of the organization by integrating sustainability principles into strategic planning and decision-making. Ultimately, it drives long-term stakeholder value creation and positive internal and external impacts on HEIs.

The ESG strategy has several objectives. These may include integrating ESG considerations into decision-making processes, engaging stakeholders, and enhancing transparency and communication regarding ESG-related initiatives and projects (Deegan, 2023). Objectives related to environmental sustainability may involve reducing greenhouse gas emissions, minimizing resource consumption, promoting renewable energy, and implementing sustainable waste management

practices (Bebbington & Thomson, 2013). Social objectives focus on promoting responsibility and inclusivity, such as fostering diversity and inclusion, ensuring fair labor practices, supporting community development, and enhancing well-being (Lueg & Radlach, 2016).

The ESG strategy also emphasizes corporate governance, aiming to strengthen transparency, accountability, and ethical behavior. Objectives may include improving diversity in leadership, ensuring effective risk management and compliance, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and promoting ethical leadership and organizational culture (Crutzen & Herzig, 2013). Financial objectives are designed to drive sustainable financial performance and long-term value creation (Blocher et al., 2024), such as reducing costs through efficiency, accessing new markets, enhancing reputation and loyalty, and attracting and retaining top talent (Edmans, 2023).

The ESG strategy also includes reporting and transparency objectives to ensure stakeholders have access to relevant information about the HEI's ESG performance. This may involve disclosing ESG metrics, goals, progress, and impacts through sustainability reports and other communication channels (Deegan, 2023).

Overall, the aims and objectives of an ESG strategy align with an HEI's commitment to sustainability, responsible practices, and value creation for stakeholders while contributing to broader societal and environmental goals. By implementing a specific ESG strategy, HEIs can contribute to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

For instance, **Stanford University** has launched ESG programs focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, including recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups and diversity education programs. **The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** has established research centers and initiatives addressing sustainability challenges such as climate change, renewable energy, and environmental conservation. **The University of California, Berkeley** maintains a robust sustainability program with initiatives like zero waste goals, energy efficiency measures, sustainable transportation options, and green building standards.

Definition and usefulness of the ESG strategy

The ESG strategy is a framework that integrates ESG factors into HEI operations and decision-making processes. The ESG Actions Framework includes the following dimensions (ESG), areas, and topics (Erasmus+, 2023):

ENVIRONMENT

- **Campus Operations** (Energy management; Emissions reduction; Water conservation; Waste reduction; Use of renewable energy; Sustainable land use and biodiversity preservation);
- **Research and Innovation** (Research environmental impact assessments; Sustainability-focused curriculum and research initiatives);
- **Procurement** (Sustainable procurement policies and practices; Green supply chain management; Climate change adaptation strategies).

SOCIAL

- **Equity and Access** (Diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and practices; Access and support for students from marginalized communities; Socioeconomic equity and affordability initiatives; Universal design principles for accessibility and inclusivity; Childcare and family support services);
- **Wellbeing** (Mental health and well-being support services; Campus safety and security measures);
- **Research and Innovation** (Research social impact assessments; Innovation for social good; Community engagement in research to address social issues).

GOVERNANCE

- **Management and Accountability** (Transparent and accountable decision-making processes; diversity among university leadership; Compliance with

applicable EU laws and regulations; Impartiality and independence of academic research).

- **Ethics and Integrity** (Anti-corruption policies and practices; Risk management and ethical conduct; Whistleblower policies and practices; Ethics and integrity training for staff and students).
- **Digital Readiness and Security** (Digital readiness and cyber security; Data privacy and security policies and practices; digital training for staff)
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Communication** (Stakeholder engagement and consultation processes; Public communication and transparency).

The **ESG strategy** helps HEIs identify and mitigate ESG risks that could impact their **long-term sustainability** and **performance**. By addressing these risks proactively, HEIs can enhance their **resilience** and minimize potential negative impacts (Crutzen & Herzig, 2013). Adopting an ESG strategy can create long-term value for HEIs by fostering **innovation**, improving **efficiency**, enhancing **reputation**, and gaining an **advantage in the sector** (Guenster et al., 2011). ESG strategies enable HEIs to engage with their stakeholders more effectively by addressing their concerns, building **trust**, and demonstrating a commitment to **responsible practices** (Deegan, 2023). By prioritizing the interests of stakeholders, HEIs can enhance relationships, strengthen their **social license to operate**, and foster a **positive reputation**. With growing regulatory requirements and increasing public scrutiny of organizational behavior, adopting an ESG strategy can help HEIs **comply with applicable laws and regulations**, **mitigate compliance risks**, and **avoid reputational damage** associated with ethical concerns or environmental incidents (Reid & Toffel, 2009).

In summary, the ESG strategy is a **valuable framework** that enables organizations to integrate ESG considerations into their **operations, decisions, and stakeholder engagements**. By prioritizing **sustainability**, **responsible practices**, and **long-term value creation**, HEIs can create **shared value**, promote a **more sustainable and equitable future**, and enhance their **resilience** and **societal impact** in an increasingly complex and interconnected global economy. The ESG strategy is **highly valuable** for

HEIs seeking to create **positive impact** and value for their stakeholders. By considering environmental factors, such as climate change and resource management, **social factors** like labor practices and community engagement, and **governance factors** like transparency and accountability, HEIs can better understand and effectively manage the **risks and opportunities** associated with their activities. This **holistic approach** not only helps HEIs mitigate risks and **improve resilience** but also enhances their **reputation**, attracts ethical partners, and fosters **long-term growth and competitiveness**.

Chapter 1: Materiality assessment, ESG goals and objectives

1.1 Definition and importance of materiality assessment in the context of ESG

Materiality assessment is a crucial step in evaluating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors within HEI. Understanding what is material allows HEIs to effectively prioritize and focus on the most significant issues that can impact their **sustainability performance** (Raith, 2023). Materiality assessment helps HEIs identify key risks and opportunities that are relevant to their activities and stakeholders (Jørgensen et al., 2022). By assessing what is material, HEIs can enhance their decision-making processes and ensure they are addressing the most important issues in a strategic and systematic manner.

A materiality assessment in the context of ESG issues refers to the process of determining which ESG factors are most relevant and significant to an HEI's activities, performance, and stakeholders (Calabrese et al., 2016). It involves identifying and prioritizing ESG issues that have the potential to impact the HEI's stakeholder value, **reputation,** and **long-term sustainability.** Materiality assessment helps HEIs focus their ESG efforts on areas that are most critical to their stakeholders and their objectives.

Material issues are defined as those that represent the HEI's most significant ESG impacts (GRI1, 2021). HEIs can identify many ESG topics, but prioritize those topics that represent their most significant impacts in their ESG strategy. ESG impacts are grouped into topics to help HEIs develop the ESG strategy (GRI1, 2021). Impacts can be grouped into topics according to general categories that represent an activity of HEI, or relationship, stakeholder categories, or the **ESG Actions Framework**.

1.2 Process for conducting a materiality assessment in higher education institutions

The step-by-step guidance provides the process for conducting a **materiality assessment** in HEI. The process aims to **identify impacts, assess their significance,** and **prioritize** them for the **ESG strategy.** The guideline helps HEI to focus on where it has actual or potential, positive or negative impacts. The guidance includes a **four-step approach** (GRI3, 2021).

Step 1 is to **understand the context. Step 2** is to **identify actual and potential impacts. Step 3** is to **assess the significance of the impacts. Step 4** is to **prioritize the most significant impacts** for the ESG strategy. Steps 1, 2, and 3 **relate to the identification and assessment of impacts**. These steps can be performed on an ongoing basis. Steps 2 and 3 relate to **engagement with relevant stakeholders and experts.** Steps 1, 2, and 3 inform Step 4, where HEI prioritizes the most significant impacts and determines **material topics**. Step 4 deals with **testing material topics** with experts and the users of the ESG strategy.

Changes in activities or the operating context or relationships with partners can lead to **new impacts** that need to be identified and addressed (Canning et al., 2019). This means that HEI can **review its material topics** from the previous period to account for changes in the impacts. Material topics are expected to be **reviewed regularly.** A continuous review of material topics ensures that they represent the **most significant impacts** (Farooq et al., 2021). HEI should present the **process** it uses to determine material topics. The process can depend on the specific **circumstances** of HEI. For example, the **geographical and legal context** in which HEI exists can affect the exposure to **risks** and **negative impacts**. The **highest governance body** of HEI should approve the material topics and the ESG strategy (GRI3, 2021).

1.3 Identification of key ESG issues and stakeholder groups based on the materiality assessment

The first step in the identification of **key ESG issues** and **stakeholder groups** is **understanding the context** in which HEI operates (GRI3, 2021). The understanding of the context means a **critical assessment** of activities, business relationships, the **sustainability context,** and stakeholders. To understand activities, HEI should outline its **purpose, value, mission statements, organizational model,** and **strategies**. HEI should further examine the types of activities, the services or products, and the markets. HEI should include the **geographical location** of where the educational activities take place because the local context can have an important role to play in providing a more complete picture of the **ESG impacts.**

Furthermore, HEI should consider the **education sector** in which HEI is active and its **characteristics**. For example, the key characteristics of the education sector include diverse institutions, lifecycle learning, curriculum development, pedagogical methods, and certification.

Moreover, HEI should evaluate **business relationships**. Business relationships include business partners and other organizations that are directly linked to HEI through operations, services, and products. HEI should consider the types of relationships that can include suppliers HEI works with. HEI should examine the **nature of the relationship**, which can include whether the relationship is based on a **long-term** or a **short-term contract,** or whether it is based on a specific project or event. HEI should also include an overview of the **geographical location** where the activities of business relations take place.

Additionally, an understanding of the context in which HEI operates also includes the **sustainability context**. HEI should consider **sustainability challenges** at local, regional, and global levels related to the education sector and the geographical location of its activities and business relationships. HEI should assess its compliance

with **mandatory and voluntary policy instruments,** including the laws and regulations. HEI should identify **stakeholders** across its activities and business relationships. It should engage with stakeholders to identify ESG impacts. HEI should make a full list of individuals and groups whose interests are affected or could be affected by the HEI's activities. Common stakeholders are **suppliers, civil society organizations, students, employees, governments, the local community,** and others. The lists of stakeholders can be drawn per activity, project, service or product, or other classification.

The **second step** in the identification of key ESG issues and stakeholder groups is to **identify actual and potential impacts** across activities and business relationships (GRI3, 2021). ESG impacts are classified in the following categories:

- Actual and potential impacts;
- Positive and negative impacts;
- Short-term and long-term impacts;
- Intended impacts and unintended impacts.

Actual impacts have already occurred or are occurring. **Potential impacts** have not yet occurred but could occur in the future. It is important to consider **actual and potential impacts** to address current impacts and prevent future impacts. **Positive impacts** contribute to sustainable development, and negative impacts are detrimental to sustainable development. **Short-term impacts** take place over a relatively short period of time (for example, 1-3 years). **Long-term impacts** take place over a relatively long period of time (for example, 3-5 years). **Intended impacts** are linked to a purposeful action that is anticipated or foreseen. **Unintended impacts** are linked to a purposeful action that is not anticipated or foreseen (GRI3, 2021).

HEI can use information from different sources to identify **ESG impacts** or issues. HEI can use its own **assessments** and **expertise** or **third-party assessments** of impacts. HEI can use information from **legal reviews**, **financial audits**, **occupational health and safety inspections** from HEI, or **multi-stakeholder initiatives**.

Furthermore, HEI can try to understand the concerns of **stakeholders** and approach **external and internal experts** such as civil society organizations, trade unions, and academics. HEI should assess impacts before a **new activity** or **business relationship** and before making substantial changes to its **activities** and **operations**. HEI should first identify **negative impacts** before identifying **positive impacts**.

The **third step** in the identification of key ESG issues and stakeholder groups is to **assess the significance of the impacts** (GRI3, 2021). The significance of **actual negative impacts** is determined by the **severity** of the impact. The significance of **potential negative impacts** is determined by the **severity** and **likelihood** of the impact. The assessment of the **significance of the impacts** can be included in the **risk management systems** and should consider the perspectives of **affected stakeholders**. The assessment of the **severity** and **significance** of the impacts should be tested through **consultations with stakeholders**. The **severity of an impact** should be assessed in relation to the other **impacts of HEI**. The severity of an impact is determined by **scale** and **scope**. The **scale of an impact** is how grave the impact is. The **scope** refers to how widespread the impact is. The scale of a **negative impact** can depend on whether the impact leads to **non-compliance** with **laws and regulations** or with other **policy instruments** with which HEI is expected to comply. For example, if a negative impact leads to a violation of **fundamental rights to work**, the scale of this impact can be considered greater. The scale of a negative impact can depend on the **context** in which the impact takes place. For example, the scale of the impact of **water withdrawal** can depend on the area from which water is withdrawn. The **likelihood of a potential negative impact** refers to the **chance** of the impact happening. The likelihood of an impact can be determined **qualitatively** or **quantitatively**. For example, HEI can use terms such as **likely** and **very likely** or mathematically using **probability** or **frequency**. When prioritizing **potential negative impacts**, HEI can prioritize highly **severe negative impacts** that may be less likely to occur.

The significance of an **actual positive impact** is determined by the **scale** and **scope** of the impact. The significance of a **potential positive impact** is determined by the **scale**, **scope**, and **likelihood** of the impact. The **scale of a positive impact** refers to how **beneficial** the impact is or could be. The **scope of a positive impact** refers to how widespread the impact is or could be, for example, the number of **individuals** or the extent of **environmental resources** that are or could be positively affected. The **likelihood of a potential positive impact** refers to the **chance** of the impact happening. The likelihood can be defined using **general terms**, **probability**, or **frequency**.

The **fourth step** in the identification of key ESG issues and stakeholder groups is **prioritizing the most significant impacts** for the **ESG strategy** (GRI3, 2021). To facilitate prioritization, HEI should **group the impacts/issues into topics**. **Grouping impacts into topics** helps HEI report in a cohesive way about multiple impacts that relate to the same topic. HEI can group impacts according to the **ESG Actions Framework** that relates to an **activity**, **stakeholder category**, **type of business relationships**, or an **economic** or **environmental resource**. After grouping impacts into topics, HEI should **arrange impacts from most to least significant** and define a **threshold** to determine which of the impacts it will focus its **strategy** on. HEI defines where to set the **threshold** that will determine **material topics**. **Significance** is the sole criterion that determines whether a topic is **material**. HEI should prioritize **negative impacts** separately from **positive impacts**. HEI should **test the selection of material topics** with potential **users of the ESG strategy** and **experts** who understand HEI and have insights into the **material topics**. Examples of experts are **academics**, **consultants**, **lawyers**, **national institutions**, or **non-governmental organizations**. The **university board** should **review and approve** the list of **material topics**.

1.4 Setting ESG goals and objectives that are aligned with the institution's values and stakeholder expectations.

HEI can shape its **ESG goals and objectives** in a way that connects **material ESG issues** with their contribution to the **SDGs** (GRI1, 2021). HEI should use the outcomes of the **materiality assessment** as valuable input to subsequently identify and set ESG goals and objectives that are in line with the SDG goals and targets from the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. **Material ESG topics/issues** can be used to identify impacts that fall under the SDGs and targets. These are important because material topics/issues can strengthen the **ESG strategy**, leading it to encompass SDGs and the material topics HEI has identified, and thus develop a more comprehensive strategy. Therefore, ESG goals and objectives are aligned with the SDGs and targets and address the identified **material ESG issues**. **ESG objectives** to address the prioritized SDG targets based on material ESG topics/issues should go beyond avoiding harm to find opportunities to **maximize positive outcomes**. HEI should consult **stakeholders** when setting objectives to contribute to the SDGs' priority targets. HEI should have a list of ESG objectives to contribute to SDG priority targets aligned with the **SDG**, **sustainability**, and **ESG strategy**.

Material ESG issues identified and prioritized based on stakeholder input include the following:

1. Lack of Awareness and Environmental Education;

2. Lack of Institutional and Systemic Support;

3. Inefficiencies in the Digitalization and Operationalization of the SDGs;

4. Infrastructure and Use of Energy Resources;

5. Lack of Connection and Coordination in the Implementation of the SDGs and ESG;

6. Limitations in Governance and Participation;

7. Budgetary Restrictions and Short-Term Decision-Making;

8. Deficiencies in Training and Internal Communication;

9. Unfavorable Communication and Work Conditions;

10. Gender Inequality and Diversity;

11. Lack of Adequate Spaces;

12. Equitable Access to Education and Resources.

ESG goals and objectives are aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

SDG 4 - Quality Education

SDG 5 - Gender Equality

SDG 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy

SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth

SDG 9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

SDGS 10 - Reduced Inequalities

SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities

SDG 12 - Responsible Production and Consumption

SGD 13 - Climate action

SDG 16 - Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals

Chapter 2: Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

Introduction

As stated by the European Commission, the **key principles of research and innovation** are[1]:

- co-creation, working and acting together for a better society;
- diffusion, sharing knowledge across society, territories and people;
- uptake, turning research into sustainable solutions with social and economic value;
- transformation, changing the way we consume and produce; and
- directionality, with research and innovation leading the way.

While **co-creation** is considered of high importance, the question is how do universities engage societal actors: citizens, non-governmental organisations, public authorities, and others in their activities? The answer is a first step in finding a common understanding of why the involvement of stakeholders may be beneficial for both the science community and society.

2.1. Identification of key stakeholders

A **stakeholder** of an **organization** is defined as an **individual** or a **group** who is **influenced** by an **activity or can impact an activity of the organization.**

[1] Science, research and innovation performance of the EU 2020' (SRIP 2020)

https://ec.europa.eu/assets/rtd/srip/index.html;

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/srip/2020/ec_rtd_srip-2020-report.pdf

There are different possibilities for stakeholders can be systematically categorized. **One possibility** considers the **nature** of the stakeholders:

- **Citizens** (as individuals).
- **Organizations** (as collective bodies). The quadruple helix model considers the next types of organizations:
  - Civil society organisations (in the sense of organised citizens). This includes nongovernmental organisations or professional groups (e.g. fishers, farmers).
  - Companies (for profit organisations).
  - Universities.
  - Public institutions like governments, ministries, etc.

Another possibility is to categorise stakeholders based on a **geographical level:**

- **Local** stakeholders (e.g. a city)
- **Regional** stakeholders (e.g. a region)
- **National** stakeholders (e.g. a country)
- **International** stakeholders (e.g. European Union).

A **third possibility** is to categorise stakeholders based on **the nature of the issue considered.** In this regard, a material issue relates to a matter that is likely to influence decisions, actions, and behaviour of stakeholders and/or the university.

- **Material stakeholder** refers to a stakeholder, individual or group of people, who has an interest in the university, and can influence the outcome of a significant issue, and the long-term success of the university. Examples of material stakeholder groups in this context will include the university leadership, professors, staff, students, alumni, donors, prospective students, employers of the students, business community, service providers, government, communities, and many others that can affect or be affected by the university's activities.
- An **illegitimate stakeholder** refers to a stakeholder who might not have a link with the university, and whose views the management might not consider when making decisions, especially if they are raising non-material issues.

Stakeholders who will be affected or can affect the decision or activity of the university must be identified, and, considering the engagement purpose, scope, and material issues identified. The material issue identified might require the university to engage with several stakeholders with diverse and conflicting interests and concerns. In that case, it is helpful to follow a systematic method to identify stakeholders, considering the scope of the engagement and guided by stakeholder attributes such as the following:

- **Dependency** – stakeholder groups directly or indirectly dependent on the university's core activities, such as teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.
- **Responsibility** – stakeholder groups that the university has a legal, ethical, or operational responsibility to attend to, now or in the future. These may be prospective students who have applied to the university.
- **Tension** – stakeholder groups or individuals that the university must attend to immediately because of different reasons that can include operational, financial, socio-economic, or environmental issues.
- **Influence** – stakeholder groups or individuals who can have an influence and impact on various areas of the university, including strategic or operational issues.
- **Diverse perspectives** – stakeholder groups or individuals who might present different views that can add value and lead to a new understanding of issues and identification of possible and innovative solutions.

The university must also be aware and respond accordingly to illegitimate stakeholders who may claim to represent a stakeholder group and who nonetheless can affect the activities of the university.

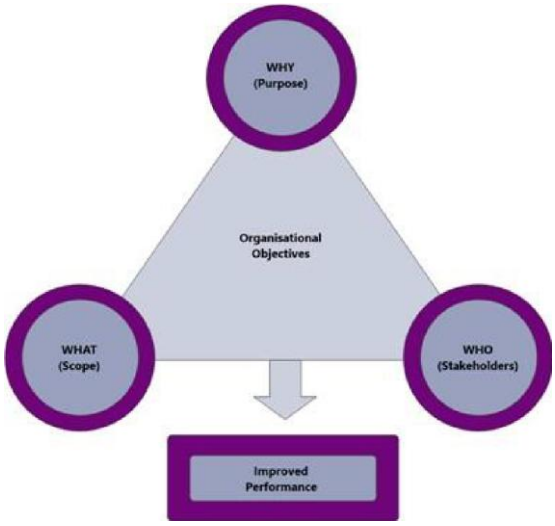

Figure 1: Purpose, scope, and stakeholders to be engaged

For accountability purposes, an **engagement initiative** must have an **owner(s)** to determine the purpose, scope, and identify the stakeholders to be involved and engaged, and oversee the implementation of the engagement. The **process owner** or **engagement owner** refers to any official of the university or delegated person who is tasked to plan and/or implement a stakeholder engagement activity.

The **process owner** must profile and map the stakeholders at an individual and organisation level. The aim must be to better understand the **stakeholder(s)**, including the following elements – which stakeholder should be prioritised and how, and why they should be engaged, or why they will want to engage with the university. All of this must be done considering the engagement purpose and scope. **The engagement owner** must map stakeholders in different ways, including determining their level of influence and interest in the university business and knowledge of material issues.

The following is an example of a **stakeholder engagement matrix** that includes power and interest assessment. C stands for current and D for desired. The **matrix** is a helpful tool to assess the actual and desired engagement levels of **stakeholders**, and gaps that might exist and should be closed.

Table 1. Example of a stakeholder engagement matrix

Stakeholder name or group	Power/ Interest	Observing	Following	Endorsing	Contributing	Owning	Leading
Stakeholder 1	High/low	C			D		
Stakeholder 2	High/medium			C		D	

2.2. Purpose, goals, and objectives of the engagement

There is a **long-lasting endeavor** of analysing the relationship between **science** and **society**, and how it deals with two fundamental questions: what is **knowledge (ontology),** and how is **knowledge created (epistemology)?** These theoretical questions become concrete in a situation where **academic partners** work together with **experts from outside universities.**

This is called **transdisciplinary research,** and Pohl et al. (2017) give two key elements of transdisciplinary research:

1. Plurality of information. Information on a problem can come from different sources, and there can be different perspectives on the same problem.
2. Science contributes to solving real-world problems.

From this point of view, science seeks "to grasp the relevant complexity of problems, taking into account the diversity of both everyday and academic perception of problems".

The fact is that most **universities** consider, at least in some way, engagement or cooperation with **stakeholders.** Very obvious is the emphasis on business cooperation: all universities have specific activities in technology transfer and clear regulations for business cooperation, and this commercially oriented cooperation ("valorization of science") is supported either by their own institutions or as part of a regional network. Companies and commercial stakeholders are important players in our society, and research at universities contributes to new products or technologies.

On the one hand, companies may benefit from academic research including through research cooperation. On the other hand, there is significant political support to facilitate business development from academic working groups, such as supporting spin-off companies.

On the other hand, stakeholders, other than business stakeholders, are not particularly highlighted in universities' strategies or position papers, except for general ethical regulations imposing some general principles (e.g. no harm, respect the **integrity** and dignity of persons).

It should be, also, mentioned that there are no national regulations on stakeholder engagement concerning cooperation with non-commercial partners, such as citizens or NGOs, while cooperation with commercial partners or companies, in the sense of technology transfer and other business-related activities, are often regulated in different countries. While no regulation can be seen as a maximum of flexibility, however it may also lead to a lack of support. Some European countries have national networks supporting such engagement, such as Ireland and the United Kingdom.

A relevant question for this discussion is: **why involve stakeholders?**

The key arguments for involving stakeholders in universities' scientific work are:

1. strengthening the relation between science and society, like science leaving the ivory tower.
2. Science can receive valuable support from outside, such as new ideas and perspectives.
3. Cooperation with practitioners enables the application of new knowledge.

In this respect, below are some details concerning the above-mentioned arguments:

1. Strengthen the relation of science and society:

- Bridge the gap between academia, science, and economy ("leaving the ivory tower").
- Democratise universities.
- Stakeholder empowerment.
- Building trust and mutual understanding.

2. Support scientific work:

- Integration of different perspectives allows strengthening the impact of science.
- Better understanding of informal institutions (e.g. social norms, traditions).
- New ideas for research.

3. Support the application of new knowledge:

- Assure innovation and transformation by involving practitioners.

2.3. Methods and tools to be used to engage each stakeholder group

With the insights gained after **profiling** and **mapping** the stakeholder(s) and this includes understanding the **needs**, **expectations**, and **capacity to engage**, the engagement owner must determine the best **level(s)** and **method(s)** of engagement. The level(s) and method(s) of engagement must be suitable to the **purpose** and **scope** of the engagement and may differ at different stages of the engagement process. The six **levels of engagement pyramid** are:

Figure 2: Six levels of engagement pyramid

The case of external stakeholders

When considering this specific case, the interaction between **individuals** and **universities** can take place in very different ways. And there are also different **levels of participation.** It makes a difference if a **stakeholder** is just contributing some **data** or if they are already involved in **designing the project.** In the case of **contribution,** a stakeholder will have little influence on the **outcome,** while in the case of **co-design,** their influence will be very high.

The **level of participation** defines the **roles** of the different participants and their relation to each other. To better understand the consequences, it is helpful to distinguish several **levels of participation** of **the external stakeholders** and describe their **function** (based on Shirk et al., 2012).

a. **Contract:** In this case, there is minimal stakeholder involvement in the research project. The research is commissioned by stakeholders, then the scientific research is completed by the university, before finally, the university informs stakeholders on the scientific results by way of scientific publication or other

kinds of reporting. This is the classic way of financing academic research through public funding, for example, by a ministry or public authority. Of course, there might be communication before the project - funding schemes and agenda-setting for research priorities are a matter of intense public discussion, and universities are actively part of such debates. When it comes to specific projects, interaction between the funder and scientist is very limited, and there is no active participation by the funder in the research itself.

b. **Contribution:** The project is planned, run, and evaluated by scientists. Stakeholders contribute data or information, but they are not involved in the conceptual steps of the project. One typical example of stakeholder contribution is “Citizen Science”, such as in the case study “Plastic Pirates” (page 16), which was completely developed by scientists. The stakeholders - in this case, young students - collect much data on plastic waste along rivers. They upload their data to a database and scientists analyse the findings. In this way, the students contribute valuable voluntary work to the creation of scientific knowledge.

c. **Collaboration:** The project is planned by scientists, and stakeholders are involved in research and/or further analysis. One example is the project ESPOmar at the University of Cádiz (page 26). The University of Cádiz, together with the Universities of Huelva and the Algarve, takes the lead, but stakeholders, like the Andalusian Ports Agency, collaborate during the project. Even if the stakeholders did not have a direct influence on the project concept, they are in intense interaction with the project partners during the project, and therefore have a much higher influence on the outcome.

d. **Co-creation:** The project is developed together by scientists and stakeholders. This is the most participative approach, as the stakeholders are enabled to join from the beginning by choosing the topic, defining the research question, and developing the methodology. On this level of participation, they are considered as equal partners within the project. One example illustrating this approach is

the "Center for Service Learning" at UNIST (page 36). Several civil society organisations elaborated a service-learning program, together with the Faculty of Economics, Business, and Tourism. With this program, they intend to jointly solve social problems in the community and encourage young people to be active and socially aware citizens.

As presented above, interaction between **scientists** and **stakeholders** can happen on different **levels.** The highest **level of participation** is **co-creation,** where the **project** is developed together by **scientists** and **stakeholders.**

2.4. Communication channels per stakeholder group

The HEI must compile a **database** and invite **stakeholders** identified on time and using appropriate **communication channels**. In this respect, the **engagement owner** must establish and communicate the **boundaries of disclosure** on the **information** that will be shared with the **stakeholder(s)** and what **information** the **stakeholder(s)** will be allowed to communicate outside the **engagement process**.

Where applicable, the **owner of the engagement** must develop and distribute the **meeting material** to enable **stakeholders** to prepare in advance and adequately for the **engagement**.

The **engagement owner** must **document** the **discussion** including the following:

- Purpose and aims of the engagement;
- Method(s) used;
- Stakeholders who were present and absent;
- Time frame;
- Summary of issues raised;
- Summary of key discussions and proposed interventions; and
- Summary of the engagement outputs, that is, decisions and actions agreed upon.

The HEI must communicate the **engagement outputs** and **action plan** to the relevant stakeholders using suitable communication channels. The channels that can be used include written reports, telephone calls, emails, stakeholder events, follow-up on one or group meetings, and, where appropriate, the same can be communicated widely to the internal and general external public.

In addition to engaging with stakeholders involved in the engagement process, the university must communicate to the public the **stakeholder engagement's overall outcomes, impact,** and demonstrate the value of stakeholder engagement to the university's strategy and operations. Stakeholder engagement reporting must be integrated into the university's reporting tools, including annual and financial reports, and can cover the following:

- Stakeholder groups engaged;
- Engagement methods used;
- Frequency of engagement;
- Key issues and concerns raised by stakeholders and the university's response to issues raised.

2.5. Fostering collaboration and partnerships

A **HEI** should recognise that different stakeholders add value and play an important role in helping the university to achieve its strategic objectives. In addition, the university should place a high priority on **transparent, clear, proactive, and meaningful dialogue** with all its stakeholders.

Thus, the **HEI** must adopt a **stakeholder-inclusive approach** when planning and implementing its core business. This must be achieved by taking into account the **reasonable needs, interests, and expectations** of HEIs' stakeholders, and at the same time, considering the **sustainability** of the university.

Balancing the **needs, interests, and expectations of stakeholders** and ensuring that the university is **sustainable** is a dynamic and ongoing process. The **HEI**

must establish and maintain **strong relations with material stakeholders,** and this will make it possible for the university to manage and strike this balance when dealing with problematic issues.

2.6. Encouraging Participation and Feedback per ESG dimension

AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (SES) was published in 2015 by **AccountAbility**, a leading global research, consulting, and standards organisation providing innovative solutions in the areas of **corporate responsibility** and **sustainable development**. The purpose of the **AA1000SES (2015)** is to establish the **benchmark** for the assessment, planning, and implementation of **good and quality stakeholder engagement**.

To implement **quality stakeholder engagement** based on international best practice, the **AA1000SES (2015)** requires that the university commit to the **AccountAbility Principles Standard (AA1000APS, 2008)**, which are: **inclusivity, materiality, and responsiveness**.

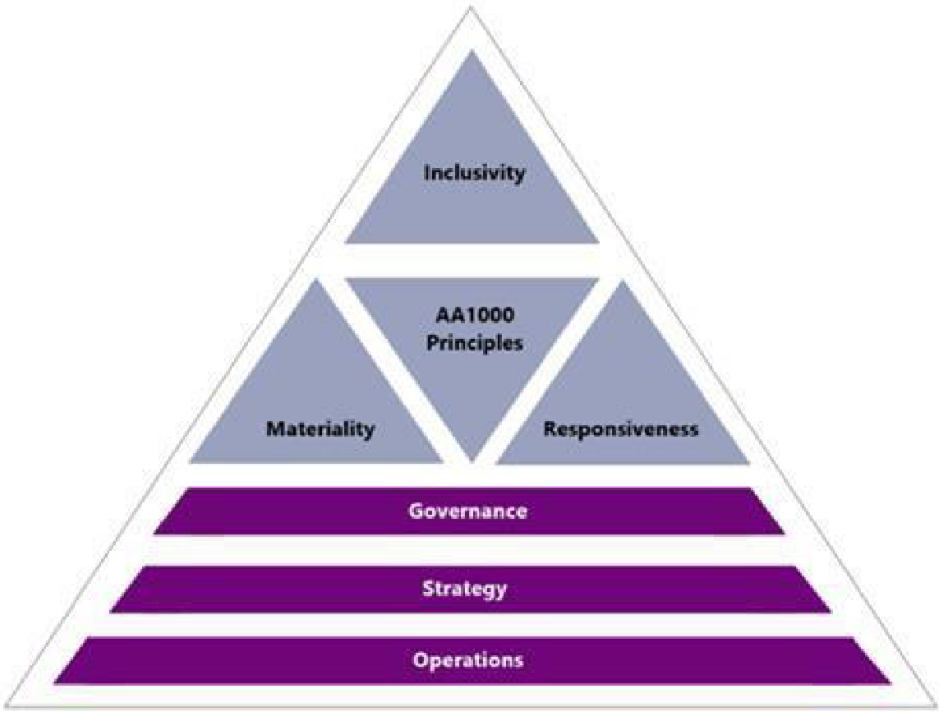

Figure 3: Integration of AA1000 Principles to Stakeholder Engagement

1. **Inclusivity:** The university must engage with material stakeholders at different levels, including at the governance level.
2. **Materiality:** The University decision makers must identify and be clear on issues that are important to the university.
3. **Responsiveness:** The university must act transparently and timely manner on material issues. These issues can include decisions taken, actions, and performance of the university. Material issues might be stakeholder-specific and can compete for available resources, and as a result, responses must be prioritised and communicated accordingly.

These three principles must be adopted and applied consistently to the governance system of the university.

2.7. Maintaining ongoing engagement and participation

Each **HEI** should develop a **framework** containing provisions applicable to the **university board members, employees, students, and third parties** who may be appointed by the HEI to implement its **programmes and activities.**

The objective of such a **framework** is to **describe fundamental stakeholder relations management principle**s applicable to the **HEI** to:

- Establish and maintain sound and mutually beneficial relationships with material stakeholders;
- Continuously improve communication and engagements to manage reasonable needs and expectations of stakeholders; and
- Provide targeted and timely information in a proactive manner to the different stakeholders.

Developing such a framework implies that **stakeholder engagement** must be integrated into the core functions of the university, namely, corporate governance, strategy, and operations.

1. Integrate into the university's corporate governance

Stakeholder engagement must be integrated into the governance system of the university. The university system must define the decision-making process, roles, and responsibilities of different structures of the NWU. The university governance and processes for decision making require formal frameworks for identifying material issues and for collecting relevant information to form an opinion, make a decision, and implement the same.

2. Integrate into the university's strategy

The policies and processes of the university must include the requirement to use stakeholder engagement when developing strategies and important documents, including policies.

3. Integrate into the university's operational management

Stakeholder engagement must be integrated into the operations of the university. Strong and well-managed stakeholder relations build trust, support, and insights gained from engagements will contribute to the sustainability of the university.

The stakeholder engagement process must include four stages:

- Plan
- Prepare
- Implement, and
- Act, Review and Improve

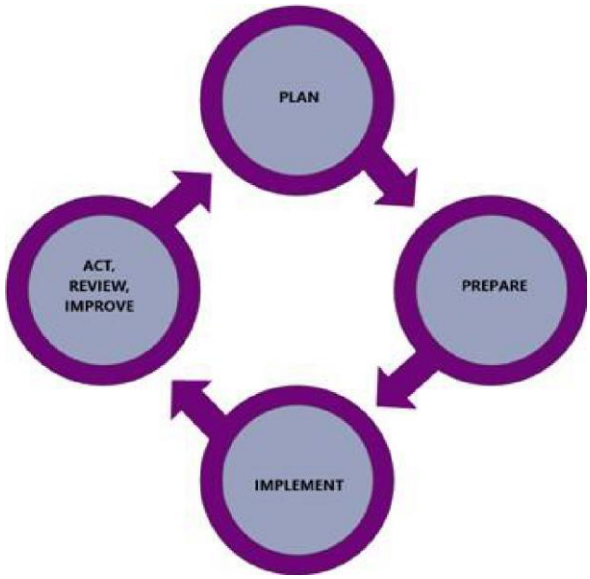

Figure 4: Stakeholder engagement process

The HEI must develop an **engagement plan** that covers the following elements: purpose and scope, owners of the engagement process, clarification of roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, identification of stakeholders, profiling and mapping of stakeholders, engagement level(s), and methods and boundaries of disclosure.

Planning **stakeholder engagement** must start with establishing the purpose for engagement, the scope, and the stakeholders who must be involved.

The process owner must first establish the **purpose of the engagement,** that is, the need, issue, or risk that must be addressed. Establishing the **scope of stakeholder engagement** must take the following into account:

- The material issue that the engagement must address and link to the purpose. The material issue relates to an issue that is likely to influence decisions, actions, and behaviour of stakeholders and/or the university;
- The university faculty or division and associated activities that the engagement will address; and
- Establish if the stakeholder engagement will look at long-term strategic issues, current concerns, or both areas.

The **engagement owner** will oversee the planning, implementation, and review of engagement programmes, including the identification of stakeholders who must be involved and engaged.

At the start of the engagement, the engagement owner, with inputs from stakeholders, shall establish the **rules of engagement** and make sure the engagement takes place in a professional, fair, transparent, and respectful manner.

In order to identify and prepare for engagement risks, the **engagement owner must:**

- Identify, assess, and address engagement risks.
- Anticipate possible negative outcomes and develop mitigating strategies.
- Identify areas for opportunity and positive relationship building.

The **engagement owner** must identify and mitigate factors that might negatively affect the ability of stakeholders to engage effectively.

Also, engagement owners must **monitor and measure stakeholder engagement** to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved and, most importantly, to identify areas that require improvement. The engagement owner must **establish key performance indicators** (KPI) that will be used to measure the engagement.

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Chapter 3: ESG Policies and Practices

3.1 Overview of European Policy

Introduction

The **European Union** has progressively developed a robust policy framework to address **ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance)** challenges, recognising their central role in achieving sustainability, equity, and accountability. Initiatives such as the **European Green Deal**, the **EU Taxonomy**, and the **European Pillar of Social Rights** exemplify the EU's commitment to embedding ESG principles across sectors, including **higher education institutions (HEIs)**. These policies serve as a roadmap for aligning institutional practices with broader societal and environmental goals. In the following, the key EU ESG frameworks and policies are outlined, stressing their relevance for **HEIs**.

Key EU ESG Frameworks and Policies

Over time, the **EU** has established several critical frameworks to integrate **ESG principles** into its policy agenda. These policies also guide the transformation of **HEIs**. For instance, one cornerstone of the EU's environmental policy is the **European Green Deal**. Adopted in 2019, it aims to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy by ensuring net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and achieving economic growth decoupled from resource use (European Commission, 2019; 2024a). These policies have further been supported by the **NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan**, where a total of 18.9 billion euros have been dedicated to environmental policies, supported by an additional 401 billion euros from the **Multi-Financial Framework (MFF)** (European Commission, 2024b).

Three key goals outlined in the **European Green Deal** are particularly relevant to ESG policies at **HEIs**. First, one aim is to foster collaboration among HEIs, research organisations, and companies to address **climate change**, **sustainable energy**, future

food systems, and smart, eco-friendly urban transport solutions (European Commission, 2019: 18). Second, schools, training institutions, and universities shall play a key role in fostering **climate knowledge** and **skills**, supported by an EU competence framework, teaching resources, and teacher-training networks (European Commission, 2019: 19). Third, the Commission aims to support **grassroots climate initiatives** and prioritise the **green transition** in Europe's future discussions (European Commission, 2019: 22).

In line with these goals, the EU adopted in 2020 the **EU Taxonomy Regulation**, which provides a classification system for **sustainable economic activities**. The regulation encourages HEIs to align their **research**, **teaching**, and **operations** with key environmental objectives such as **climate change mitigation and adaptation**, **pollution control**, and the **transition to a circular economy**. HEIs can promote **sustainable water use**, **biodiversity protection**, and **ecosystem restoration** through innovative research, campus practices, and educational programmes. By integrating these goals, universities contribute to the EU's broader **climate and sustainability agenda** (Regulation (EU) 2020/852; European Commission, 2024c).

The policy objectives from the **European Green Deal** and **the EU Taxonomy Regulation** have been further incorporated in **Horizon Europe** by shaping funding opportunities accordingly and prioritising **sustainability-focused projects** (European Commission, 2021).

Turning to the **social dimension,** the EU adopted the **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)** in 2017 to promote upward social convergence after the economic crisis (European Commission, 2017; de la Porte et al., 2023). The EPSR includes 20 principles in the areas of **equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion.** These principles shall guide the EU towards a strong social Europe that is fair, inclusive, and provides full opportunities (European Commission, 2017; European Commission, 2024d). It thus underscores **equity, diversity, and inclusion as fundamental values.** This framework informs HEI policies to enhance access for underrepresented groups and promote **gender equity** (European Commission, 2022a). Further examples include the

European Education Area (EEA), envisioned for completion by 2025. The EEA is designed to enhance collaboration among member states and stakeholders, fostering more **resilient and inclusive national education systems** (European Commission, 2020). For instance, the **Erasmus+ programme** is a pillar of the EEA that facilitates **mobility and international collaboration,** embedding **social responsibility** in student and staff exchanges (European Commission, 2020: 10-12; European Commission, 2024e).

Governance is another critical component of ESG policies. The EU has enacted directives to improve **transparency** and **accountability**, including the **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDD)** (Directive (EU) 2024/1760). The CSDD requires companies to identify, prevent, and address adverse impacts on the **environment** (e.g., pollution or biodiversity loss) and **human rights** (e.g., exploitation of workers or child labour) (European Commission, 2022b; Pircher 2023: 34). Complementing this, the **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)** obliges institutions to disclose **ESG-related information**, setting benchmarks for reporting **sustainability metrics** (Directive (EU) 2022/2464). By aligning with these frameworks, HEIs are not only held to higher **accountability standards** but also encouraged to adopt **participatory governance practices** that engage stakeholders in decision-making processes. These policies collectively foster a **holistic approach** to embedding ESG principles in HEIs, ensuring their alignment with the EU's broader **sustainability and equity goals.**

Challenges for HEIs

The implementation of **ESG frameworks and policies in the EU presents both challenges** and **opportunities for HEIs.** A significant challenge lies in aligning institutional practices with ambitious EU goals, such as achieving **climate neutrality** and promoting social **equity**, while navigating limited resources and diverse institutional capacities. However, these policies also offer opportunities for HEIs to lead in **innovation, sustainability research, and inclusive governance,** strengthening their role as drivers of **societal transformation.** By leveraging EU funding

programmes and fostering cross-sector collaborations, HEIs can overcome **implementation barriers and contribute to the green and digital transitions.** Looking ahead, achieving these goals requires **continued commitment to integrating ESG principles into institutional strategies,** supported by **stronger policy coherence, stakeholder engagement, and capacity-building initiatives.**

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3.2 Map of ESG policies and practices

This section serves as a comprehensive framework to identify and showcase best practices in **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)** dimensions within **higher education institutions (HEIs)**. It outlines actionable approaches that HEIs can adopt to achieve their ESG goals and objectives. By leveraging examples from diverse institutions, Belgrade Metropolitan University, Linnaeus University, University of Almería, and the University of Lodz, this section synthesizes 30 ESG policies and practices. These practices highlight institutional strategies for sustainability, inclusion, and governance.

3.2.1. Best practices from case studies (see 3.3.)

Environmental Dimension – best practices

One of the best practices identified in the **environmental dimension** is the integration of sustainability initiatives with national and international frameworks. For instance, **BMU** aligns its environmental efforts with Serbia's Law on Environmental Protection and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This includes incorporating sustainability themes into academic programs and promoting environmental awareness through initiatives like MetEcoFriendly brochures and ReCreation. Similarly, **LNU** adheres to Sweden's Higher Education Act by embedding ecological considerations into its operations and participating in a national consortium of universities to align climate strategies with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target.

Another exemplary approach **is sustainability in campus operations. UAL** exemplifies this through its promotion of sustainable mobility, establishing charging stations for electric scooters to reduce carbon emissions on campus. **The University of Lodz** also demonstrates leadership in this area by installing photovoltaic panels to produce renewable energy, reducing dependency on conventional sources and lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

Community engagement is another hallmark of environmental best practices. **BMU** engages students and the public through events like the AllBreadDog Festival, fostering a culture of environmental responsibility. **UAL**'s INDALO project, which monitors climate change and its effects on local ecosystems, highlights the role of HEIs in addressing regional environmental challenges through collaboration.

Finally, **integrating sustainability into education** is critical. **BMU** includes sustainability-focused courses in its curriculum, ensuring environmental awareness is instilled in students from the outset. Similarly, **LNU**'s "Challenges of the 21st Century" project enhances students' understanding of global environmental and social issues, encouraging responsible behaviors and decisions.

Social Dimension – best practices

The **social dimension** emphasizes **equity, inclusion, and community engagement** as core best practices. **BMU's** Statute explicitly prohibits discrimination and promotes equality for all students and staff, laying a legal foundation for an inclusive environment. **UAL** builds on this by integrating equality into its institutional framework, formalizing it through an **Equality Unit** and earning the **AENOR Equality Certification.** These examples show the importance of codifying commitments to inclusivity within governance structures.

Providing **tailored support services for vulnerable groups** is another essential practice. The **University of Lodz** addresses **mental health and disabilities** through its **Academic Support Center**, which offers personalized assistance to ensure all students can participate fully in academic life. Similarly, **UAL**'s **UNIdiversidad program** supports students with disabilities, promoting social and academic integration through partnerships with local organizations.

Encouraging the **participation of underrepresented groups in specific fields** is a notable approach to social inclusion. **UAL**'s "**A Scientist Visits Your Centre**" program inspires young women to pursue **STEM careers** by showcasing successful female role models. This program not only addresses gender gaps but also challenges

stereotypes by empowering female students to envision careers in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Community engagement is equally vital. **UAL**'s "**Campus Rural**" program connects students with **rural communities**, enabling them to address local challenges such as sustainability and entrepreneurship. This initiative bridges the urban-rural divide and fosters a deeper understanding of rural issues, making students active contributors to **community development**.

Governance Dimension – best practices

The governance dimension highlights the importance of **transparent decision-making** and **strategic alignment** with institutional goals. UAL exemplifies **participatory governance** by involving the university community in decision-making through committees, ensuring **inclusivity** and **collaboration**. BMU incorporates feedback from students and staff to align operations with **ESG principles**, creating a culture of **accountability** and **responsiveness**.

Aligning governance practices with strategic objectives is another key approach. BMU integrates **ESG policies** into its **re-accreditation process**, ensuring operations meet both national and institutional goals. UAL takes a similar approach through **program contracts**, linking funding to the achievement of objectives, enhancing **efficiency** and **accountability** in resource management.

Collaborative research platforms also play a critical role. UAL's **European Institute for Sustainability in Management** shows how **university partnerships** can address **global sustainability challenges**. Similarly, the University of Lodz's **International and Science Hubs** facilitate collaboration between researchers, students, and external stakeholders, promoting **innovation** and **knowledge exchange**.

Flexibility in governance practices is another notable best practice. LNU demonstrated adaptability during the Ukraine war by soliciting **energy-saving ideas** from employees. This participatory initiative encouraged **innovation** and empowered

employees to contribute to **decision-making**, showing the value of flexibility in times of crisis.

3.2.2. Conclusion

HEIs play a crucial role in advancing **sustainability**, fostering **inclusivity**, and ensuring responsible **governance**. By adopting best practices such as integrating **environmental goals** into curricula, fostering **equity** through statutory policies, and promoting **participatory governance**, institutions can effectively contribute to achieving **ESG objectives**. This **MAP** provides a replicable framework that other HEIs can use to implement and refine their **ESG strategies**, ensuring long-term **impact** and alignment with **global sustainability goals**.

3.3 Case Studies

Belgrade Metropolitan University, Serbia

Context

Belgrade Metropolitan University (BMU) is an independent higher education institution and scientific-educational organization that develops future professional and ethical leaders in Serbia and the region, capable of shaping our future. The mission of BMU is to **contribute to the educational, cultural, economic, and social progress of Serbia** by providing advanced bachelor's and master's academic studies in the area of information technologies, arts and management, as well as continuous professional education.

BMU began its operations as the **Faculty of Information Technologies** (FIT), established in 2005. It was built upon the principles defined by the Bologna Declaration for the European education system. In 2010, the newly founded **Faculty of Management** and **Faculty of Digital Arts** joined the Faculty of Information Technology, and the three faculties formed **Metropolitan University.** By closely following the trends of the modern labor market, we have recognized its needs and

started to provide quality education to our students in various areas. BMU provides students with an introduction to modern technical concepts and practice in several scientific and artistic areas: **Information technologies, Information systems, Software engineering, Computer Games, Engineering and Operations Management, Business and Marketing Management, Management in Sports, Graphic design, Interactive media design,** and **Fashion design.** Today, BMU comprises four faculties:

1. Faculty of Information Technologies – FIT;
2. Faculty of Management – FM;
3. Faculty of Digital Arts – FDU;
4. Faculty of Foreign Languages – FSJ.

The goal of BMU is to become not only a university of regional significance but also a university of **global scale.**

Data collection

In developing the document, we employed a **systematic** and **multi-faceted approach** to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the practices and policies at **BMU**. The first step involved utilizing the **content analysis method**, which enabled us to qualitatively analyze a wide range of institutional documents. These documents included **rules**, **decisions**, **annual reports**, and other relevant materials that outline the university's policies and governance structures. By systematically reviewing these texts, we identified key **themes**, **trends**, and **insights** that reflect the university's adherence to **ESG principles**.

National context relation to Environment dimension

A joint formal initiative of higher education institutions in one of the areas of the **ESG model** in the Republic of Serbia does not exist. As a result, higher education institutions use national laws, strategies, and international acts in the field of environmental protection. At BMU, the environmental dimension is aligned with the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as outlined in the Republic of Serbia's 2023 report on sustainable development. Major challenges, such as **climate action**, responsible consumption and production, and clean water and sanitation, continue to be areas of focus. In response to these challenges, the Republic of Serbia has introduced initiatives to improve environmental quality. The **Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (2024)** promotes clean energy use, and the **Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy (2021)** provides additional support in this direction.

Although no direct legal framework specifically targets higher education institutions in relation to environmental policies, **BMU** integrates environmental considerations within its broader teaching and extracurricular activities. The **Law on Environmental Protection** encourages educational institutions to foster environmental awareness through academic programs and scientific research (Article 6). At BMU, this is facilitated by various initiatives. The **Rulebook on Teaching Activities (2021)** promotes environmental awareness early in students' educational experiences. Several environmental initiatives at BMU reflect the institution's commitment to **sustainability**. These include **MetEcoFriendly** brochures, which disseminate information on sustainable practices, **ReCreation**, which promotes creative engagement in environmental responsibility, and the **AllBreadDog Festival**, which encourages community involvement in environmental causes. Improvements in **air quality** have been noted in recent reports from the **Environmental Protection Agency**, although pollution challenges remain, particularly concerning **PM10 particles**. The willingness of citizens to engage in **recycling**, as seen in the “Odvajamo” project, points to a growing environmental awareness, contingent on the availability of adequate infrastructure.

BMU’s dedication to environmental sustainability is further demonstrated by incorporating compulsory and elective courses focused on **sustainable development** into its academic offerings, which is aligned with the **Law on Environmental Protection (Article 6)**. This ensures that **environmental awareness and**

responsibility are part of the students' learning experience, positioning BMU as a proactive contributor to the nation's **sustainability goals**. Through these actions, BMU aligns itself with national laws and regulations, fostering a culture of **environmental consciousness** within the academic community.

National context relation to Social dimension

In discussing the **social dimension** of BMU, it is essential to begin with the **legal and institutional frameworks** of the **Republic of Serbia** at the highest level and then analyze how they are applied within the university's procedures. At the highest level, the **Constitution of the Republic of Serbia** guarantees equality in **human and minority rights**, which are further protected by **international treaties and laws**, often originating from the **European Union**, the **United Nations**, and other relevant organizations. The Constitution explicitly prohibits any form of **discrimination**, whether direct or indirect, based on race, gender, nationality, social origin, birth, religion, political or other beliefs, property status, culture, language, age, or mental or physical disability. Furthermore, the Constitution guarantees **equality in employment**. The **Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination** expands on these areas through various provisions. It underscores the principle of equality for all individuals and prohibits unjustified discrimination or unequal treatment, whether in the form of action or omission (exclusion, limitation, or preferential treatment), towards individuals, groups, or their family members and close associates. Discrimination is prohibited based on race, skin color, ancestry, citizenship, national or ethnic origin, language, religious or political beliefs, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, gender characteristics, income level, property status, birth, genetic characteristics, health condition, disability, marital or family status, convictions, age, appearance, or membership in political, trade union, or other organizations, as well as other actual or presumed personal characteristics. Although Serbia is not a member of the **EU**, in view of its **candidate status** and the orientation towards accession, the **acquis communautaire** must be taken into account and the relevant legislation must receive scrupulous attention, regardless of the fact that, formally, they are not binding

at the moment. The three key **EU directives** pertaining to the prohibition of discrimination are: **Directive 2000/43/EC**, **Directive 2000/78/EC**, and **Directive 2006/54/EC**. Osim zakona, razvijena je i **Strategija prevencije i zaštite od diskriminacije za period 2022-2023. godine**. The **Law on Higher Education** emphasizes, in addition to everything else in the provision on the Principles of Higher Education, respect for **humanistic and democratic values** of national and European traditions, values of **cultural heritage**, and respect for **human rights and civil liberties**, including the prohibition of all forms of **discrimination**.

BMU is especially dedicated to promoting **equality** and prohibiting all forms of **discrimination** in its operations. This commitment is explicitly codified in the **BMU Statute**, where **Article 12** affirms the respect for **humanistic and democratic values** and prohibits any form of discrimination against both students and teaching and non-teaching staff. This article serves as a foundation for ensuring that **equality and inclusion** are upheld in all aspects of university life, reinforcing **BMU's dedication** to fostering a **diverse and respectful academic environment**. **Equity and equality** are integral to the **BMU mission**, as they guarantee **equal opportunities** for all prospective students, irrespective of their race, color, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, religion, political beliefs, disability status, or socioeconomic background. This comprehensive approach fosters an **inclusive academic environment**, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to access education and realize their potential. Referring to the **Law on Science and Research**, **BMU** has established a comprehensive **Quality Assurance Policy Statement**. This law highlights that science and research, among other things, are founded on the principles of **freedom, ethics, gender equality, environmental responsibility**, and **sustainable development**, with the ultimate aim of improving the quality of **scientific and research activities**. Closely connected to this are the **Law on Innovation Activity** and the **Strategy for Scientific and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia until 2025**, known as "**The Power of Knowledge**." Through the **Quality Assurance Policy Statement**, **BMU** seeks to contribute to these strategic goals by defining its long-term objectives, which include the **continuous and**

systematic enhancement of higher education quality, the improvement of **study programs**, **study efficiency**, the **quality of teaching**, the **pedagogical work of faculty**, **student performance**, **scientific research output**, **working conditions**, and **management processes**. The "**Social**" dimension of **ESG** at **BMU** is thus achieved through the synthesis of these legal frameworks. For instance, **BMU** regularly **surveys students** and conducts **interviews** to assess **work quality**. This approach not only reinforces **democratic principles** but also ensures **student participation** in **management and decision-making processes**, particularly on matters concerning **teaching quality**, as outlined in the **Law on Higher Education**. By gathering and analyzing this feedback, the **Quality Assurance Committee** identifies areas for improvement, thereby ensuring that the university's **educational programs** align with **student needs** and the evolving demands of the **job market**.

National context relation to Government dimension

The development of **education in the Republic of Serbia** is defined by the umbrella document "**Strategy for the Development of Education and Upbringing in the Republic of Serbia until 2030**." The strategy thus indirectly defines the path and framework of action of **higher education institutions** regarding the implementation of **sustainable development goals** and the **ESG model**. In the domain of **Governance**, the mentioned strategy, among other documents, used the following as the basis: Strategy of Scientific and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2025 "Power of Knowledge", Smart Specialization Strategy 2020–2027, Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence 2020–2025, Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence 2020–2023, Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities 2020–2024, Strategy for the Development of Digital Skills 2020–2024, National Youth Strategy 2015–2025, Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Roma Women 2016–2025, Employment Strategy 2021–2026, Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Gender-Based Violence 2021–2025, National Security Strategy, and Action Plan for Negotiation Chapter 23 with EU.

A joint formal initiative of **higher education institutions** in one of the areas of the **ESG model** does not exist. However, higher education institutions individually adapt to new changes and regulations; that is, they individually launch initiatives in this domain within their institutions. Since 2020, changes in the structure of requirements for obtaining a **license for teaching in higher education** issued by the **National Accreditation Body** (www.nat.rs), significantly in terms of **management review** of study programs, faculties, and universities, have made a significant impact on higher education institutions. In the previous two years, **BMU** went through the **re-accreditation process** related to study programs, institutions, and scientific work and significantly improved its operations with changes such as more frequent **employee satisfaction surveys**, harmonization of the **professional development plan** for teaching and non-teaching staff, increase of **student participation** in management processes, involvement of **industry stakeholders** in the creation of university products and services, and strengthening the activities of the **alumni club**. The **governance dimension** in Serbia's higher education sector is guided by various **national strategies** that emphasize **sustainable development**, **digital skills**, and **inclusion**, among other priorities. **BMU** has aligned with these strategies by adapting its operations, improving **student participation** in decision-making, and involving **industry stakeholders** in shaping university offerings.

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Linnaeus University, Sweden

Context

Linnaeus University (LNU) is a rather young state university in the Swedish historical province of **Småland** that was granted the status of a full university in 1999. It presents a merger of two former universities of applied sciences in **Växjö** and **Kalmar** and has campuses at both places with 5 faculties and approximately 16,000 students (Linnaeus University, 2024a). In Sweden, the **Higher Education Act** requires that all higher education institutions shall promote **sustainable development** and **gender equality** through their activities and working methods (Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2024). While the university aims to fully implement the UN's **global sustainability goals** and the **Agenda 2030**, LNU has developed a broad and integrative approach to achieve these goals by including an 'ecological, economic and social' dimension (Linnaeus University, 2024b). This is also expressed in the university's overall **vision and strategy documents** (Linnaeus University, 2024c).

In addition, and in line with the **Swedish Higher Education Act**, LNU focuses officially specifically on **climate policy** as well as **equality**, where specific action plans have been developed (Linnaeus University, 2021, 2023). Concrete and measurable targets are laid out in the **climate action plan of 2023**, which includes that the **carbon dioxide emissions** from business travel should be reduced by 50% per full-time equivalent by 2025 compared to the level of 2019 (Linnaeus University, 2023). While the report on **equality** hints at an inequality between men and women, concrete measures are not included, but more overall ideas and instruments on creating greater awareness of the issue by including all different levels of studying, working, and researching (Linnaeus University, 2021). These targets follow the **Swedish Discrimination Act** that requires universities to map and analyze the risks of

discrimination in the **admission**, **recruitment process**, **teaching methods**, **organization of education**, and in the **examination and assessment** of students' performance (Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, 2008). In addition, the national **gender equality policy goals** should be applied in the context of **employment**. This includes assessing risks of **discrimination** in **working conditions**, **wages**, and **employment terms**, the **recruitment and promotion**, as well as **work-life issues** (Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2024). Furthermore, LNU is instructed to ensure that **48% of newly appointed professors are women**, and the university is required to increase the proportion of **female researchers** and ensure **fair conditions** in the execution of research (Linnaeus University, 2021).

Data Collection

To identify the current ESG **policies** and **strategies**, as well as the overall strategy of **sustainability** of the university, we proceeded in three different steps. First, we gathered all official **documents** concerning sustainability and ESG **policies** that are made available by the university. We analyzed these documents via qualitative **content analysis** and focused on the existing policies and **practices**. Second, we conducted focus **groups** with employees at LNU who work with these ESG policies to identify the current implementation **practices** and potential **challenges** to them. These focus groups were recorded and transcribed to analyze them. For the analysis, we focused on the implementation practices and potential **discrepancies** between the analyzed official documents and the actual practices. Third, we conducted expert **interviews** with the industry as well as with researchers and teachers in the field about their opinions on the university's ESG policies and practices to identify potential gaps in the university's capacity to contribute to the **Sustainable Development Goals**. In the following, we present our main findings and individual case **studies** related to each of the ESG dimensions.

Case Studies

Environmental

Case 1

To meet the climate objectives set forth by the Paris Agreement, which Sweden and other nations have committed to, emissions must be approximately halved every ten years. A consortium of 36 Swedish universities and colleges has developed a unified climate framework to underpin their individual climate strategies, intending to align with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature rise limit by 2030 (KTH, 2019). This initiative seeks to diminish direct emissions while enhancing engagement in societal climate issues.

The climate framework outlines how universities and colleges should engage in initiatives to mitigate climate damage. Participating institutions acknowledge the climate as a crucial and high-priority issue for the future and commit to the following actions:

1. Continue contributing to societal progress to achieve climate goals through education, research, and collaboration.
2. Minimize their own climate impact, aiming to implement measures by 2030 to align with the 1.5°C warming limit.
3. Establish long-term goals for climate efforts and allocate resources to achieve these goals and conduct follow-up measures.
4. Clearly communicate their climate efforts to inspire and disseminate knowledge to other entities and the broader society.

The climate framework is associated with guidelines that outline key areas where the higher education sector can influence society and propose measures to reduce climate impact. These guidelines assist each university in selecting areas of focus, defining goals, and determining required measures tailored to their specific circumstances.

Universities and colleges play a crucial role in this endeavor through their core missions, which are now more pivotal than ever. These institutions are tasked with researching climate change, focusing both on mitigation strategies and adaptation methods. They are also responsible for educating citizens and future leaders capable of implementing the required actions. Additionally, higher education institutions are instrumental in developing solutions to curb greenhouse gas emissions and remove existing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and they take part in the deployment of these solutions. Furthermore, they promote the dissemination of new scientific knowledge.

For the higher education sector broadly, these activities represent the most significant opportunities to contribute effectively to climate action and are integral to the climate framework. This framework is not only about research and education but also aims to minimize the climate emissions directly associated with the operational activities of universities.

Case 2

The regulation on environmental management in government agencies requires the university to have an environmental management system with an associated environmental management steering group (Naturvardsverket, 2024). The goal of the authorities' environmental management system is to create a systematic environmental work to reduce the negative and increase the positive environmental impact of the operations. To contribute to achieving these goals, the government agencies covered by regulation (2009:907) on environmental management in government agencies must introduce and develop an environmental management system.

The main task of the environmental council at LNU is to coordinate and develop the university-wide strategic sustainability work (LNU, 2024). The council is also to support collaboration with other councils and committees where sustainability issues relate to education, research, and the work environment. In June 2020, a steering

group for the environmental management system was established (2020/2316-1.3) with the task of leading and developing Linnaeus University's overall environmental management work.

The steering committee for the environmental management system has an important task within government agencies in Sweden (Naturvardsverket, 2024). Their main responsibility is to oversee and support the implementation and development of environmental management systems within the agencies. Here are some central aspects of their mission:

Monitoring and support: The steering committee follows up on how the environmental management system is integrated into the agencies' operations. They provide advice, support, and guidance to ensure that the system works effectively.

Monthly meetings: The project leader has regular meetings with the steering committee to discuss the project's status and future plans. This allows for continuous dialogue and adjustments to the environmental management work.

Focus areas: The steering committee discusses areas such as indirect environmental impact, business travel and transportation, energy use, and environmental requirements in procurement. These areas are crucial for reducing negative environmental impacts and increasing positive impacts.

Reporting: The steering committee is responsible for reporting on the environmental management work and disseminating information on current environmental issues to the agencies' contact persons.

Governance

In the area of environmental policies, LNU has established various strategies and targets at the central university level that all faculties and departments must measure and report. This reporting is often perceived as a mandatory task, leaving employees with little opportunity to voice their ideas or concerns. However, a different

approach emerged during a recent crisis, showcasing that more innovative approaches and practices to ESG policies might result in better outcomes.

Due to multiple crises, including the war in Ukraine, high inflation, and rising electricity and rental costs, Linnaeus University needed to implement cost-saving measures and reduce energy consumption. In addition to lowering the heating, the university invited all employees to contribute ideas on how to save more energy both broadly and on a more individual level. Numerous suggestions were submitted and made accessible to everyone. One interviewee remarked: 'There were a lot of inspiring and interesting ideas and it felt like a good competition' (Interview SE 1, 2024). This initiative contrasted with the formal obligations leaders often face to meet ESG policies and their reporting requirements, which are frequently seen as a mandatory exercise rather than an opportunity for leaders or employees to actively shape the policies. A great advantage was additionally that many of the ideas were also quickly and easily implemented at the level of departments or as individual employees (Interview SE 1, 2024).

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University of Almeria, Spain

Context

The University of Almería (UAL) was founded in July 1993 under the auspices of the Andalusian Parliament. The campus is located six kilometers from the city of Almería, which has around 200,000 inhabitants and is situated on the southeastern coast of Andalusia. As a public university with approximately 15,000 students enrolled, its main mission is to contribute to the economic, cultural, and social development of the region, offering an education that responds to the historical and economic characteristics of the province, with special focus on sectors such as solar energy, agriculture, and water resource management. UAL is composed of eight faculties: health sciences, economics and business studies, engineering college, education, law, experimental sciences, humanities, and psychology. The university's research

activities are largely connected to its economic environment, with a strong focus on solar energy, agriculture, and water management.

The University of Almería addresses the social dimension through a strong commitment to equality and diversity, as demonstrated by the implementation of its first Equality Plan and the preparation of a second. This commitment includes awareness-raising campaigns and training programmes, positioning UAL as a regional leader, as confirmed by the AENOR Equality Certification. UAL's institutional governance is based on a participatory model that involves the university community in decision-making processes, with specialised committees ensuring a collaborative approach. Since 2018, this commitment has been strengthened by the formal incorporation of the Equality Unit into the university's statutes. In terms of human resources management, working conditions have been adapted for staff with disabilities, promoting an inclusive environment. In addition, UAL collaborates with third sector organisations, enabling effective assessment of the needs of vulnerable groups and creating a positive impact both within the university and in the wider community.

In terms of sustainability, UAL has made significant strides. The university actively promotes research and knowledge transfer activities focused on climate change, sustainable development, efficient water and energy use, and desertification. Interdisciplinary and interdepartmental research centers and groups are managing around 40 innovative national and international projects aimed at advancing sustainability. These initiatives include the development of more efficient irrigation and water regeneration systems, the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices, effective management of natural resources, and the conservation of biodiversity. These topics are crucial to the local economy due to the climate and geographical characteristics of the region. UAL also integrates these concerns into academic programs, preparing students to lead initiatives that support environmentally responsible development. Furthermore, UAL is working on enhancing the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems and implementing clean technologies.

UAL is firmly committed to sustainability in its internal management, in accordance with the provisions of the Organic Law of the University System (LOSU). This law requires universities to adopt measures to reduce their environmental impact, optimize resource use, and promote research in areas related to sustainability, such as renewable energy and climate change mitigation. Through these actions, UAL strengthens its commitment to responsible governance and long-term sustainable development.

Data collection

Research was conducted at the University of Almeria and aimed to explore the opinions and perceptions of different stakeholders in relation to the implementation and development of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) practices in its context. To carry out this study, a questionnaire with open-ended questions was designed and distributed from June to September 2024. Data collection focused on various stakeholders linked to the University of Almeria, thus allowing for a diverse and representative view of ESG perspectives and challenges.

The questionnaire with open-ended questions was chosen to collect data efficiently and capture a wide range of perspectives. The online format allowed participants to respond flexibly, which was important for governance bodies and industry representatives, who often have limited availability. This flexibility was especially helpful since the questionnaire was open over a three-month period (June to September), including vacation times. By using an open-ended approach, the three stakeholder groups (industry, governance bodies, and management) could share their views in detail and reflect individually on ESG practices, without the pressure of a group setting.

Case studies

Environmental Dimension:

INDALO Project: Climate Change and Ecosystem Monitoring. The University of Almería (UAL) participates in the INDALO project, a research initiative aimed at monitoring and adapting to climate change in arid ecosystems. This project, in collaboration with other Andalusian institutions, focuses on studying biodiversity and the impact of global changes such as shifts in land use and demographic trends. Through the Center for Global Change Assessment and Monitoring (CAESCG), UAL contributes to LifeWatch ERIC, a European infrastructure for ecological research. The project aims to understand the effects of climate change on local ecosystems and the services they provide, offering data that could guide future adaptation strategies in the region.

Greenhouse Agriculture in Almería: Mitigating Climate Impact. Almería's extensive greenhouse agriculture, covering around 30,000 hectares, serves as a significant tool in the fight against climate change. This area acts as a CO2 sink, helping to offset carbon emissions while leveraging the "albedo effect," which involves reflecting sunlight to cool the earth's surface. Research led by UAL, including contributions from the Department of Applied Economics, highlights the role of these greenhouses in reducing local temperatures and offering a model for sustainable agricultural practices. Despite facing criticism for environmental challenges, this agricultural model is recognized for its contributions to carbon sequestration and adaptation to the region's arid conditions.

Promotion of Sustainable Mobility on Campus: Charging and Storage Stations for Electric Scooters. The University of Almería is leading the way to promote sustainable mobility on campus by establishing charging and storage stations for electric scooters. This project began in 2021 and has progressively expanded to include various strategic locations across the university, particularly in areas with high foot traffic from students. By doing so, the UAL aims to facilitate the use of clean and efficient transportation options that significantly reduce carbon emissions associated with traditional vehicles. The charging stations are strategically located near key buildings, making it convenient for students to access them before and after classes.

Each station is equipped to provide simultaneous charging for multiple scooters, ensuring that users can rely on fully charged vehicles when they need them. Furthermore, the design of these stations offers a secure environment for users to store their scooters while attending classes or engaging in campus activities. In collaboration with Cajamar, the university also offers a unique financial incentive: a 0% interest financing plan for the purchase of electric scooters. This initiative not only lowers the financial barrier for students but also promotes a culture of sustainability by encouraging and promoting a shift in student behavior towards more eco-friendly transport options.

Social Case Studies:

UNIdiversidad Program: Promoting Inclusion. The UNIdiversidad program at UAL focuses on fostering inclusivity within the university community. This initiative aims to support students with disabilities, providing them with opportunities for social and academic integration. The program includes tailored educational resources and access to support services, creating a more inclusive environment. Through partnerships with local entities and social organizations, UAL ensures that students with diverse needs can fully participate in university life, contributing to a more equitable educational landscape in Almería and beyond.

Rural Campus Program: Bridging Urban and Rural Gaps. The "Campus Rural" program is an initiative that connects university students with rural communities in Spain. Managed by UAL, the program allows students to carry out internships and gain practical experience while supporting the revitalization of rural areas. By engaging students in projects that address local needs, such as sustainability, entrepreneurship, and community development, the program aims to reduce rural depopulation and enhance students' understanding of rural life. It serves as a bridge between urban academic knowledge and the practical needs of rural communities, fostering mutual learning and social integration.

Promoting the Participation of Women in STEM areas: A scientist visits your centre. The University of Almeria (UAL) has implemented various strategies to encourage the participation of women in STEM areas, highlighting the programme 'A scientist visits your centre'. This initiative aims to reduce the gender gap in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The initiative has recently involved the participation of 107 professionals from the UAL, who have visited 86 schools in the province of Almeria. During these visits, women scientists have shared their experiences and knowledge, exposing young students to real examples of women who have succeeded in scientific and technological careers. These sessions aim not only to inspire scientific vocations but also to break gender stereotypes, making female role models visible and empowering girls to consider themselves capable of developing in STEM. This action is fundamental to increasing the interest of female students in scientific careers, generating a space for exchange where students can learn about the reality of women in science.

Governance

European Institute for Sustainability in Management: A pioneering inter-university project for environmental innovation and awareness. The European Institute for Sustainability in Management is an innovative inter-university project that seeks to raise awareness of the importance of training, research, and innovation in environmental, social, and governance management. This institute, considered a pioneer in Spain, aims to address global and local challenges related to sustainability through practical and strategic solutions. The Institute is made up of 11 research groups from 5 Andalusian universities: University of Almeria, University of Cadiz, University of Granada, University of Jaén, and Pablo Olavide University of Seville, bringing together more than 70 researchers. The research, transfer, and training activity of the Institute revolves around five main lines of research that show its collaborative nature and potential synergies: strategy and sustainability, international management and sustainability, digitalization and sustainable supply chain,

sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship, and human resources and sustainability. This initiative is of utmost relevance for the Andalusian system as it fulfils the obligation of the Organic Law of the University System (LOSU), which emphasizes the need for universities to respond to the problems of climate change and sustainability.

Programme contract with the Junta de Andalucia. The Programme Contract of the University of Almeria (UAL) for the period 2023-2027 is a legal-administrative agreement that directs the funding of the university towards the achievement of strategic objectives aligned with the lines of the Andalusian Public University Funding Model. This contract programme seeks to link funding to specific results, promoting efficiency in the management of resources and the implementation of measures that favour territorial development, social cohesion, and the transfer of knowledge and research to society, thus ensuring compliance with the objectives set out in the law and contributing to the region's economic and social growth.

University of Lodz, Poland

Context

Located in central Poland, the University of Lodz is the largest university in the region. With an unwavering commitment to research and the advancement of higher education, it aims to be a catalyst for change in the community. It is one of the few Polish universities included in international rankings: QS World University, Times Higher Education, U.S. News Best Global Universities, WEBOMETRICS, in the U-Multirank ranking, or in the field rankings.

In 2022, the University of Lodz joined UNIC, one of the 50 networks of European Universities. European Universities are a model of international universities of the future, promoting European values and revolutionising the quality and competitiveness of European higher education through the joint implementation of innovative solutions in the field of education and science and deep institutional integration.

The themes of the UNIC network address the challenges of post-industrial cities, the role of universities in their transformation, and building the potential of cities in key areas such as

- social inclusion;
- diversity (superdiversity);
- sustainable development (sustainability);
- social impact;
- mobility.

The university consists of 12 faculties and offers over 100 study programmes within first cycle (86), second cycle (71), and long-cycle (3) master's programmes. One of the important dimensions of sustainable development is education on social and environmental aspects, which is carried out both as part of separate studies, such as environmental protection, and as part of specific courses taught as obligatory or optional courses.

As a member of the EU, Poland implements European policies related to sustainable development and climate change. In the case of universities, there are currently no separate regulations requiring HEIs to adopt environmental policies or climate change plans. The University of Lodz has not had separate sustainable development objectives or policies (August 2024). Some provisions related to ESG were included in the Development Strategy for 2020-2030. The goals and tasks reflect the sustainability issues in various organisational processes. The strategy's assumptions relate to the creation of a socially responsible, inclusive, and diverse place to work and study. In addition, the University initiates many bottom-up initiatives and activities involving different groups of stakeholders. In addition to its educational activities, the University also carries out various scientific projects to promote all dimensions of sustainable development.

Data Collection

The presented case studies were developed based on data collected during qualitative analysis of documents and websites belonging to the University of Łódź. First, the scope of information sought was defined, focusing on the diversity of initiatives, support for sustainable development goals, and alignment with individual ESG dimensions. To show the variety of solutions implemented, both grassroots actions and university-wide initiatives were presented.

Case Studies

Environmental

Case 1 Eco-Eksoc (Eko -Eksoc)

The EKO EkSoc project is a bottom-up initiative implemented at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of the University of Lodz. It is the largest faculty at the university. The project was launched in 2018. Its main goal is the implementation of environmentally friendly solutions and adaptation to climate change. The planned activities focus on several areas:

- education - raising environmental awareness among staff, students, and the local community, shaping pro-ecological attitudes, and promoting healthy lifestyles.
- infrastructure and environment - development of green infrastructure, green mobility facilities, reduction of sealed areas, construction of environmentally friendly facilities, and protection of biodiversity.
- functioning of the department - implementing less-waste assumptions, including in purchasing processes.
- monitoring results - reporting on the impact of actions taken.

An example of an implemented task is the publication of a guide to organising eco-events or Veganuary. The guide facilitates the environmentally friendly events organisation. Veganuary on Eko EkSoc, encouraging people to cook plant-based food

with Eko EkSoc in January. Throughout January 2023, interested people exchanged recipes for plant-based dishes on the faculty's Facebook and Instagram. The result of the action is the "Eko EkSoc Vegan Cookbook".

The Eko EkSoc programme is aimed at different stakeholder groups, including: the Faculty of Economics and Sociology community - employees and students, the local community, and employees of companies and external institutions.

Internal stakeholders are also active participants in the activities offered, not just the beneficiaries of served activities.

The project initiators defined a number of benefits resulting from the programme implementation:

- the creation of a more environmentally friendly place to work and study;
- achieving savings by monitoring the consumption of various resources and new pro-ecological investments;
- strengthening the Faculty's image as modern, responsible, and responsive to social challenges;
- involvement in EU, national, and local environmental policies;
- impact on the environment and increasing the environmental awareness of the academic community;
- access to funding for environmental purposes;
- joining the group of 'green universities'.

The programme can be used as a benchmark for other faculties and universities on how to develop environmental awareness and achieve environmental impact through small-scale initiatives.

Case 2 Challenges of the XXI century (Wyzwania XXI wieku)

Challenges of the 21st Century is an educational project that aims to develop knowledge and awareness of the social and environmental issues affecting modern

societies. Teaching is carried out in three thematic areas: Man, Planet, and Economy. In each block, there are 5 interdisciplinary sessions devoted to different dimensions and issues related to the place and role of people in the world, problems with resources and pollution, or the current economic situation. Lectures are organised online to ensure the availability for all interested students.

The aim of the project is

- improve awareness of the changes in current world which are taking place at the local and international level and its far-reaching consequences;
- build knowledge about possibilities how individuals can change negative effect on environment and support the environmental friendly behaviours;
- share good and bad examples to make students more responsible in their buying decisions and choices;
- improve awareness of new possibilities in the field of business, possibilities of transforming the economic system.

Lectures are given by willing teachers from all faculties of the University of Lodz, thanks to which students get to know different perspectives and points of view.

The courses are open to all students, regardless of the study cycle or discipline. Classes are not graded. Participation is completely voluntary and free of charge. There are 50 places per semester in each block. The project has been running for winter and summer editions, and several hundred students have had the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of sustainable development, treated as informal education.

Case 3 Energy transformation (Transformacja energetyczna)

Advancing climate change and the armed conflict in Ukraine have made the issue of access to energy resources particularly important. This is partly due to rising energy prices and also to the need to respond to growing external expectations regarding climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. One of the projects to be implemented by the end of 2024 is the installation of photovoltaic panels on selected buildings of the University of Lodz.

The main objective of the investment is to increase the share of electricity from renewable sources, improve the functionality of the existing electricity network by reducing its operating costs, reduce energy production from conventional energy sources, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The University has received public funding for this purpose.

The planned investment will be used to produce electricity, which will be used partly for own consumption and, in the case of thermal energy, entirely for own consumption. Part of the electricity exceeding its own consumption will be stored in the network for later use.

Case 4 Małe wielkie kroki na UŁ

The need to develop environmental awareness and minimise negative impacts on the environment, both in the private and professional spheres, means that each member of the academic community should understand the role of the individual contribution to reducing negative environmental impacts. One of the tools is good examples and small actions, which are not difficult to implement in everyday behaviour and will bring tangible benefits. #MałeWielkieKroki is a catalogue of good environmental practices from the University of Lodz. The document shows what actions are possible. The material encourages people to work more responsibly. Reading it will give you, among other things, suggestions on how to implement the standards we define as "green office" (or "green academic") and how to start working according to the "less waste" pyramid, i.e., tips that will protect us from excessive production of waste.

The material is aimed at anyone who wants to get involved in the development of an environmentally friendly workplace. The publication of the catalogue was communicated through various social media channels as well as through a newsletter addressed to different stakeholder groups, which allowed information on possible practices to reach many recipients.

Social

Case 1: Gender Equality at the University of Lodz

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is not possible without addressing social issues. One such area is gender equality, which is implemented in various dimensions of social and economic life. The EU has identified inequalities in women's access to knowledge and professional positions and has required universities to develop Gender Equality Plans. The University of Lodz is currently preparing the second edition of this document. Gender equality goals are implemented at the University not only through the Gender Equality Plan, but also through other initiatives aimed at creating diverse and inclusive conditions for learning, working, and development. These are: Equal Treatment Council, a team dealing with work-life balance, an anti-discrimination and anti-mobbing procedure. In 2024, a series of training courses aimed at enabling the achievement of scientific excellence was launched. They are oriented on: building knowledge and awareness of gender equality, inclusion, and diversity.

These activities engage all groups of stakeholders: administrative staff, teachers, people in managerial positions, student,s and PhD candidates. The effect is to reach a wide audience. Approximately 15 training sessions are organised each month. The training will continue until the end of the year and is co-funded by the EU through the H2020 RESET project.

Case 2: Academic Support Center (Akademickie Centrum Wsparcia)

The pandemic has highlighted the scale of the need to address young people's mental health. Younger generations need additional psychological support. Openness to neurodiversity and equal opportunities for people with disabilities are challenges for socially responsible universities. At the University of Lodz, the unit dealing with creating opportunities for access to education for students and graduates with disabilities is the Academic Support Centre. The Centre was

established based on the long-standing experience of the Office for Disabled Persons and Addiction Prevention at the University of Lodz.

The Centre's activities aim to assist members of the academic community at the University of Lodz who need it for various reasons, with special emphasis on people with disabilities and/or deficits or difficulties in the study process.

The scope of activities of the Academic Support Centre at the University of Lodz includes, in particular, support in the following areas

- equal opportunities;
- solving educational difficulties caused by health and/or adaptation reasons
- mental hygiene;
- personal development;
- addiction prevention and therapy;
- crisis management;
- obtaining financial support in the form of a scholarship for people with disabilities.

ASC has an individualised approach. Each person is treated individually. Specialists learn about their specific needs and psychophysical abilities and select appropriate types of support so that they can fully participate in the study process.

Governance

Case 1: Deklaracja społecznej odpowiedzialności uczelni

In 2017, the University of Lodz became a signatory of the Declaration of Social Responsibility. The document specifies areas in which social responsibility should be particularly visible, such as: cultivating academic values, developing programmes and projects dedicated to social responsibility, cooperation, and building relationships with various stakeholders.

The Declaration is a document that has been produced as a result of collaboration between people from different universities working on the social responsibility of organisations. The activities were carried out as part of a working group operating in one of the Polish ministries. It is a document that contains a set of principles that universities should follow as part of their socially responsible activities. The Declaration is a voluntary involvement of universities in promoting sustainable development and social responsibility in the organization's management system, education, and research.

It is a commitment to actively raise awareness of sustainable development and the place and role of universities in shaping the conditions for socio-economic development, taking into account environmental protection and social well-being.

The declaration is addressed to all public and private universities. The key is the will of the university to implement the mission of education and training in the spirit of modern global education, taking into account trends related to sustainable development and social responsibility.

Case 2 UŁ HUBS for partnership

Achieving sustainable development goals requires cooperation and activities that enable the establishment of new relationships and the exchange of knowledge and experience at the university, local community, and international levels. Specialised administrative units have been established at the University of Lodz to strengthen partnerships and scientific development.

The International Hub is an administrative unit of the University of Lodz whose main objective is the internationalisation of the University. The unit serves as a contact point for international researchers, providing administrative assistance in all formalities related to the employment process and stay at the University.

The Science Hub is a university-wide cooperation platform aimed at supporting the academic community of the University of Lodz in the implementation of scientific projects in cooperation with the environment. The Science Hub aims to initiate and develop cooperation between students, research supervisors, and partner institutions of the University of Lodz to implement scientific projects and application and implementation solutions.

Hubs are linked to the Governance dimension of ESG management. They combine different competencies, needs, and expectations with opportunities to develop activities aimed at strengthening the research area and cooperation with the external stakeholders.

Chapter 4: ESG Awareness Initiatives

Belgrade Metropolitan University, Serbia

In developing the document, we employed a systematic and multi-faceted approach to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the practices and policies at BMU. The first step involved utilizing the content analysis method, which enabled us to qualitatively analyze a wide range of institutional documents. These documents included decisions, annual reports, and other relevant materials that outline the university's policies and governance structures. By systematically reviewing these texts, we identified key themes that reflect the university's adherence to ESG principles.

Based on the applied research methodology, four case studies were selected, which are shown in the following Table.

Table 1. Case studies – BMU

No.	Case Study	Title	Source
1.	ESG training and education programs (all target groups);	Interactive Workshop on ESG for Final-Year Students at BMU	ESG training and education program-BMU
2.	Public awareness campaigns and community outreach events	Promoting Sustainable Education for a Greener Future	Public awereness-BMU
3.	Partnerships with stakeholders	Building Partnerships for Sustainable Education	Partnership with stakeholders-BMU
4.	Engagement with policymakers to advocate	SHIFT at LIMEN 2024 – Advocating for ESG in Higher Education	Engagement-BMU

	for ESG policies and regulations		

Source: BMU

Linnaeus University, Sweden

The data collected for the case studies was collected as a result of desk research followed by content analysis of the identified documents. The following documents were identified as the basis for the case studies.

No.	Case study	Title of the case/initiative	Link to the source
1	ESG training and education programs	ESG Training at LNU	https://lnu.se/en/medarbetare/employed-at-lnu/professional-development-and-career-paths/course-education-for-sustainable-development https://lnu.se/en/research/research-projects/project-esg-impact-index-in-higher-education https://lnu.se/en/meet-linnaeus-university/knowledge-environments/green-sustainable-development
2	Public awareness campaigns and community outreach events	Sustainable Campus	https://lnu.se/en/meet-linnaeus-university/a-sustainable-university/sustainable-campus/
3	Partnerships with stakeholders	The Bridge and Project and Networks at LNU	https://lnu.se/en/research/research-groups/the-bridge https://lnu.se/en/meet-linnaeus-university/collaborate-with-us/international-collaboration/projects-and-networks
4	Engagement with policymakers to advocate for ESG policies and regulations	A catalogue of case studies in creating solutions for a sustainable future of higher education	

Soruce: LNU

University of Almeria, Spain

For the collection of initiatives, two approaches were employed: firstly, interviews with the university's sustainability, social responsibility, and governance officers; and secondly, a review of institutional strategies, official university websites, and publicly available materials on academic programs, outreach activities, and governance practices. These combined sources provided a comprehensive overview of UAL's commitment to ESG integration across education, community engagement, partnerships, and policymaking.

N.	Case study	Title of the case/initiative	Link to the source
1	ESG training and education programs	ESG Training at the University of Almería:	https://www.ual.es/estudios/masteres https://www.ual.es/universidad/centros/eidual/programas-de-doctorado https://www.ual.es/investigacion/investiga/grupos
2	Public awareness campaigns and community outreach events	Environmental Good Practicies Decalogue and "EcoUALízate" Campaign; Functional Diversity Week; IMPULSO STEM UAL Programme; Code of Ethics and Conduct	https://www.facebook.com/ualsostenibleysaludable/?locale=es_ES https://news.ual.es/sociedad/la-ual-cierra-su-semana-dedicada-a-abrazar-la-diversidad-y-eliminar-la-discriminacion/ https://www.ual.es/download_file/144994/94989 https://www.ual.es/application/files/4717/3875/9742/VIII_Plan_de_accion_de_Sostenibilidad_Ambiental_de_la_UAL_2023.pdf https://www.ual.es/application/files/1615/9557/2823/codigo-etico.pdf
3	Partnerships with stakeholders	UAL transfiere	https://www.ual.es/otri/transfiere/ualtransfiere-2024
4	Engagement with policymakers to advocate for	Course on integrated water management	https://www.ual.es/estudios/cursos-verano/oferta-de-cursos/curso/DD5237A0-E2CF-11EE-B167-41D464FF2313

	ESG policies and regulations		https://news.ual.es/cursosverano/el-curso-de-verano-sobre-regeneracion-y-desalacion-situa-a-almeria-a-la-vanguardia-en-gestion-sostenible-del-agua/

Source: UAL

Unviersity of Lodz, Poland

The data collected for the case studies was collected as a result of desk research followed by content analysis of the identified documents. The following documents were identified as the basis for the case studies.

N.	Case study	Title of the case/initiative	Link to the source
1	ESG training and education programs	ESG Training at the University of Lodz	https://www.uni.lodz.pl/aktualnosc/szczegoly/lato-ze-szkoleniami-esg-nowe-szkolenia-w-ofercie
2	Public awareness campaigns and community outreach events	University Diversity	https://www.uni.lodz.pl/university-diversity
3	Partnerships with stakeholders	Ecosystem Integration Labs in the RiEcoLab Project	https://riecolab.eu/ecosystem-integration-labs/
4	Engagement with policymakers to advocate for ESG policies and regulations	A catalogue of case studies in creating solutions for a sustainable future of higher education	https://www.gov.pl/attachment/796fb871-c177-4721-981d-7d5281ee6778

Soruce: UOL

ImpactSci, Portugal

To identify and document the four case studies on universities and their engagement with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles, a twofold approach was employed. The process began with informal interviews conducted with Portuguese stakeholders connected to IMPACTSci. These discussions were instrumental in capturing nuanced perspectives, as they allowed stakeholders to share candid insights into how universities in Portugal are navigating the ESG landscape. The informal setting encouraged open dialogue, revealing practices and initiatives that might not be immediately apparent through formal documentation. Building on these interviews, a content analysis was conducted, focusing on the official websites of the universities mentioned during the discussions. This step involved a careful examination of publicly accessible resources, such as sustainability reports, strategic plans, and other relevant documents, to validate and complement the information obtained from the interviews. This process provided a solid foundation for presenting authentic and representative case studies, rooted in both evidence and experience.

N.	Case study	Title of the case/initiative	Link to the source
1	ESG training and education programs	The University of Porto's UPTEC Sustainability and ESG Training Initiative Background	https://uptec.up.pt/pt-pt/sustentabilidade-e-esg-na-estrategia-dos-negocios-em-debate-na-uptec/
2	Public awareness campaigns and community outreach events	ESG Awareness Week by the University of Lisbon Background	**https://esgportugal.pt/images/esg/2024/Brochura_ESSGWeek2024.pdf**

3	Partnerships with stakeholders	Corporate Governance and ESG Program by Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics	https://clsbe.lisboa.ucp.pt/pt-pt/corporate-governance-e-esg/programa-detalhado
4	Engagement with policymakers to advocate for ESG policies and regulations	Project SIGMA: Advancing ESG Policies in Local Municipalities	https://ccp.pt/2024/03/inovacao-e-desenvolvimento-local-esg-nos-municipios-o-projecto-sigma/

Soruce: ImpactSci

4.1 Initiatives on ESG training and education programmes

Belgrade Metropolitan University, Serbia

Interactive Workshop on ESG for Final-Year Students at BMU

The Belgrade Metropolitan University organized an interactive workshop designed to deepen the understanding of the **ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) concept** among final-year students. The goal was to encourage critical thinking about **sustainable business practices** and to emphasize the integration of **ESG principles** into future business strategies. The workshop was held within the context of the course **MG 315 (Old name: OM350) – Product Management**, which was selected due to its relevance to aligning **product and service development** with **environmental goals, technological innovations, and socio-economic imperatives**.

The primary objective of the workshop was to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of **ESG** and its application in real-world scenarios. The students engaged in discussions that analyzed **case studies** and explored how organizations could adopt and integrate **ESG principles** into their **operational and strategic frameworks**. The interactive format allowed students to debate the significance of **ESG factors** from various perspectives, both from the point of view of the **organizations** they will eventually work for and their **personal perspectives** as future professionals in the field.

The students showed strong awareness of **environmental sustainability** and the importance of monitoring key indicators such as **carbon dioxide emissions, energy efficiency, and sustainable resource use**. Their insights were aligned with the global push for businesses to **reduce their carbon footprint** and contribute to **climate action**. Many students highlighted the growing importance of **environmental goals** in shaping **business decisions**, emphasizing how companies need to invest in **sustainable technologies and practices** to remain competitive in a

world increasingly concerned with **environmental impact**. As future **business leaders**, students clearly recognized the need to advocate for **ecological sustainability** within their organizations and beyond.

While the **environmental aspects of ESG** garnered a high degree of consensus among the students, the discussions around the **social and governance dimensions** revealed a broader range of opinions and some uncertainties. Students raised questions about the boundaries of **social responsibilities** within the **ESG framework**, questioning where the **social aspects**, such as **equality, working conditions, and community impact**, end and where **governance issues** like **ethical leadership, corporate transparency, and accountability** begin. This diversity of thought illustrated the complexities involved in defining and applying **social and governance principles** within an **organizational context**.

The debate around **social issues** was particularly interesting, with students highlighting the need for organizations to foster **inclusive environments** and ensure **fair treatment** for all employees, regardless of **gender, race, or background**. On the **governance side**, the discussion revolved around how **leadership practices, ethical decision-making, and corporate accountability** play a critical role in building **trust** and promoting **long-term sustainability**. The students emphasized that **governance** goes beyond **regulatory compliance** and should be embedded in the **organizational culture**.

A significant portion of the workshop was devoted to exploring the **future of ESG**. Students were encouraged to reflect on how the concept would evolve in the coming years and how they, as **future professionals**, would contribute to its development. This reflective session provided valuable insights into how **ESG** will shape **business practices** in the future. Students were able to articulate their vision of how **companies** should embrace these principles and drive **change** in their respective industries.

The students' understanding of **ESG's significance** was demonstrated through their suggestions for **actionable steps** that **organizations** could take to integrate

these principles into their **operations**. Concrete examples included the implementation of **energy-efficient technologies**, the creation of **transparent corporate governance structures**, and the establishment of **policies** that promote **employee well-being** and **community development**.

Linnaeus University, Sweden

Integrating ESG Principles into Education at LNU

As the global economy shifts towards sustainable business practices, the role of **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) education** in shaping future professionals is becoming increasingly crucial. **Linnaeus University (LNU)** recognizes this imperative and has developed a range of **ESG-focused training programs** aimed at equipping students, professionals, and organizations with the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate sustainability into their operations.

Through interdisciplinary courses, specialized workshops, and applied research projects, **LNU** fosters an educational environment where sustainability, **ethical leadership**, and **corporate responsibility** are at the core of learning. These initiatives align with the latest European Union regulations on sustainability reporting, responsible investment, and environmental governance.

Key ESG Training Programs at LNU

LNU offers a diverse range of ESG-related courses and training sessions, designed to address different aspects of sustainable development. These programs cater to a broad audience, including students, business leaders, policymakers, and researchers. Some of the key ESG training initiatives include:

1. **Master's Program in Sustainable Structural Engineering**

This program integrates environmentally responsible construction methods, emphasizing life-cycle assessments, sustainable materials, and low-carbon design.

Students engage in real-world projects that assess the ESG impact of infrastructure, preparing them for leadership roles in the green building sector.

2. **Master's Program in Political Science focusing on Sustainable Democracy and Governance.**

This program integrates current questions of political science and international relations with the questions of sustainability. Courses include sustainability and multi-level governance, sustainable democracy, and others.

Students learn important ESG strategies implemented by various governments and different levels of governance (global, EU, national, regional, and municipalities).

3. **Sustainability in Business and Finance**

This course provides an overview of ESG risk management, ethical investment strategies, and compliance with EU sustainability regulations.

The program is particularly valuable for finance professionals looking to integrate ESG factors into investment decision-making.

4. **Energy and Environmental Management**

Designed for engineering and environmental science students, this course focuses on renewable energy systems, resource efficiency, and corporate environmental responsibility.

Participants learn about carbon footprint reduction strategies and the role of technology in achieving net-zero emissions.

5. **Circular Economy and Sustainable Innovation**

This initiative educates participants on circular supply chains, waste reduction, and product lifecycle sustainability.

The program is highly relevant for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and corporate sustainability managers looking to implement circular economy principles.

6. **Diversity and Social Responsibility in Organizations**

This training module explores inclusive leadership, workplace diversity, and social responsibility frameworks.

Participants gain insights into how ESG principles can improve organizational culture, employee well-being, and social equity.

Target Audience and Accessibility

LNU's ESG training programs are structured to cater to a wide range of learners, including:

- Undergraduate and graduate students seeking ESG expertise for careers in sustainability, engineering, business, and public policy.
- Industry professionals looking to integrate sustainable practices into corporate strategies.
- Entrepreneurs and business leaders aiming to develop ESG-compliant business models.
- Public sector employees and policymakers responsible for sustainability regulations and urban planning.

Impact and Future Directions

Linnaeus University's commitment to ESG education extends beyond coursework. Through collaborations with **industry leaders, government bodies, and research institutions**, LNU ensures that its **ESG programs** remain aligned with real-world challenges and evolving regulations.

By embedding **ESG principles** across various disciplines, LNU is preparing the next generation of professionals to lead in a world where **sustainability** is not just a goal, but a necessity. The university continues to expand its **training offerings, research projects, and international partnerships** to further strengthen its impact on sustainable development.

University of Almeria, Spain

ESG training and education programs

The University of Almería (UAL) stands out for its firm commitment to integrating Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles into its institutional strategy, academic programmes and campus culture. Through postgraduate education, interdisciplinary research and innovation in teaching practices, UAL ensures that ESG values are not only promoted, but also lived in the daily experiences of students, faculty and staff.

Key ESG-Oriented Postgraduate Programs at UAL

The UAL offers a wide range of master's degrees designed to prepare students to face global and local sustainability challenges with ethical and science-based approaches. These programmes equip future professionals with technical knowledge, critical thinking skills and a deep sense of responsibility towards the planet and society.

1. **Master's Degree in Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Ecosystem Services:** it is aimed at training professionals with an environmental profile within the paradigms, methodologies and cutting-edge techniques of environmental research and management. The Master's provides up-to-date knowledge on the sustainable use and valuation of ecosystem services, as well as the tools and methodology for the environmental management of resources, all under a multidisciplinary approach.

2. **Master's Degree in Sustainable Local Development and Co-development:** it is presented as a response to the social and institutional demand for professionals trained to promote development in various areas. This educational programme integrates knowledge from multiple disciplines, such as anthropology, economics and the environment, in order to train competent

and effective individuals. The master's degree examines crucial and contemporary aspects related to the progress of communities and individuals, covering local development in its various forms, development cooperation linked to migratory movements, and sustainability with a focus on the responsible use of resources. It seeks to train professionals who can boost the socioeconomic development of their communities of origin and promote sustainable and economically viable plans.

3. **Master's Degree in Environmental Education for Sustainability:** Aimed at educators and change agents, this degree empowers graduates to foster sustainable behaviors through formal and informal education. With a strong practical and theoretical foundation, students learn to promote transformative action and environmental awareness.

4. **Master's Degree in Circular Bioeconomy and Sustainability:** This cutting-edge program combines biotechnology, circular economy principles, and ecological thinking. It aims to contribute to the training of professionals capable of bringing about the paradigm shift from a linear economy to a circular economy, where waste is more than just a source of primary energy and becomes the raw material for high-value chains.

Research and Teaching Innovation for Sustainability

Beyond formal education, UAL actively encourages the integration of ESG principles into academic research and pedagogical innovation:

- Final Degree Projects and Doctoral Theses: The university promotes sustainability-themed topics across disciplines, encouraging students to investigate real-world problems through an ESG lens.
- Teaching Innovation Groups: academics are strongly encouraged to focus on sustainability in the form of initiatives including:
    - Resource optimization in environmental methodologies.

- Biodiversity monitoring as a tool for ecological awareness.
- The integration of ethics in environmental management education.
- Service-learning as a practical approach to embed sustainability into the curriculum.

Target Audiences

UAL's ESG-related initiatives in this area are designed to reach a wide audience:

- Graduate students pursuing careers in environmental management, education, public policy, and rural/urban development.
- Professionals seeking to deepen their understanding of sustainability and apply it to their sectors.
- Researchers and educators are committed to exploring and teaching ESG principles.

Unviersity of Lodz, Poland

ESG training and education programs

In response to the growing importance of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles in business operations, the **University of Łódź** has expanded its educational offerings to include **specialized ESG training programs.** These initiatives aim to equip professionals and enterprises with the necessary knowledge and skills to integrate sustainable practices into their operations, aligning with the latest European Union regulations.

Recognizing the imperative for sustainable development, the University of Łódź's Faculty of Management, through its Centrum Rozwoju Biznesu (Centre for Business Development), has introduced a series of **ESG-focused training sessions.** These programs are designed to cater to a diverse audience, including large organizations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and individual professionals seeking to deepen their understanding of ESG concepts.

Launched in July 2024, the **"Summer with ESG Training"** initiative offers both open and closed training sessions, providing flexibility to participants from various sectors. This initiative serves as an excellent opportunity for businesses and specialists to enhance their knowledge of sustainable development, prepare for its implementation, and adapt to the latest EU regulations.

Key Training Programs Offered

1. Basics of Sustainable Development Reporting in Accordance with CSRD and ESRS (Scheduled for August 13, 2024). This training focuses on the fundamentals of reporting sustainable development activities in line with the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). Participants will learn about the essential components of sustainability reporting, ensuring compliance with EU directives).
2. ESG in Practice: Sustainable Development for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (Held over two days, August 26-27, 2024, this program is tailored for SMEs, which constitute over 97% of the Polish market. Despite their significant presence, many SMEs have limited awareness and readiness to implement ESG principles. This training aims to bridge that gap by providing practical insights into sustainable development tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs.)

Beyond the primary programs, the University offers **specialized closed training sessions**, including:

1. Effective Diversity Management and Building Inclusive Organizations
2. Building and Maintaining Stakeholder Relationships
3. Sustainable Supply Chain Management
4. ESG Risk Management.

These modules allow organizations to delve deeper into specific areas of **ESG**, fostering a comprehensive understanding and application of sustainable practices.

The training sessions were led by **Dr. Agata Rudnicka,** recognized as one of the 25 Leaders of Sustainable Development by Forbes Women in 2021. With nearly two decades of experience, Dr. Rudnicka is dedicated to promoting corporate social responsibility and sustainable development. Her affiliations include the Faculty of Management at the University of Łódź, the Responsible Business Forum, and the Polish Institute for Human Rights and Business. She collaborates with various enterprises and business institutions to facilitate sustainable transformation.

Understanding and implementing **ESG principles** are no longer optional but essential for businesses aiming to remain competitive and responsible in today's market. For SMEs, in particular, early adoption of ESG practices can lead to improved market positioning and preparedness for future regulatory changes. The University of Łódź's ESG training programs are instrumental in guiding these enterprises through the complexities of sustainable development, ensuring they contribute positively to environmental and social outcomes while achieving economic success.

The University of Łódź's proactive approach in offering **ESG training** reflects a commitment to fostering sustainable business practices across various sectors. By providing comprehensive education and practical tools, these programs empower organizations and professionals to navigate the evolving landscape of corporate responsibility and sustainability effectively.

ImpactSci, Portugal

Case Study: The University of Porto's UPTEC Sustainability and ESG Training Initiative Background

The University of Porto's Science and Technology Park (**UPTEC**) has contributed to promoting sustainability and **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)** principles within both academic and business environments. Recognising the growing importance of sustainable practices in business strategies, **UPTEC** developed a series of training and educational programmes aimed at improving **ESG literacy** and aligning emerging ventures with global sustainability goals.

The **ESG initiative** at **UPTEC** consists of a range of workshops, seminars, and mentorship opportunities designed to integrate sustainability into business operations. One of the key events, "**Sustainability and ESG in Business Strategy**", brought together experts, entrepreneurs, students, and academics to explore the challenges and opportunities of incorporating **ESG principles** into organisational frameworks.

The initiative includes **workshops** that focus on applying **ESG principles** in practice, such as developing **sustainability strategies**, **ESG reporting**, and aligning with the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The curriculum provides practical tools, such as **carbon footprint analysis** and **social impact assessments**, to help participants implement **ESG practices** in their work.

Additionally, to workshops, **UPTEC** fosters collaboration between various **University departments**, including **engineering, management, and social sciences**, and the startups located within its **incubator**. This interdisciplinary approach ensures that **ESG principles** are integrated across multiple fields of study and applied in innovative ways. Also, **expert-led panels** and **case study presentations** form a central part of the initiative. These events feature **ESG leaders** from **multinational corporations**, **local businesses**, and **academic researchers**, who share insights on successful **sustainability initiatives**. For example, a panel discussion in 2023 explored how **ESG strategies** can mitigate **climate risks** while driving **profitability**.

The programme also includes **mentorship** and **consulting services**, which bridge the gap between **academic research** and **practical application**. **Startups** in the **UPTEC incubator** receive tailored advice on implementing **ESG standards**, which enhances their **investment appeal** and broadens their **societal impact**.

Over **300 students, entrepreneurs, and professionals** have participated in the initiative, gaining both foundational knowledge and practical skills in **ESG integration**. Several **startups** incubated at **UPTEC** have adopted **ESG-focused business models**, resulting in increased **funding opportunities** and improved **market positioning**. The programme has also fostered the development of a strong **community of ESG advocates**, creating opportunities for collaboration between **academia, businesses, and policymakers**.

The programme contributes to several of the **United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly **SDG 4 (Quality Education)**, **SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure)**, and **SDG 13 (Climate Action)**.

The combination of **theoretical and practical approaches** has allowed participants to apply **ESG principles** directly in their respective fields. Collaboration between the **University, startups, and industry experts** has extended the programme's reach and ensured its relevance. The success of the initiative positions **UPTEC** as a model that other universities can replicate in developing **ESG competencies** within their communities.

Through its **training programmes**, **UPTEC** demonstrates how universities can act as **catalysts for sustainable development**, equipping future leaders with the **knowledge and tools** necessary to drive **positive change**.

More info here: https://uptec.up.pt/pt-pt/sustentabilidade-e-esg-na-estrategia-dos-negocios-em-debate-na-uptec/

4.2 Initiatives on Public awareness campaigns and community outreach events

Belgrade Metropolitan University, Serbia

Promoting sustainable education for a greener future

Belgrade Metropolitan University is a key partner in the SHIFT project, an innovative initiative designed to transform education by integrating **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles** into higher learning institutions. As the European Union strives toward climate neutrality, it is crucial to prepare new generations of students who are capable of leading and managing this transition. The SHIFT project plays a significant role in advancing sustainable education by focusing on the introduction of the **ESG Impact Index** into higher education curricula, ensuring that students are equipped with the knowledge and practical skills necessary to address sustainability challenges.

Belgrade Metropolitan University's involvement in the SHIFT project represents a key component of a public awareness campaign focused on sustainability. The campaign aims to engage not only students but also the broader community in understanding the importance of **ESG principles** and their relevance in shaping a sustainable future. Through the project, the university contributes to raising awareness about the critical need for **climate action,** the reduction of **carbon emissions,** and the promotion of **social equity,** emphasizing the interconnectedness of **environmental, social, and governance factors.**

The university's active participation in the SHIFT project is designed to spread the message of **sustainability** across various stakeholders, including **students, faculty,** and the **public.** By embedding **sustainable practices** into the educational process, the university is creating a ripple effect that extends beyond the classroom. This approach encourages the broader community to recognize its role in the

transition to a more **sustainable** and **fair society.** The goal is to create a culture where **sustainability** is not only taught but also practiced at all levels of society.

Moreover, the BMU encourages public participation in **sustainability discussions**, both within and outside the university. **Public lectures**, **seminars**, and **workshops** are organized to educate the community about the practical applications of **ESG principles** and their importance in shaping future **policies** and **business practices**. These events provide a platform for **students** and **faculty** to exchange ideas with **experts**, engage in critical discussions, and collaborate on solutions to pressing **environmental** and **social issues**.

Belgrade Metropolitan University's active involvement in the SHIFT project aligns with the broader goals of the **European Green Deal** and the **United Nations Agenda 2030**. These international frameworks emphasize the need for **education** to be at the heart of the **sustainability transition**, promoting **lifelong learning** and the integration of **sustainable development** into all aspects of **public policy** and **business practice**. The university's efforts to incorporate **ESG principles** into its curriculum are in direct support of these goals, ensuring that **students** are well-prepared to meet the challenges of the future and lead the way toward achieving **climate neutrality**.

Linnaeus University, Sweden

Public awareness campaigns and community outreach events

Linnaeus University (LNU) is committed to fostering **sustainability**, **inclusivity**, and **social responsibility** through a range of public awareness campaigns and community outreach initiatives. These efforts aim to engage students, faculty, and the broader community in addressing key environmental and social challenges, reinforcing LNU's role as a leading institution in **sustainable development**. By integrating **climate action**, **diversity**, and **social equity** into its outreach activities, LNU ensures that its sustainability initiatives extend beyond the classroom, creating a lasting impact on both local and global communities.

Key Public Awareness Initiatives and Community Engagement Programs

1. **Sustainable Campus Initiative**

To promote sustainability awareness, LNU has transformed its campus into a living laboratory for environmentally friendly practices.

The university has implemented sustainable energy solutions, waste reduction programs, and biodiversity initiatives to reduce its carbon footprint.

Awareness campaigns, workshops, and student-led activities educate the university community on climate change, resource conservation, and responsible consumption.

2. **Green Travel Awareness Campaign**

Recognizing the importance of sustainable transportation, LNU launched the Green Travel Choices project in partnership with the municipality of Kalmar.

The campaign encourages students and staff to adopt eco-friendly travel options, such as biking, public transportation, and carpooling.

Workshops and promotional events provide insights into how individual travel choices impact carbon emissions and urban sustainability.

3. Climate Action Week

One of LNU's flagship community engagement events, Climate Action Week brings together students, researchers, policymakers, and industry leaders to discuss urgent environmental challenges.

Activities include panel discussions, climate hackathons, and film screenings on environmental sustainability.

The event raises awareness of Sweden's climate policies and the role of academia in driving sustainable change.

4. Diversity and Inclusion Awareness Campaign

LNU actively promotes cultural diversity, gender equality, and social inclusion through various initiatives:

Multicultural Festivals celebrate the cultural heritage of international students, fostering cross-cultural exchange.

Gender Equality and LGBTQ+ Advocacy Programs focus on creating a safe and inclusive learning environment.

Workshops and public talks address issues such as unconscious bias, workplace diversity, and social equity.

5. Beehives on Campus – A Biodiversity Awareness Project

To promote urban biodiversity and pollinator conservation, LNU installed beehives on the roof of Campus Kalmar.

The initiative raises awareness about the importance of bees in ecosystems, supporting biodiversity and food security.

Students and faculty participate in educational sessions on sustainable agriculture and wildlife conservation.

Impact and Recognition

Linnaeus University's public awareness campaigns have been widely recognized for their innovative approach to sustainability and community engagement. The Sustainable Campus Initiative and Climate Action Week have been highlighted as best practices in higher education sustainability efforts. By fostering environmental consciousness and social responsibility, LNU's initiatives ensure that students, faculty, and the broader community are actively engaged in building a more sustainable and inclusive society.

University of Almeria, Spain

Public awareness campaigns and community outreach events

In recent years, the University of Almería (UAL) has consolidated a comprehensive strategy aimed at implementing and promoting ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) principles, positioning itself as an institution committed to environmental sustainability, social equity, and transparent and responsible management. Some of the main initiatives that reflect this commitment are detailed below:

Environmental dimension:

One of the pillars of the UAL's ESG approach is its **strong commitment to caring for the environment.** This commitment is mainly articulated through the Decalogue of Good Environmental Practices, which establishes **ten key principles** aimed at the entire university community. Among the highlights of this decalogue are the **protection of fauna and flora, the responsible use of water and energy, proper waste management, sustainable mobility, and the integration of sustainability criteria in the procurement of goods and services.**

This decalogue forms part of the university's Code of Ethics and Conduct, which reinforces its normative and ethical value within the institution. In addition, its content is actively disseminated through awareness campaigns that seek to involve both students and teaching and administrative staff. A notable example is the social media initiative **'EcoUALízate',** present on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which regularly publishes content related to the university's environmental policy, sustainable urban planning, biodiversity, and citizen participation in environmental issues.

Social Dimension:

The UAL has also developed **multiple actions** aimed at fostering an equitable, inclusive, and socially committed university community. In this regard, it promotes and celebrates key dates such as International Women's Day, World Down Syndrome Day, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and LGBT Pride Day, among others. These commemorations include awareness-raising activities, conferences, workshops, and digital campaigns designed to highlight social issues and promote values of equality, respect, and diversity.

In the field of functional diversity, the UAL has developed **Functional Diversity Week,** an initiative consisting of a wide-ranging programme of activities aimed at raising awareness and improving the inclusion of people with **disabilities.** Among the actions carried out are a radio discussion on anti-disability, meetings with the Student Council to analyse inclusive practices, specific training for teachers on disability and educational needs, and theoretical and practical activities in collaboration with the ONCE Foundation, focusing on visual impairment.

In addition, the university hosted the 12th National Meeting of the SAPDU Network (Support Services for People with Disabilities at the University), one of the most important forums at the national level for the exchange of good practices and strategies that guarantee adequate attention to diversity within the Spanish university system.

In line with the promotion of **gender equality** and the encouragement of scientific vocations, the UAL promotes the IMPULSO STEM UAL programme, aimed especially at women and vulnerable groups. Around International Day of Women and Girls in Science, various activities are organised, such as visits by prominent female scientists to educational centres, round tables with professionals from the scientific field and meetings such as 'Coffee with Science', which seek to inspire young women to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), fields in which female representation remains low.

Governance:

Within the framework of responsible governance, the UAL stands out for **integrating ethics, transparency, and accountability as fundamental pillars of its institutional actions.** The **inclusion** of the environmental decalogue in the Code of Ethics and Conduct is an example of how ESG values are not treated as abstract principles but as concrete commitments that regulate university life. The university also encourages the **active participation** of its community in the design and implementation of institutional policies, contributing to democratic and participatory management.

In addition, the UAL participates in scientific and social outreach events such as the Feria Aula Almería, the European Researchers' Night, and Science Week, which promote knowledge about sustainability, science, and social responsibility, connecting research work with the general public.

Unviersity of Lodz, Poland

Public awareness campaigns and community outreach events

The University of Łódź (Łódź) has established itself as a leading institution in fostering **diversity** and **inclusivity** through its public awareness campaigns and community outreach initiatives. With a robust commitment to social sensitivity and equity, the university promotes values that resonate not only within its academic community but also across broader societal contexts. This case study examines the university's pioneering programs and their impact on promoting diversity, equality, and cross-cultural understanding.

The cornerstone of the University of Łódź's outreach initiatives lies in its dedication to diversity and inclusivity. These principles are formally enshrined in the university's **Gender Equality Plan (GEP),** launched in 2022, which outlines strategies to promote equality within the institution. This plan ensures that diversity management and social responsibility are ingrained into the university's operations, policies, and educational strategies.

In tandem with the GEP, the university operates the "University Diversity" project, which has been instrumental in fostering cultural, generational, and gender diversity. This initiative features activities such as photo exhibitions, community events, and academic discussions to bridge cultural gaps and celebrate shared human experiences.

Key Initiatives and Campaigns

1. The University Diversity Project

Launched in 2016, the "University Diversity" project serves as a flagship program for promoting inclusion and understanding. It features an annual photo exhibition and poster campaign that showcases the diverse backgrounds of students and staff. Each year, international students participate in themed photo sessions, sharing their unique stories and experiences. For instance, the 2017 campaign focused on the

theme “Why Łódź?” where participants highlighted their motivations for choosing the city as their academic home.

2. Christmas Guest Campaign

The "Christmas Guest" initiative is a heartwarming tradition aimed at connecting international students with local families. During the holiday season, families, including university staff, open their homes to students, allowing them to experience Polish Christmas traditions. This initiative not only provides students with a sense of belonging but also fosters mutual cultural appreciation between hosts and guests.

3. International Cookbook

As part of the University Diversity project, the university published an "International Cookbook" in 2017, featuring recipes from students representing 15 different countries. Alongside recipes, participants shared cultural narratives and traditional customs, offering a culinary lens into their diverse backgrounds. This project highlights the role of food as a unifying element and a platform for cultural exchange.

4. Diversity Day and Corridor Food Festival

Diversity Day is an annual celebration that explores various dimensions of diversity, including culture, gender, and disability. As part of the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus+ program in 2017, the university organized the "Faces of Diversity" conference, featuring discussions on the impact of student exchange programs. Complementing the academic discourse was the Corridor Food Festival, a vibrant event showcasing regional cuisines prepared by students from different countries, promoting culinary and cultural exchange.

5. Living Library Initiative

The Living Library program offers a unique platform for dialogue and understanding by enabling participants to "borrow" individuals representing minority groups for one-on-one conversations. Held multiple times a year, the initiative

challenges stereotypes and encourages empathy by allowing participants to gain firsthand insights into the lives and experiences of diverse community members.

The University of Łódź's public awareness campaigns have garnered both local and international acclaim. Notably, the **"University Diversity" project** won third place at the EUPRIO Awards, a prestigious competition for university marketing and communication initiatives in Europe. This recognition underscores the university's success in leveraging public engagement to promote inclusivity.

While the university's initiatives have been widely celebrated, implementing diversity programs at scale poses challenges. Ensuring sustained engagement, addressing cultural sensitivities, and measuring long-term impact are ongoing tasks. The university's commitment to continuous learning and adaptation has been crucial in overcoming these hurdles.

The University of Łódź exemplifies how institutions of higher education can **lead by example** in promoting diversity and inclusivity through public awareness campaigns and community outreach. By fostering meaningful connections and celebrating cultural richness, the university not only enhances the academic experience but also contributes to a more inclusive and empathetic society. Its efforts serve as a model for other institutions aiming to bridge societal divides and build a better future.

ImpactSci, Portugal

Case Study: ESG Awareness Week by the University of Lisbon Background

The **University of Lisbon** has actively engaged in promoting societal understanding of ESG principles. Through its ESG Awareness Week, the university interacts with the local community to raise awareness of sustainability, inclusivity, and responsible governance. This event is part of a broader strategy to connect academia with society in addressing global sustainability challenges.

ESG Awareness Week is a multi-day event aimed at educating and encouraging action among Students, residents, businesses, and policymakers. The initiative incorporates workshops, public talks, exhibitions, and interactive activities to highlight the significance of ESG principles in daily life. The main themes of the event include climate action, social equity, and ethical governance practices.

The event features public talks and panels with leading academics, policymakers, and industry experts, who address critical ESG issues such as **renewable energy, gender equality,** and **ethical supply chains.** These sessions offer practical insights and foster dialogue among diverse stakeholders. Community workshops are also organised, allowing participants to engage with topics such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and responsible consumerism. For example, one workshop teaches families how to calculate and reduce their carbon footprint.

A **Sustainability Fair** is held as part of the event, where local green businesses, non-profit organisations, and Student-led initiatives are showcased. Attendees can explore sustainable products and services, learn about community resources, and network with other people who share similar values. Youth engagement activities are also included, with events such as art contests, eco-themed games, and storytelling sessions designed to instil ESG values in younger audiences. Finally, partnerships with city officials, local NGOs, and businesses strengthen the impact of the campaign. For instance, the municipality co-hosts clean-up drives and urban greening projects during the week.

The initiative has engaged thousands of participants, significantly **increasing awareness of ESG principles across different demographics.** Surveys indicate that local knowledge about sustainable practices rises by 40% after each event. Many attendees report adopting eco-friendly habits, such as recycling and energy-saving practices, as a result of participating in the workshops. The event has also reinforced the University's position as a community leader in sustainability, fostering trust and collaboration with local stakeholders. Businesses and organisations that took part in the Sustainability Fair have reported new collaborations and opportunities to promote their own ESG initiatives.

The initiative highlighted the importance of accessibility, with events being offered in multiple languages and formats to attract a broad audience. Hands-on activities were particularly effective in turning awareness into action, as practical workshops and interactive events were found to be the most impactful. Also, partnerships with local entities and leveraging their networks significantly expanded the campaign's reach and effectiveness.

The **University of Lisbon's ESG Awareness Week** demonstrates how Universities can play a central role in community-focused sustainability initiatives. The program promotes ESG awareness and enhances the University's role as a catalyst for positive societal change by fostering dialogue, providing practical tools, and engaging diverse groups. This initiative serves as a model that other institutions can adopt to increase public engagement in sustainability and governance practices.

More info here: https://esgportugal.pt/images/esg/2024/Brochura_ESSGWeek2024.pdf

4.3 Partnerships with stakeholders

Belgrade Metropolitan University, Serbia

Building partnerships for sustainable education

Belgrade Metropolitan University plays a vital role as a partner in the SHIFT project, a transformative initiative aimed at aligning higher education with ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles. As the European Union works towards climate neutrality, it is essential to equip future generations with the knowledge and skills to lead this transformation. The SHIFT project's primary focus is on introducing the ESG Impact Index into higher education, enhancing curricula to better prepare students for the challenges of sustainability. BMU participation emphasizes the importance of strong partnerships with stakeholders, including other educational institutions, businesses, government agencies, and civil society, to achieve common sustainability goals.

The goal is **to integrate education for sustainable development** into the fabric of university life, ensuring that students not only gain theoretical knowledge but also acquire practical skills necessary for advancing sustainability in various sectors. Through this project, the university contributes to the global agenda of promoting sustainable development, supporting the European Green Deal, and meeting the targets set by Agenda 2030.

BMU engagement in the **SHIFT project** highlights the importance of partnerships with diverse stakeholders to achieve sustainable education goals. By working alongside other universities, governmental organizations, and sustainability-focused companies, the university strengthens its commitment to creating a curriculum that reflects the challenges and opportunities of sustainability. These partnerships are central to the project's success, enabling the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices across various sectors.

A **key focus** of these partnerships is the integration of the **ESG,** which helps universities assess and enhance their **ESG-related educational efforts.** The university

collaborates with experts and other institutions to continuously improve its curriculum and align it with current sustainability standards. By working together with stakeholders, BMU ensures that its graduates are well-prepared to meet the demands of a **sustainable economy** and contribute to **long-term solutions** for **environmental** and **social challenges.**

Through the SHIFT project, BMU has developed strong relationships with a wide array of stakeholders, including other **educational institutions, businesses,** and **public organizations.** These partnerships foster a collaborative approach to sustainability education, where ideas and strategies are exchanged to develop innovative solutions for sustainable development. Regular dialogue with stakeholders, including industry leaders, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations, helps ensure that the university's curriculum remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the labor market and society.

One of the notable outcomes of these collaborations is the creation of joint initiatives that promote **sustainability awareness** among students and the wider community. These initiatives include **public lectures, workshops,** and **internships** that allow students to engage with real-world sustainability issues and apply their learning in practical settings. By partnering with **industry** and **policy leaders,** BMU ensures that its students gain hands-on experience that is essential for building careers in sustainability.

The SHIFT project not only enhances education but also encourages stakeholders to work together in advocating for **policy changes** that promote sustainability at a broader level. Through its partnerships, BMU supports initiatives that aim to influence public policies and regulations related to climate action and sustainable business practices. Engaging with policymakers, businesses, and civil society, the university plays a key role in fostering dialogue and collaborative action on sustainability issues, contributing to the implementation of the European Green Deal and the UN's Agenda 2030.

Linnaeus University, Sweden

Partnerships with stakeholders

LNU's collaborative initiatives reflect a strong commitment to fostering responsible research, innovation, and sustainable development in line with global Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards. The university partners with various industry leaders, research institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to integrate ESG principles into academia, industry, and society.

Key initiatives include:

1. **The Bridge Collaboration**

The Bridge Collaboration represents a strategic alliance between LNU, IKEA, and Södra, aimed at advancing sustainable forestry practices and eco-friendly building solutions. This initiative fosters the **development of innovative building materials sourced from responsibly managed forests.** By **integrating sustainability** into the supply chain, the collaboration seeks to reduce the environmental footprint of construction and create greener urban environments**.**

Through joint research, LNU and its partners are working on the creation of **advanced timber-based solutions that are both environmentally friendly and commercially viable.** This partnership is essential for promoting circular economy principles and driving the transition towards sustainable urban development.

Key outcomes:

Sustainable Building Solutions: Development of timber-based materials that reduce reliance on non-renewable resources.

Forest Management Practices: Innovations in sustainable forestry to ensure the long-term health of forest ecosystems.

Cross-Sector Collaboration: Strengthened ties between academia, industry, and government bodies to promote environmental responsibility.

2. New European Bauhaus Partnership

LNU plays a pivotal role in the New European Bauhaus initiative, which focuses on promoting sustainable, inclusive, and aesthetically beautiful urban design. The New European Bauhaus aims to address climate challenges while fostering creativity and sustainability in the built environment. LNU's involvement ensures that cutting-edge research and solutions in sustainable urban planning are incorporated into the design of future cities.

By engaging with a broad network of stakeholders, LNU facilitates the integration of **environmentally conscious and socially inclusive urban designs** that will **shape the future of European cities.** The university's contributions to this partnership align with its commitment to sustainable architecture and green infrastructure.

Key outcomes:

Sustainable Urban Design: Development of urban spaces that integrate nature, promote biodiversity, and prioritize the well-being of citizens.

Cultural Inclusivity: Urban designs that reflect the diverse cultural and social fabric of European societies.

Innovation in Public Spaces: Encouraging the creation of green, multifunctional public spaces that contribute to the overall health of communities.

3. Sustainable Health Research Network

LNU's Sustainable Health Research Network focuses on addressing the intersection of sustainable healthcare systems and climate-resilient medical solutions. This **interdisciplinary collaboration** brings together experts from various fields, including public health, environmental sciences, and medicine, to develop **innovative solutions** that address the health challenges posed by climate change.

By working with national health agencies, NGOs, and international organizations, LNU is actively contributing to the creation of health systems that are **resilient** to the

impacts of climate change. The network explores ways to **reduce the carbon footprint** of healthcare infrastructure and provides solutions for climate-induced health risks.

Key outcomes:

Climate-Resilient Healthcare Systems: Innovations in healthcare systems that are robust to climate change and promote long-term public health.

Green Healthcare Practices: Development of environmentally sustainable practices in healthcare facilities, including energy-efficient buildings and waste reduction strategies.

Global Health Impact: Contribution to the global health agenda by addressing the growing health challenges linked to environmental change.

University of Almeria, Spain

The UALtransfierE program at the University of Almería (UAL) is a strategic initiative aimed at transferring knowledge generated within the university to society, fostering ***collaboration with businesses, social entities, and public organizations***. This effort is based on interaction with multiple stakeholders, establishing alliances that drive innovation and development in key sectors. Additionally, UALtransfierE incorporates a strong awareness component regarding ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) criteria, aligning with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

UALtransfierE represents a **key initiative** that not only **strengthens the relationship between UAL and its strategic stakeholders** but also **integrates ESG criteria into its projects.** Through this strategy, the university consolidates itself as a key player in the region's sustainable development, promoting an innovation model based on collaboration and positive impact on society and the environment

Collaboration with Stakeholders: Businesses, Municipalities, and Public Entities

One of the fundamental pillars of UALtransfierE is its focus on collaboration with strategic actors in the business and social ecosystem. The university acts as a bridge between academic research and the needs of the productive sector, establishing synergies with:

Businesses: Research and development projects in strategic sectors such as agribusiness, tourism, energy, and production technology allow companies to access advanced research and innovative solutions to their challenges.

Municipalities and Public Administrations: UAL works with local governments to implement innovative solutions in public management, ranging from energy efficiency to sustainable urban planning.

Third Sector Organizations: Cooperation with NGOs and associations is fostered to address social challenges through knowledge and technology transfer.

These agreements not only strengthen the connection between academia and the business world but also create employment opportunities for students and graduates of the university.

Commitment to Environmental Sustainability

As part of its ESG strategy, UALtransfierE promotes various initiatives to reduce environmental impact and foster sustainability:

Energy efficiency: Optimization of energy consumption in UAL facilities and promotion of renewable energy use.

Waste management: Implementation of recycling and waste reduction programs in collaboration with local entities.

Sustainable mobility: Development of actions to encourage the use of public transport, bicycles, and carpooling among the university community and associated companies.

Social Innovation and Sustainable Development

UALtransfierE also promotes projects with significant social impact, focused on:

Reducing inequality: Collaboration with businesses and organizations to create inclusive and accessible employment.

Gender equality: Promotion of projects that foster equity in the workplace and education.

Public health and well-being: Development of technological solutions applied to health and community well-being.

Governance and Transparency

The program also establishes principles of responsible governance in its agreements with stakeholders. Values such as transparency, ethical management, and accountability are prioritized in every action.

Unviersity of Lodz, Poland

Partnerships with stakeholders

The RiEcoLab project, led by the University of Łódź, represents an ambitious initiative under the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Consortium Responsible Innovation-Led Entrepreneurial University Transformation Centres. Supported by a subgrant agreement (21307) between EIT Manufacturing and University of Łódź, RiEcoLab aims to **redefine the role of universities in fostering responsible research, innovation, and entrepreneurship through the creation of Ecosystem Integration Labs** (EILs). These labs embody a transformative approach to **research, innovation, and stakeholder engagement.**

The **primary goal** of the RiEcoLab project is to **revolutionize the way research and development (R&D) are performed within universities,** ensuring a seamless transition from academic innovation to commercial spin-offs. This is achieved by involving a wide array of internal stakeholders, academic and non-academic staff, as well as students, and fostering collaborations with external stakeholders such as investors, businesses, and governmental bodies. The overarching vision is to enhance universities' **entrepreneurial and innovative capacities while promoting sustainable development through responsible research and innovation (RRI).**

EILs are the cornerstone of the RiEcoLab project, serving as hybrid infrastructures that integrate physical and virtual environments to support startups and foster innovation ecosystems. Each participating university, including the University of Łódź, University College Dublin (Ireland), Wageningen Research (Netherlands), National University of Political Science and Public Administration (Romania) and Yaşar University (Turkey), developed an EIL tailored to their regional needs and innovation potential. These labs were established using the HEInnovate needs assessment framework and aligned with each institution's smart specialization strategies.

The EILs facilitate:

1. **Support for Spin-Offs and Startups:** Enhanced technology transfer offices and advisory boards guide and fund new ventures.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Mandatory training sessions equip staff and students with the tools to navigate the entrepreneurial landscape.
3. **Public-Private Collaboration:** Partnerships with impact investors bridge gaps between academic innovation and commercial opportunities.
4. **Operational Sustainability:** Comprehensive performance measurement systems ensure EILs remain impactful.

The success of EILs hinges on robust partnerships with diverse stakeholders. Below are notable examples that demonstrate the impact of these collaborations:

1. **Yaşar University's Agri-Food Accelerator Supported by RiEcoLab,** Yaşar University's EIL secured €1 million from the Turkish government to establish itself as an official accelerator for agri-food innovations. This initiative exemplifies how EILs can attract public funding and industry engagement to address critical regional challenges.
2. **Cross-Sector Collaboration in Łódź At UŁ**, partnerships with local industries and public bodies facilitated the integration of RRI principles into research and development projects. This collaboration resulted in improved commercialization processes, refined intellectual property strategies, and a sustainable innovation ecosystem that benefits both academia and society.
3. **Wageningen Research's Sustainability** Focus Wageningen Research leveraged its EIL to prioritize sustainability-driven spin-offs, aligning with its expertise in agriculture and environmental sciences. This strategic focus attracted international investors and reinforced the lab's role as a hub for responsible innovation.

RiEcoLab has driven institutional change within participating universities by redefining internal processes and fostering a culture of innovation. Key outcomes include:

1. **Policy Enhancements:** New guidelines for research strategies, ethics, and commercialization were developed.
2. **Skill Development:** Comprehensive training programs enhanced the entrepreneurial competencies of staff and students.
3. **Reputation Building:** EILs bolstered the global reputation of participating HEIs, positioning them as innovation leaders.

The project's success is attributed to the following best practices:

1. **Incremental Scaling:** Starting with small research teams and expanding to faculty-wide initiatives.
2. **Stakeholder Communication:** Using compelling narratives to convey the vision and impact of the project.
3. **Tailored Strategies:** Customizing approaches to suit the unique needs of each HEI and its ecosystem.

The RiEcoLab consortium faced challenges such as tight project timelines and the need to align diverse institutional priorities. However, the dedication of the participating teams and the support of EIT Manufacturing ensured **successful project** completion.

Moving forward, the focus will be on **operationalizing EILs** by recruiting research projects, fostering new collaborations, and integrating RRI principles into ongoing initiatives. These efforts aim to solidify the role of EILs as dynamic platforms for innovation and societal impact.

The RiEcoLab project highlights the **transformative potential of Ecosystem Integration Labs in fostering responsible innovation and entrepreneurship.** By building strong partnerships with stakeholders and institutionalizing best practices,

the project has laid a foundation for sustainable innovation ecosystems that bridge the gap between academia and society. As the EILs continue to evolve, they promise to serve as models for innovation-driven institutional transformation across the globe.

ImpactSci, Portugal

Case Study: Corporate Governance and ESG Program by Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics

The **Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics (CLSBE)** has positioned itself as a leader in fostering partnerships that support **ESG initiatives**. Recognising the importance of collaboration in addressing ESG challenges, CLSBE developed the **Corporate Governance and ESG Program** in collaboration with industry leaders, regulatory bodies, and non-governmental organisations. The initiative seeks to enhance ESG competencies among executives, policymakers, and students while building a network of stakeholders committed to sustainable practices.

The **Corporate Governance and ESG Program** is designed to combine academic rigor with practical insights to improve ESG literacy and governance standards. It aims to create shared value through collaboration among stakeholders and prepares participants to lead in a world increasingly influenced by sustainability imperatives.

The program involves a diverse range of stakeholders, including multinational corporations, financial institutions, consulting firms, and public agencies. These partners contribute to the program through case studies, mentorship, and guest lectures, ensuring that the content remains relevant to real-world situations. The curriculum covers key ESG topics such as **sustainable finance**, **ethical leadership**, **corporate governance**, and **impact measurement**, with a strong focus on integrating ESG into decision-making processes at all organisational levels.

Participants engage with practical case studies provided by partner organisations, which highlight both successful ESG implementations and challenges encountered. These case studies offer participants insights into the application of ESG

frameworks and provide strategies for addressing common obstacles. Participants also collaborate on action-oriented projects that address real-world ESG challenges faced by the programme's partner organisations. These projects often result in actionable recommendations, linking the university's expertise with stakeholder impact. Networking sessions and roundtable discussions allow stakeholders to exchange best practices, explore synergies, and discuss emerging trends in ESG.

More than **150 senior leaders** from corporations, public institutions, and NGOs have completed the program, acquiring key skills to integrate ESG principles into their organisational strategies. The program has strengthened relationships between CLSBE and its corporate and institutional partners, leading to new research projects, internships, and consulting opportunities. The action-oriented projects have resulted in tangible outcomes, including **improvements in sustainability reporting practices** and the development of **innovative ESG investment products** by partner orga nisations. As a result, CLSBE has established itself as a thought leader in ESG education and governance, influencing policy and business practices in Portugal and beyond. The involvement of diverse stakeholders in the program enriches the content, ensuring that it remains relevant and addresses real-world challenges. The emphasis on practical application through actionable projects and real-world case studies has proven effective in enhancing learning outcomes and providing immediate value to stakeholders. Sustained collaboration with partners has strengthened relationships and generated opportunities for long-term impact.

The **Corporate Governance and ESG Program** by **Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics** illustrates how universities can collaborate with stakeholders to promote ESG principles. CLSBE has established a model for addressing sustainability challenges while fostering a culture of **ethical leadership** and **innovation** through the combination of academic excellence and practical partnerships.

More info here: https://clsbe.lisboa.ucp.pt/pt-pt/corporate-governance-e-esg/programa-detalhado

4.4 Engagement with policymakers

Belgrade Metropolitan University, Serbia

SHIFT at LIMEN 2024 – Advocating for ESG in Higher Education

At the **10th International Scientific Conference LIMEN 2024**, held in Vienna, the BMU project took the opportunity to advocate for the **integration of ESG principles in higher education**. Professors from Belgrade Metropolitan University — **Vladimir Škorić**, **Zorica Lazić**, and **Goran Pavlović** — presented the abstract *"The Impact of ESG Integration on Higher Education Institutions,"* showcasing how ESG is reshaping academic environments and influencing students' education and career paths.

This conference served as an essential platform for engaging with **policymakers**, fostering dialogue on sustainability, social equity, and governance in academia. By attending, the SHIFT project highlighted the **importance of ESG in higher education**, helping shape the future of policies that support sustainability goals and a greener, more inclusive academic landscape. The event provided an opportunity to connect with key stakeholders, discuss the challenges and benefits of ESG integration, and advocate for **regulatory changes** that will encourage universities to adopt these principles more widely.

Attending conferences such as **LIMEN 2024** provides an invaluable platform for connecting with **policymakers** and fostering meaningful discussions on important issues like **ESG integration in higher education**. When researchers, such as those from **Belgrade Metropolitan University** presenting the **SHIFT project**, attend these conferences, they not only engage in dialogue with other academics but also directly interact with policymakers and influencers who shape education and sustainability policies.

One of the key opportunities provided by attending such events is the ability to present research papers that address current challenges and propose actionable solutions. By presenting a paper like **"The Impact of ESG Integration on Higher**

Education Institutions," participants can directly influence the policy debate, showcasing how ESG principles are reshaping universities and impacting students' education, career opportunities, and the campus environment. This act of presenting a well-researched paper allows policymakers to gain insights into practical, research-backed recommendations for future policy directions.

Moreover, conferences often serve as a space for networking with **government representatives, industry leaders, and other decision-makers**. These connections enable researchers to highlight the importance of sustainable education and advocate for policies that encourage universities to adopt ESG frameworks. By engaging with policymakers in such settings, researchers can emphasize the urgency of aligning academic institutions with sustainability goals and influence future regulations that foster this alignment.

Furthermore, the discussions and exchanges that take place at conferences like **LIMEN 2024** create an opportunity to hear policymakers' concerns and priorities, allowing researchers to tailor their advocacy efforts accordingly. By hearing about the theme, policymakers can become better informed about the role of higher education in achieving sustainability targets, which may lead to more robust and informed policy development. Ultimately, these interactions strengthen the push for integrating ESG principles into education systems globally.

Linnaeus University, Sweden

Engagement with policymakers to advocate for ESG policies and regulations

As global challenges intensify, the integration of **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) policies** has become pivotal in shaping sustainable futures. **Universities**, as hubs of knowledge and innovation, play a unique role in bridging the gap between research and actionable policymaking. This case study explores initiatives undertaken by **LNU**, which, through strategic engagement with **policymakers**, advocate for the integration of ESG principles into national and international frameworks.

The framework for engagement at **LNU** draws from the principles outlined in the **Declaration of Social Responsibility of Universities (DSOU)**. This document, endorsed by a consortium of over 160 institutions, emphasizes the collective responsibility of academia in addressing societal challenges through **education**, **research**, and **policy advocacy**. A significant focus is placed on establishing **partnerships** that promote sustainable practices across sectors, making universities vital drivers of change in the global ESG landscape.

LNU has demonstrated exemplary approaches in overcoming these challenges through various initiatives:

1. Green Sustainable Development Knowledge Hub

LNU's Green Sustainable Development Knowledge Hub functions as a think tank, providing policymakers with timely and well-researched policy recommendations on environmental governance and the green transition. By creating a **centralized platform** for collaboration, this initiative connects researchers, students, and external partners, including government bodies, to address pressing environmental challenges.

Actions Taken:

- Establishment of a central coordination unit for policy-relevant research.

- Development of a comprehensive database linking policymakers with experts and students skilled in ESG domains.
- Hosting regular workshops and forums to foster dialogue on green transition priorities.

Impact:

- Enhanced access for policymakers to evidence-based recommendations.
- Strengthened interdisciplinary approaches to tackling global sustainability challenges.

2. Water and Climate Policy Advisory Group

The Water and Climate Policy Advisory Group focuses on developing research-backed policies for sustainable water management and climate adaptation strategies. LNU brings together experts in hydrology, environmental science, and climate studies to guide national and regional policies on water resilience, climate change mitigation, and adaptation.

Actions Taken:

- Formation of a specialized task force to tackle pressing water and climate policy issues.
- Coordination with national governments and international organizations on climate resilience strategies.
- Creation of publications addressing water policy and climate adaptation best practices.
- Impact:
- Strengthened policy frameworks for water conservation and climate change adaptation.
- Increased collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders in addressing climate-related issues.

3. Circular Economy in Higher Education Policies

Incorporating circular economy principles into higher education governance is a key area of focus at LNU. This initiative advocates for policies that promote the

reduction, reuse, and recycling of resources within universities, while simultaneously fostering broader societal shifts toward circularity.

Actions Taken:

- Adoption of circular economy principles in university governance and management.
- Collaboration with policymakers to influence the integration of circular economy models into national education policies.
- Implementation of sustainability initiatives on campus to model circularity for students and the broader community.

Impact:

- Positioned LNU as a leader in sustainability within the higher education sector.
- Encouraged other institutions to adopt circular economy practices in governance and operations.

4. National Climate Framework Advocacy

LNU has played an active role in shaping Sweden's national climate policies by engaging in discussions that align academic research with the nation's sustainability goals. Through these efforts, the university aims to **influence national climate strategies,** ensuring that Sweden continues to make progress on its environmental commitments.

Actions Taken:

- Active participation in Sweden's climate policy discussions and public consultations.
- Dissemination of academic research findings to inform national climate action plans.
- Engagement with government bodies to align climate policies with global sustainability frameworks.

Impact:

- Strengthened Sweden's national climate framework in alignment with global sustainability goals.
- Enhanced collaboration between academia, government, and industry on climate resilience and carbon reduction strategies.

To further enhance **ESG awareness** and integration across different sectors, LNU offers several recommendations aimed at strengthening both academic and practical engagement with **ESG**: LNU recommends fostering stronger collaborations between **industry** and **academia** to integrate ESG principles into **corporate governance** and business practices. These partnerships should focus on collaborative research projects, internships, and industry-sponsored academic programs to enable students to gain real-world experience and businesses to adopt sustainable practices grounded in cutting-edge academic research.

University of Almeria, Spain

Engagement with policymakers to advocate for ESG policies and regulations

In a global context characterized by the growing **water scarcity** and the urgent need to move towards more **sustainable policies**, the University of Almería (UAL) reaffirms its commitment to ESG (environmental, social, and governance) principles through initiatives that promote **dialogue, knowledge transfer,** and **collaboration** among key actors. One of the most notable expressions of this commitment is the organization of a specialized course on **integrated water management,** an initiative that transcends the academic sphere to become a true forum for dialogue between the university, industry, public entities, and policymakers.

This course was part of the UAL's institutional strategy to position itself as an active player in the construction of **sustainable solutions** to complex challenges, such as water management in regions with increasing **water stress.** Throughout the course, the program addressed fundamental aspects of the **water cycle:** from purification and treatment to reuse, efficient use, sludge management, and quality and supply assurance for human consumption. All these elements have a strong **environmental** and regulatory component and are essential to the **ESG agenda** at both the national and international levels.

One of the most distinctive features of this course was its focus on **direct interaction between researchers and policy makers.** This approach responds to the **growing need for public policies** to be based on scientific evidence, while academic research responds to the real needs of the territory and its citizens. In this regard, the participation of representatives from institutions and the private sector was crucial. Figures such as the Councilor for Water, Green Areas, and Agriculture and Third Deputy Mayor of the City Council of Almería, the head of the industrial environment department at the Cosentino Group, and the head of knowledge management and the environment at Aqualia, among others, contributed their practical and political perspectives on the challenges facing cities and companies in the field of water.

The event was also attended by academics, technicians from standardization bodies, and highly respected specialists, who reviewed the most relevant legislative changes in the field of water treatment and purification. Both the challenges and opportunities arising from these regulatory changes were highlighted, emphasizing the need for adaptation by all stakeholders. Emerging issues such as **sludge treatment** and **water regeneration and reuse** were also discussed, a field that is becoming increasingly important in the face of climate change and pressure on aquifers.

The main added value of this initiative lies in its ability to create a space for effective dialogue between different sectors. By bringing together academics, industry representatives (such as FCC Aqualia and Cosentino), public entities, policymakers, and regulatory bodies, the University of Almería was able to facilitate a **collaborative ecosystem** aimed at promoting informed, viable, and socially accepted policies. In this sense, the course not only served as a training opportunity, but also as a mechanism to influence the shaping of **sustainable public policies**, in line with **ESG principles**.

Such initiatives position the UAL as a leader in the field of sustainability and resource management, demonstrating how universities can play an active role in the development and implementation of environmental policies. Thanks to actions such as this, a model of governance based on evidence, consensus, and innovation is being promoted, three fundamental pillars for addressing current and future water challenges.

In short, the course on integrated water management organized by the University of Almería is a tangible example of how **collaboration** between academia, policymakers, and the private sector can generate valuable synergies to advance the effective implementation of ESG strategies. In a world that increasingly demands sustainable solutions, the UAL is positioning itself as a committed player with a transformative vision and the ability to influence policies that will shape the course of our social and environmental development.

Unviersity of Lodz, Poland

Engagement with policymakers to advocate for ESG policies and regulations

As global challenges intensify, the integration of **environmental, social, and governance (ESG) policies** has become pivotal in shaping sustainable futures. Universities, as hubs of knowledge and innovation, play a unique role in bridging the gap between research and actionable policymaking. This case study explores initiatives undertaken by higher education institutions in Poland, which, through strategic engagement with **policymakers**, advocate for the integration of ESG principles into national and regional frameworks.

The framework for engagement draws from the principles outlined in the **Declaration of Social Responsibility of Universities (DSOU)**. This document, endorsed by a consortium of over 160 institutions, emphasizes the collective responsibility of academia in addressing societal challenges through education, research, and policy advocacy. A significant focus is placed on establishing **partnerships** that promote sustainable practices across sectors.

Engaging policymakers in ESG-related discussions requires overcoming several barriers:

1. Limited financial resources often restrict the scope of projects and collaborative initiatives.
2. Policymakers may lack a comprehensive understanding of ESG principles, creating a need for targeted educational outreach.
3. Inconsistent national and regional policies complicate the alignment of academic recommendations with legislative agendas.
4. Access to advanced tools and platforms for policy simulation and impact analysis remains limited in some academic settings.

Polish universities have demonstrated exemplary approaches in overcoming these challenges, as illustrated by the following cases:

1. University of Łódź – Science Hub Initiative

The **University of Łódź** launched the **Science Hub UŁ** to bridge the gap between **academic expertise and policymaking.** By creating a centralized platform for collaboration, the initiative connects researchers, students, and external partners, including government bodies, to address pressing societal challenges.

Actions Taken:

- Establishment of a central coordination unit for policy-relevant research.
- Development of a database linking policymakers with experts and students skilled in ESG domains.
- Regular workshops and forums to foster dialogue on ESG priorities.

Impact:

- Enhanced policymaker access to evidence-based recommendations.
- Strengthened interdisciplinary approaches to policy challenges.

2. University of Economics in Kraków – Responsible UEK Program

Recognizing the importance of inclusivity in ESG policymaking, the University of Economics in Kraków implemented the Responsible UEK project. This initiative aims to instill social responsibility values among stakeholders while promoting ESG-aligned policies at various governance levels.

Actions Taken:

- Formation of a task force to coordinate ESG advocacy efforts.
- Hosting public debates and discussions on sustainable economic policies.
- Publication of policy briefs addressing local governance challenges.

Impact:

- Creation of a robust dialogue framework between academia and policymakers.
- Increased visibility for ESG issues in regional policy circles.

Through persistent engagement, universities have successfully:

1. **Influenced Policy Agendas:** By providing research-backed recommendations, universities have contributed to the formulation of ESG regulations that align with global sustainability goals.
2. **Built Capacities:** Educational programs targeting policymakers have increased awareness of ESG principles and their implications.
3. **Promoted Collaboration:** Multi-stakeholder partnerships, facilitated by universities, have bridged gaps between academia, government, and industry.

Recommendations that can be advised to other HEIs

1. Establish dedicated liaison offices within universities to streamline communications with policymakers.
2. Advocate for increased government and international funding to support ESG research and advocacy projects.
3. Develop pilot programs in collaboration with policymakers to test and refine ESG initiatives before broader implementation.

The **proactive engagement** of Polish universities in ESG advocacy demonstrates the transformative potential of academia in shaping sustainable futures. By fostering collaboration with policymakers and addressing systemic challenges, these institutions underscore the vital role of higher education in **advancing global sustainability goals.**

ImpactSci, Portugal

Case Study: Project SIGMA: Advancing ESG Policies in Local Municipalities

Project SIGMA (Sustainability, Innovation, and Governance in Municipal Action) is an initiative led by a consortium of **Universities**, including the University of Coimbra, in partnership with local **municipalities** and government agencies. The project aims to integrate **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles** into municipal decision-making processes and establish a framework for sustainable local governance. Recognising the role of municipalities in implementing national sustainability goals, Project SIGMA seeks to equip **policymakers** with the tools, knowledge, and frameworks necessary to drive ESG-based innovation and development at the local level.

Project SIGMA is a comprehensive initiative designed to promote collaboration between **Universities**, municipalities, and policy-making bodies. The program focuses on providing evidence-based research, tailored ESG training, and actionable recommendations to assist local governments in creating and enforcing sustainable policies.

A key element of the project is the development of localized **ESG policy frameworks**, which are created through collaboration between Universities and municipalities. These frameworks address challenges such as **climate adaptation**, **social equity**, and transparent governance, with a focus on meeting the specific needs of each region. Workshops are organised for municipal leaders, policymakers, and technical staff to enhance their understanding of ESG principles. These sessions cover topics such as **sustainability reporting**, urban planning for climate resilience, and strategies for attracting green investment.

Universities also provide municipalities with **research** and analytical tools to help monitor and assess the impact of their policies. These tools include **environmental impact assessments**, social equity indices, and governance audits. The program also supports municipalities in implementing **pilot projects** that align

with ESG goals. Examples of these projects include initiatives for **sustainable urban mobility**, **renewable energy adoption**, and community-driven social programs. Additionally, Project SIGMA facilitates dialogue between local governments and national policymakers to ensure that municipal initiatives align with broader ESG regulations. The project also creates platforms for municipalities to share their successes and challenges, fostering a collaborative approach to sustainability.

Several municipalities involved in Project SIGMA have adopted innovative ESG policies, such as **green procurement guidelines**, carbon-neutral urban planning strategies, and community-led social equity programmes. These municipalities reported improved governance practices, including increased transparency and enhanced stakeholder engagement, as a direct result of adopting ESG frameworks. Besides, municipalities participating in the project have successfully attracted funding for **ESG-aligned projects** from national and international sources, including grants for renewable energy and urban development.

The collaboration between universities and municipalities has also facilitated a two-way exchange of knowledge. Universities have gained practical insights into local governance challenges, while municipalities have benefited from access to cutting-edge **academic research** and expertise.

The project highlighted the importance of tailoring **ESG frameworks** to suit the unique characteristics of each municipality. This approach ensured greater adoption and success. The collaboration between Universities and municipalities was also crucial in bridging knowledge gaps and aligning ESG goals with the practical realities of local governance. Additionally, the use of data and **evidence-based decision-making** proved to be a powerful tool in strengthening policy design and increasing the credibility of municipal initiatives when advocating for funding or regulatory support.

Project SIGMA demonstrates the significant role universities can play in shaping public policy and advancing ESG principles at the local government level. The initiative offers a replicable model for fostering sustainable development through

informed policymaking, combining academic expertise with municipal governance. The success of Project SIGMA highlights the potential of **university-government collaborations** to drive meaningful change in achieving sustainability goals.

More info here: https://ccp.pt/2024/03/inovacao-e-desenvolvimento-local-esg-nos-municipios-o-projecto-sigma/

Chapter 5: Monitor and Reporting ESG Performance

5.1 Determining metrics for measuring progress towards achieving ESG goals and objectives

Determining metrics for measuring progress towards achieving ESG goals involves a systematic approach to identify, implement, and track key performance indicators (KPIs). Here's a step-by-step process: ~

1. Identify Material ESG Issues

Understand Stakeholder Priorities: Engage with stakeholders to understand their ESG challenges.

ESG Policies: Review HEI-specific ESG European and national policies.

2. Set Clear Goals and Objectives

Define Goals and Objectives: Establish specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals and objectives for each ESG dimension.

Align with Strategy: Ensure ESG goals align with the overall ESG strategy.

3. Select Appropriate Metrics

Environmental Metrics, Social Metrics, Governance Metrics

By following these steps, HEIs can effectively measure and demonstrate their progress towards achieving ESG goals and objectives, ensuring they meet stakeholder expectations and contribute to sustainable development.

5.2 Integration of ESG goals and objectives into institutional policies and practices

ESG dimension	ESG goal	ESG objective	Policies and Practices
Environment	SDG 4 – Quality Education	1. Lack of Awareness and Environmental Education	Courses, workshops, and awareness campaigns: On topics such as sustainability, circular economy, and waste management, aimed at the university community. Projects like Grön Stadsby (Green Cities): Includes the creation of green spaces and sustainable gardens to promote biodiversity and improve air quality. Afforestation and green energy initiatives: Specific actions such as tree planting and the use of renewable energy sources.
Environment	SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals	2. Lack of Institutional and Systemic Support	Financial support for students in competitions: The institution defines financial support initiatives, although they are limited to specific events. Equality of opportunity plan: Includes support for minorities and social inclusion programs. Access to basic services: Such as the introduction of food in the cafeteria to ease students' lives. Transparency and accountability policies: Through the portal and external audits. Student participation: The student parliament has a role on the board, although it could be expanded.
Environment	SDG 12 – Responsible Production and Consumption	3. Inefficiencies in the Digitalization and Operationalization of the SDGs	Digitalization of administrative processes: Although there is an intention to reduce paper usage, the implementation has not achieved the desired results. Mandatory online questionnaires: To evaluate professors and courses before exams, which promotes feedback but has efficiency issues. Implementation of sustainability operational plans:

			Related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but lacking proper coordination.
Environment	SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities	4. Infrastructure and Use of Energy Resources	Use of renewable energy, Such as solar panels and energy-saving systems. Sustainable mobility: Bike lanes and charging points for electric vehicles. Adaptation of existing spaces: Improvement of infrastructure to make them functional and pleasant, such as green courtyards. Internal competition to save energy: Leadership initiative to reduce electricity costs with the collaboration of the entire community.
Governance	SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals	5. Lack of Connection and Coordination in the Implementation of the SDGs and ESG	Operational plans: Defined by the university and faculties, they guide the implementation of the SDGs, but there is a lack of coordination. Sustainability policy: General approach for implementing the SDGs, but it is not yet fully integrated at all levels
Governance	SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	6. Limitations in Governance and Participation	Governance principles: Promote respect, participation, transparency, and accountability in university decisions. Student parliament: Increases student participation in decision-making
Governance	SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth	7. Budgetary Restrictions and Short-Term Decision-Making	Cost-saving initiatives: University leadership involves everyone to generate cost-saving ideas in response to rising costs. Financial support: Initiatives are offered to support students in competitions and activities, despite budgetary restrictions

Governance	SDG 4 – Quality Education	8. Deficiencies in Training and Internal Communication	Improvement of communication among professors: Promotes cooperation and enhances faculty competencies. Email response policy: A 48-hour deadline is set for responding to emails, although it is not always applied consistently
Social	SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth	9. Unfavorable Communication and Work Conditions	Communication channels are improved, such as emails and suggestion boxes, to keep students informed about faculty practices
Social	SDG 5 – Gender Equality	10. Gender Inequality and Diversity	Spaces are optimized to make them more functional and pleasant, with projects like EUniWell being implemented to improve well-being in university spaces.
Social	SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities	11. Lack of Adequate Spaces	The university promotes gender equality and inclusion with policies and awareness programs, along with scholarships for underrepresented groups.
Social	SDG 4 – Quality Education	12. Equitable Access to Education and Resources	Scholarships and mental health programs are offered, and tuition fees are reduced for students from rural areas, improving access to education.

Monitor and reporting ESG performance

SDG 4 – Quality Education	Environmental	E1. Awareness and Environmental Education

Indicator 1: Student Engagement in Environmental Education Programs

Definition: This KPI measures the level of student participation in environmental education initiatives, such as sustainability courses, workshops, seminars, and extracurricular activities.

Measurement:

Number of students enrolled: The total number of students enrolled at the HEI, or a subset (e.g., students enrolled in sustainability programs).

Number of programs or activities offered: The total number of environmental courses, workshops, or sustainability initiatives provided by the HEI.

Types of student participation:

- Enrollment in sustainability-related courses (e.g., sustainability-focused electives, environmental science).
- Attendance in workshops and events (e.g., environmental awareness seminars, volunteer programs).
- Involvement in extracurricular environmental activities (e.g., student environmental clubs, sustainability challenges).

Participation metrics included:

- **Quantitative data:** Total number of students participating or enrolled in each category (courses, events, clubs).
- **Qualitative data:** Student feedback or surveys assessing engagement quality and program impact.

Compilation Requirement:

1. Calculate the KPI by dividing **the total number of students** engaged in **environmental programs** by the total number of **enrolled students** or **environmental programs**.
2. Track and report **participation** in each type of engagement (courses, workshops, extracurriculars) separately to identify areas of improvement.
3. **Report** both overall student participation rates and more granular data (e.g., by department, faculty, or type of program) to analyze trends.

Guidance: Student engagement in environmental education programs is a reflection of the HEI's ability to raise awareness and educate on sustainability. Tracking engagement through specific programs and activities allows HEIs to identify which areas need more promotion or support. Normalization of student engagement (e.g., per enrolled student or per program) allows for comparison across years or institutions, helping highlight improvements or areas that may require additional resources.

Indicator 2: Faculty Participation in Sustainability Training and Research

Definition: This KPI measures the degree to which faculty members participate in professional development related to sustainability and contribute to sustainability-focused research.

Measurement:

Number of faculty members: The total number of faculty members, or faculty within specific departments or disciplines.

Number of professional development opportunities: The total number of sustainability-related training programs or workshops offered to faculty members.

Types of faculty participation:

- **Faculty participation in sustainability training: Attendance** in workshops, seminars, and online courses related to sustainability.
- **Faculty contribution to sustainability research**: Number of sustainability-focused research projects, publications, and collaborations.

Research and training metrics included:

- **Quantitative data:** Number of faculty who attended sustainability workshops or contributed to sustainability research projects/publications.
- **Qualitative data:** Survey responses on faculty awareness of environmental topics and their integration into teaching.

Compilation requirements:

1. Calculate the KPI by dividing the **total** number of faculty members **engaged in sustainability** training and research by the **total number of faculty members**.
2. Track research output separately from **training participation** to provide a clear view of faculty involvement in both teaching and research in sustainability.
3. **Report** on both training participation and research output annually to assess trends over time.

Guidance: Tracking faculty participation helps identify gaps in sustainability education and research efforts, enabling them to target training needs and increase interdisciplinary sustainability research. Participation in sustainability training can be a precursor to increased integration of sustainability into the curriculum, while faculty research output reflects institutional commitment to advancing sustainability knowledge.

Indicator 3: Awareness of Environmental Policies and Practices Among Students and Staff

Definition: This KPI measures the level of awareness of the institution's environmental policies, practices, and sustainability initiatives among students and staff.

Measurement:

Number of students and staff: The total number of students and staff members aware of Environmental practices and policies.

Number of communication touchpoints: The number of platforms or channels used to communicate environmental policies (e.g., emails, campus events, website posts).

Type of awareness:

- **Knowledge of sustainability policies:** Awareness of key environmental policies like energy reduction, waste management, and sustainable transportation options.
- **Knowledge of sustainability initiatives:** Awareness of ongoing sustainability programs and campaigns within the institution (e.g., recycling initiatives, green building efforts).
- **Participation in sustainability communications:** Engagement with sustainability newsletters, emails, and digital campaigns.

Metrics for awareness and engagement:

Quantitative data: Survey results on how many students and staff are aware of sustainability policies, and how many have interacted with sustainability-related communications.

Qualitative data: Open-ended feedback on how effectively sustainability policies and initiatives are communicated to the community.

Compilation requirements:

1. Calculate the KPI by dividing the total **number of students and staff who demonstrate awareness** of environmental policies and practices by the **total number of students and staff**.
2. Measure awareness through **periodic surveys** and **feedback mechanisms**, ensuring representation from both students and staff.
3. Separate **communication effectiveness metrics** to understand which platforms (emails, campus events, etc.) are most effective in raising awareness.

Guidance: Regular communication and transparency are key to fostering awareness of sustainability practices across the HEI community. By tracking engagement with sustainability communications, the institution can adjust its outreach strategy to improve effectiveness.

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities	Environmental	E4. Infrastructure and Use of Energy Resources

Indicator 1: CO_2 Footprint per Employee and Student

Definition: The total annual carbon dioxide emissions generated by the institution's operations—specifically from Transport & Travel, Goods, Energy, Services, and Food & Accommodation—divided by the total number of permanent employees and enrolled students. Emissions from Properties & Construction may be excluded or reported separately.

Measurement:

Emission categories: Annual CO_2 emissions are calculated by summing verified data from transport, travel, goods procurement, energy use, services, and food & accommodation.

Population reference: Total number of permanent employees and enrolled students for the reporting year.

Exclusions: Emissions from Properties & Construction can be optionally reported separately or excluded, depending on data availability.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Collect and categorize CO_2 emissions data across defined operational areas.
- Use standardized emission factors and methodologies for calculating total CO_2 output.
- Divide the total annual emissions by the number of permanent employees and students to determine the per capita footprint.

Guidance: This indicator provides insight into the institution's environmental efficiency and supports benchmarking against peer HEIs. Regular monitoring can inform targeted interventions to reduce emissions and align with carbon neutrality goals.

Indicator 2: Energy Consumption per Employee and Student

Definition: The total annual energy consumption of the HEI, measured in MWh, divided by the total number of permanent employees and enrolled students.
Measurement:

Total energy use: Aggregate of all electricity, heating, cooling, and other energy sources consumed during the year.

Population reference: Number of permanent employees and enrolled students in the same reporting period.

Energy units: All energy sources should be converted to megawatt-hours (MWh) for consistency.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Collect comprehensive energy consumption data across all campuses and facilities.
- Normalize consumption data per capita using official headcounts.

- Document trends over time to support energy efficiency improvements.

Guidance: This indicator allows institutions to monitor energy efficiency, assess progress in energy-saving initiatives, and identify opportunities for sustainable energy transition strategies.

Indicator 4: Floor Area per Employee and Student

Definition: The total built-up area of the institution, measured in square meters (m^2), divided by the number of permanent employees and enrolled students annually.

Measurement:

Total area: Sum of all functional building spaces used by the institution, including academic, administrative, and residential buildings.

Population reference: Annual count of permanent employees and enrolled students.

Space typology (optional): Floor space can be broken down by usage type (e.g., teaching, research, housing).

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Maintain accurate records of total building areas, verified through facility management or infrastructure databases.
- Calculate the area-to-person ratio to assess space utilization efficiency.
- Use results to evaluate infrastructure sustainability and inform future campus planning.

Guidance: Efficient space utilization supports energy savings, cost-effective facility management, and sustainable campus development. This indicator helps institutions align infrastructure with sustainability and operational goals.

SDG 12 – Responsible Production and Consumption	Environmental	E3. Digitalization and Operationalization of the SDGs

Indicator 1: Percentage of digitalized sustainability reporting and monitoring processes

Definition: The proportion of an HEI's sustainability reporting, monitoring, and performance tracking processes that have been digitalized to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accessibility in ESG-related decision-making.

Measurement:

Scope of digitalization: Whether sustainability-related data collection, reporting, and analysis are automated or manually conducted.

Integration with institutional systems: Whether digital sustainability platforms are linked with existing HEI databases, administrative systems, or national sustainability frameworks.

Transparency and accessibility: The extent to which digitalized reports are publicly available, easily accessible, and regularly updated.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Identify and calculate the percentage of sustainability reporting processes that are fully digitalized.
- Assess the level of automation in monitoring ESG performance and SDG-related initiatives.
- Document improvements in accessibility, efficiency, and stakeholder engagement resulting from digitalization.

Guidance: Digitalizing sustainability reporting streamlines ESG performance tracking, increases institutional accountability, and enables real-time decision-making. HEIs that integrate digital tools for SDG monitoring enhance transparency, improve stakeholder engagement, and align with global sustainability best practices.

Indicator 2: Number of digital tools implemented for sustainable resource management

Definition: The number of digital platforms, applications, or technologies adopted by HEIs to optimize resource use, reduce waste, and enhance environmental sustainability in line with SDG 12 objectives.

Measurement:

Types of digital tools: Whether they include smart energy grids, AI-driven waste management systems, digital water tracking, carbon footprint calculators, or real-time sustainability dashboards.

Functional impact: Whether digital tools improve efficiency in energy consumption, waste reduction, or sustainable procurement.

Data-driven decision-making: Whether digital solutions provide actionable insights for sustainability planning and policy adjustments.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Identify and report the number of digital tools adopted for responsible production and consumption.
- Assess the effectiveness of these tools in reducing environmental impact.
- Track progress over time to evaluate improvements in operational sustainability.

Guidance: The adoption of digital tools for resource management strengthens institutional sustainability strategies, improves efficiency, and fosters innovation in environmental responsibility. HEIs leveraging technology for sustainable operations contribute to the broader transition toward smart, green campuses and responsible consumption patterns.

Indicator 3: Percentage of procurement processes utilizing digital sustainability criteria

Definition: The proportion of HEI procurement processes that incorporate digital tools and sustainability criteria to promote responsible purchasing, reduce environmental impact, and support circular economy principles.

Measurement:

Integration of sustainability criteria: Whether procurement decisions prioritize energy-efficient, low-carbon, or ethically sourced products and services.

Use of digital platforms: Whether procurement is conducted through digitalized, transparent platforms that track ESG compliance.

Supplier engagement: Whether digital tools facilitate collaboration with sustainable suppliers and monitor ESG performance across the supply chain.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Determine the percentage of procurement activities that apply sustainability criteria via digital platforms.
- Assess the effectiveness of digital procurement in promoting sustainable consumption and reducing waste.
- Monitor trends in responsible sourcing and supplier ESG compliance.

Guidance: Digitalizing procurement processes with sustainability criteria ensures responsible consumption, enhances transparency, and supports institutional ESG goals. HEIs that implement digital tools in procurement contribute to reducing their environmental footprint, fostering ethical supply chains, and promoting long-term sustainability.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals	Environmental	E2. Institutional and Systemic Support

Indicator 1: Number of national and international multisectoral initiatives oriented on environmental protection (including projects)

Definition: The number of partnerships, projects, or collaborative initiatives between HEIs and external stakeholders (such as governments, businesses, NGOs, and international organizations) that focus on environmental protection and sustainability-related goals.

Measurement:

Types of initiatives included: Whether they are national, international, or regional in scope.

Sectors involved: Whether the initiative includes partnerships with academia, industry, public institutions, and civil society organizations.

Environmental themes addressed: Themes such as biodiversity conservation, carbon reduction, circular economy, pollution mitigation, water and waste management, climate resilience, and sustainable energy transition.

When compiling KPI HEI shall:

- Count the total number of initiatives in which they participate as a leading or supporting institution.
- Distinguish between national and international initiatives to provide a clear overview of global engagement.
- Consider only active or officially completed initiatives within the reporting period.

Guidance: Multisectoral initiatives contribute to systemic environmental change by integrating knowledge, research, and innovation. HEIs play a key role in fostering cross-sector collaboration, driving impactful policies, and leading sustainability-focused projects that align with national and global sustainability agendas.

Indicator 2: Number of rankings oriented on institutional change for sustainable development (like Higher Education Impact) etc

Definition: The number of recognized sustainability-focused rankings in which the HEI is listed, ranked, or assessed for its commitment to institutional change in sustainable development.

Measurement:

Types of rankings included: Rankings than van be included can cover: Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings, UI GreenMetric, STARS (AASHE), QS Sustainability Rankings, or other recognized sustainability assessment frameworks.

Criteria covered in the ranking: Whether they assess environmental management, governance for sustainability, research impact, social engagement, or SDG-specific achievements.

Level of recognition: Whether the HEI is ranked at national, regional, or global levels.

When compiling KPI HEI shall:

- Report on the number of sustainability-focused rankings in which they participate or receive recognition.
- Include only rankings that evaluate institutional performance beyond academic and research excellence, with a strong focus on sustainable development.
- Identify trends in ranking performance over time to assess improvements in sustainability efforts.

Guidance: Participating in sustainability-oriented rankings enables HEIs to benchmark progress in institutional sustainability transformation, demonstrate transparency, and enhance their reputation as a leaders in sustainable development. It also provides valuable insights for policy-making, funding allocation, and strategic planning for sustainability initiatives.

Indicator 3: % of funds spent on multisectoral informal initiatives supporting sustainable development

Definition: The percentage of an HEI's total budget allocated to informal, cross-sectoral sustainability initiatives that are not part of formalized research grants or institutional sustainability programs but contribute to sustainable development goals.

Measurement:

Types of initiatives included: Whether they involve student-led projects, community outreach, interdisciplinary collaborations, or informal partnerships with businesses, NGOs, or governmental bodies.

Funding sources: Whether funds come from HEI core funding, external grants, philanthropic contributions, or industry partnerships.

Sustainability focus areas: Such as climate action, social equity, circular economy, energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, or biodiversity protection.

When compiling KPI HEI shall:

- Identify the total financial resources allocated to informal sustainability initiatives.
- Calculate the percentage of total institutional expenditure that supports such initiatives.
- Differentiate between internal HEI-driven funding and external co-funding mechanisms to highlight collaboration dynamics.

Guidance: Informal initiatives play a crucial role in fostering innovation, grassroots movements, and experimental sustainability solutions. HEIs that invest in multisectoral, bottom-up sustainability actions contribute to local and global partnerships, capacity-building, and long-term cultural shifts toward sustainability.

SDG 4 – Quality Education	Governance	G8. Training and Internal Communication

Indicator 1: Quality Education System in the University

Definition: The presence, structure, and external recognition of a university-wide quality assurance system for education. This includes the degree to which quality education processes are formalized, systematic, and aligned with recognized external standards or certifications.

Measurement:

System presence: Whether a quality assurance system for education exists and is formally institutionalized.

Systematic implementation: The extent to which quality processes (e.g., curriculum evaluation, faculty review, learning outcome monitoring) are regularly applied across all programs.

External validation: Adoption of recognized national or international standards (e.g., ISO 21001, ESG by ENQA, national accreditation bodies).

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Document the institutional framework for quality education, including responsible offices and procedures.
- Report on participation in audits, accreditations, or certifications.
- Assess the maturity level of the system (e.g., ad hoc, partially institutionalized, fully embedded).

Guidance: A systematic, externally validated quality assurance system strengthens institutional accountability, supports continuous improvement, and ensures alignment with international educational standards. It is also critical for stakeholder confidence and long-term academic reputation.

Indicator 2: Programme Success Rate for Students

Definition: The average percentage of students who successfully complete the academic program they initially enrolled in, measured by exam completion.

Measurement:

Success calculation: Number of students who complete their exams in the original program/number of students initially enrolled in that program × 100.

Timeframe: The standard period of study plus any officially accepted extension period (e.g., normative duration + 1 year).

Disaggregation (optional): Success rates can be disaggregated by field of study, degree level, or student demographic.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Track enrollment and exam completion data systematically per cohort and program.
- Report the percentage of students who finish their studies in the same program they began.
- Analyze trends to identify areas for intervention and student support.

Guidance: Programme success rates reflect the institution's effectiveness in guiding students through academic completion. High rates signal well-designed curricula, effective support systems, and strong academic governance.

Indicator 3: Programme Employment Rate – Graduates Employed in Field of Study after Five Years

Definition: The percentage of graduates who are employed in the same or a related field to their academic program five years after completion.

Measurement:

Employment alignment: Number of graduates employed in their field of study five years after graduation / total number of graduates from that program × 100.

Data sources: Alumni surveys, national employment databases, tracer studies, or social security/tax data.

Field relevance: "Employed in field of study" refers to direct or closely related job roles.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Conduct periodic graduate follow-up studies to gather employment data.
- Define and apply consistent criteria for determining field-of-study relevance.
- Use results to evaluate program-market alignment and update curricula where needed.

Guidance: Tracking long-term graduate employment outcomes helps assess the relevance and impact of academic programs. It also supports labor market alignment, strategic curriculum design, and effective career services.

SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth	Governance	G7. Strategic financial planning and decision-making that balance budgetary constraints with long-term goals

Indicator 1: Percentage of institutional budget allocated to long-term sustainability initiatives

Definition: The proportion of an HEI's total budget dedicated to strategic sustainability initiatives, ensuring financial planning aligns with long-term economic, social, and environmental objectives.

Measurement:

Allocation categories: Whether funds are directed toward green infrastructure, sustainable research, ethical investments, or workforce development.

Budgeting frameworks: Whether multi-year financial plans incorporate sustainability targets and risk management strategies.

Financial resilience: Whether budget planning includes mechanisms for economic stability while supporting sustainability commitments.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Identify and report the percentage of the total institutional budget allocated to sustainability-focused investments.
- Assess financial planning mechanisms that balance operational needs with long-term sustainability.
- Track changes in financial commitment over time to evaluate institutional priorities.

Guidance: Ensuring long-term financial planning for sustainability strengthens HEIs' economic resilience while demonstrating commitment to ESG principles. A well-balanced financial strategy enables institutions to achieve sustainable growth without compromising core educational and research functions.

Indicator 2: Number of financial risk assessments conducted for sustainable investment planning

Definition: The number of structured financial risk assessments performed to ensure budgetary decisions supprt long-term sustainability objectives while mitigating economic uncertainty.

Measurement:

Risk categories assessed: Whether assessments evaluate financial stability, sustainability-related investment risks, or climate-related economic uncertainties.

Strategic alignment: Whether risk assessments influence institutional financial policies and decision-making.

Reporting transparency: Whether assessment results are integrated into institutional governance reports.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Report the number of financial risk assessments conducted within the reporting period.
- Identify key sustainability-related financial risks and mitigation strategies.
- Ensure that risk assessment outcomes inform strategic financial decisions.

Guidance: Regular financial risk assessments enhance governance by enabling HEIs to make informed, balanced decisions that integrate economic growth with sustainable investment strategies. Institutions that proactively evaluate financial risks are better positioned to navigate economic challenges while maintaining ESG commitments.

Indicator 3: Percentage of revenue generated from sustainable and ethical funding sources

Definition: The proportion of an HEI's total revenue derived from ethical and sustainable funding sources, including responsible investments, ESG-compliant grants, and green financing.

Measurement:

Funding sources: Whether revenue is generated from ethical endowments, ESG-aligned grants, sustainable research funding, or partnerships with responsible industries.

Investment policies: Whether institutional financial portfolios adhere to ethical investment standards and exclude industries that contradict ESG principles.

Growth trends: Whether the share of sustainable funding increases over time, reflecting long-term financial planning strategies.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Identify and calculate the percentage of total institutional revenue derived from ethical and sustainable sources.
- Assess the impact of financial planning policies on long-term economic growth and institutional sustainability.
- Monitor trends in responsible funding to evaluate institutional progress toward ESG financial goals.

Guidance: Strategic financial decision-making that prioritizes sustainable revenue sources ensures economic stability while reinforcing HEIs' commitment to ESG principles. Institutions that integrate responsible investment practices enhance their financial resilience and contribute to long-term sustainable development.

SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	Governance	G6. Governance and Participation

Indicator 1: Number of initiatives aiming at ethical dimention at the academia

Definition: The number of formal and informal initiatives within an HEI that promote ethical values, integrity, and responsible conduct in academic settings.

Measurement:

Types of initiatives included: such as ethics-focused training programs, workshops, policies, committees, research projects, and awareness campaigns.

Areas of ethical focus: These can include academic integrity (e.g., plagiarism prevention), responsible research conduct, data privacy, whistleblower protection, ethics in AI and technology, and human rights in education.

Stakeholders involved: Whether the initiatives engage students, faculty, administrative staff, external partners, or the broader community.

When compiling KPI HEI shall:

- Count the total number of initiatives implemented within the reporting period.
- Differentiate between internal initiatives (HEI-driven) and collaborative initiatives with external partners (e.g., ethics-focused NGOs, government bodies).
- Assess the impact and outreach of these initiatives by measuring participation rates and policy implementations resulting from them.

Guidance: HEIs play a critical role in shaping ethical standards by fostering responsible academic practices, governance transparency, and institutional accountability. Ethics-focused initiatives strengthen trust in academia and ensure alignment with principles of peace, justice, and human rights.

Indicator 2: Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in managerial positions

Definition: The percentage representation of different demographic groups in managerial and leadership positions within an HEI, reflecting diversity, equity, and inclusivity in governance.

Measurement:

Categories of managerial positions include: These can cover university board members, deans, department heads, directors, senior administration.

Demographic breakdowns considered, e.g:

a) Gender representation (male, female, non-binary).
b) Age distribution (e.g., under 40, 40-60, 60+).
c) Persons with disabilities (self-reported).
d) Other population groups, such as ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, or other socially marginalized groups.

When compiling KPI HEI shall:

- Calculate the percentage of managerial roles held by individuals within each demographic category.
- Track trends over time to assess progress in diversity and inclusion.
- Compare against national or sectoral benchmarks for higher education diversity representation.

Guidance: Inclusive governance ensures fair representation of diverse voices in HEI decision-making, supporting social justice and equal opportunities. Institutions that promote gender-balanced and diverse leadership contribute to stronger, more equitable academic environments.

Indicator 3: Number of human rights violations annually

Definition: The total number of reported cases of human rights violations occurring within or involving the HEI, including academic freedom breaches, discrimination, harassment, and violations of ethical policies.

Measurement:

Types of violations included, e.g.:

a) Violations of academic freedom (e.g., censorship, political pressure on research).
b) Discrimination cases (based on race, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation, etc.).
c) Workplace and campus harassment (including sexual harassment and bullying).
d) Violations of labor rights (e.g., unfair treatment of faculty/staff).
e) Ethical research violations (e.g., data falsification, unethical experimentation).

Reporting mechanism: Whether cases were recorded through official university ethics boards, ombudsman offices, student unions, or legal channels.

Resolution status: Whether cases are pending, under investigation, or resolved.

When compiling KPI HEI shall:

- Count the total number of officially reported human rights violations.
- Categorize cases based on type and severity.
- Ensure confidentiality and due process in reporting mechanisms.

Guidance: Tracking human rights violations strengthens institutional accountability and governance. HEIs that prioritize safe, fair, and inclusive environments contribute to broader goals of justice and human dignity within academic spaces.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals	Governance	G5. Connection and Coordination in the Implementation of the SDGs and ESG

Indicator 1: Level of implementation of ESG in institutional strategy

Definition: This measures whether the principles and values associated with ESG are explicitly incorporated into the policies, strategic plans, and regulations of the organization or government of public institutions.

Measurement:

Percentage of strategic documents that include ESG-aligned objectives.

Compilation Requirement:

1. Define the scope by identify the **set of strategic documents** that guide institutional decision-making.
2. Develop a **checklist of ESG principles** (e.g., climate action, social equity, governance transparency) that should be reflected in strategic documents.
3. Analyze each document to verify whether it explicitly integrates ESG objectives.

4. Calculate **the percentage by dividing the number of ESG-integrated documents by the total number of strategic documents reviewed**. Define a threshold for strong ESG integration (e.g., 70%+ of strategic documents containing ESG commitments).

Guidance: when analysing the documents, a systematic evaluation of each document should be carried out using a structured scoring system. Assign a weighting or score based on the depth and specificity of the integration of ESG criteria (e.g. explicit ESG objectives versus general mentions of sustainability).

Indicator 2: Training and capacity building of public officials on ESG

Definition: This KPI assesses the extent to which public officials and political agents with institutional responsibilities receive training on ESG matters.

Measurement:

Number of ESG training modules/courses conducted.

Percentage of officials in responsible positions who have completed ESG training.

Compilation requirements:

1. Determine the **ESG training formats** (e.g., workshops, online courses, seminars) that qualify for measurement.
2. **Define key learning areas** aligned with ESG principles.
3. Track the **number** of ESG training sessions conducted within a specific period and record participation rates and **completion percentages** of training program.
4. Use the following formulas to quantify ESG training efforts:

Training Frequency: Total ESG training sessions conducted over a given period.

Training coverage: (Number of trained officials in responsible positions/Total officials in responsible positions) × 100.

1. Define target benchmarks for **ESG training coverage** (e.g., 80% of key officials trained annually).

Guidance: Institutions must maintain an up-to-date record of ESG training programs, including participant data, course content, and completion rates.

Indicator 3: Level of public knowledge and satisfaction

Definition: this measures the degree of knowledge of civil society on ESG as well as their satisfaction with political and governmental actions in this regard.

Measurement:

Through **surveys** on both issues aimed at the public in general and at representatives of civil society to measure the **level of awareness** and understanding of ESG factors, **satisfaction** with government ESG policies and initiatives, and the effect of sociological factors such as age, social status and other demographic indicators to visualise trends and disparities.

Compilation requirements:

1. Identify **target audiences** for the surveys, including the general public, NGOs, community leaders, and key civil society representatives. Ensure diversity in survey participants to capture various perspectives across different demographics (age, income level, education, geographic location).
2. Develop **ESG Awareness and Satisfaction Criteria** covering aspects such as environmental Awareness: Climate change, sustainability, renewable energy, social Awareness: Human rights, inclusion, labor rights, social equity and governance Awareness: Transparency, anti-corruption measures, government accountability. Include satisfaction indicators regarding government ESG policies, such as: perceived effectiveness of ESG initiatives, trust in governmental ESG commitments and level of engagement and public participation in ESG-related decision-making.
3. Use the following metrics to analyze survey results:

ESG Knowledge Score: Percentage of respondents who demonstrate a basic or advanced understanding of ESG principles.

Satisfaction Score: Percentage of respondents expressing moderate to high satisfaction with government ESG actions.

Guidance: ensure a representative sample of respondents across different areas and social groups, and collect both qualitative (open-ended responses) and quantitative (Likert scale ratings) data to enrich the result.

SDG 4 – Quality Education	Social	S12. Access to Education and Resources

Indicator 1: Digital Research Database Access Rate

Definition: The extent to which students have access to and utilize the university's digital research databases and online library resources to support their academic activities.

Measurement:

Access tracking: Number of students who accessed digital research databases at least once during the reporting period.

Utilization rate: Divide the number of students accessing the databases by the total number of enrolled students × 100.

Data source: Access logs from university library systems, student surveys, or authentication systems.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Track unique student access to licensed digital research platforms (e.g., JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science).
- Calculate the ratio of students who accessed databases at least once to the total student population.

- Where available, document trends in access frequency, discipline-specific access patterns, and user satisfaction.

Guidance: This indicator highlights the reach and effectiveness of digital academic resources. High access rates suggest that students are engaging with digital learning tools and research materials, promoting equitable access to knowledge and digital literacy across the student body.

Indicator 2: Students by Academic Parental Background

Definition: The distribution of students based on the academic education level of their parents, used to assess diversity, inclusivity, and access to higher education for students from non-academic backgrounds.

Measurement:

Non-academic background rate: Number of students whose parents have no academic education / total number of students × 100.

Partial academic background rate: Number of students with one parent holding an academic education / total number of students × 100.

Optional breakdown: Data may also include students with two academically educated parents.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Collect background information from students at enrollment (e.g., through admissions surveys or declarations).
- Classify students based on the highest education level achieved by each parent or guardian.
- Calculate and report the proportion of students falling into each background category.

Guidance: Understanding students' family academic backgrounds supports targeted equity and inclusion strategies. Institutions can use this KPI to design

outreach, mentoring, and support programs for first-generation students, thereby reducing systemic barriers to academic success.

Indicator 3: Financial Support Rate for Tuition and Living Costs

Definition: The proportion of students receiving financial support for tuition fees and/or living expenses, categorized by level of support.

Measurement:

Tuition Support Categories:

1. Full Tuition Support = Number of students receiving full tuition coverage / total number of students × 100
2. Partial Tuition Support = Number of students receiving partial tuition coverage / total number of students × 100
3. No Tuition Support = Number of students receiving no tuition support / total number of students × 100

Living Cost Support Categories:

1. Full Living Cost Support = Number of students receiving full living support / total number of students × 100
2. Partial Living Cost Support = Number of students receiving partial living support / total number of students × 100
3. No Living Cost Support = Number of students receiving no living support / total number of students × 100

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Collect financial aid and scholarship data disaggregated by tuition and living expenses.
- Distinguish between full, partial, and no support to reflect the financial accessibility of education.
- Analyze data trends across student demographics and programs.

Guidance: This indicator provides insight into the affordability of education and the effectiveness of institutional or governmental financial aid programs. It supports policy development aimed at reducing financial barriers and promoting access to higher education for economically disadvantaged groups.

SDG 5 – Gender Equality	Social	S10. Gender Equality and Diversity

- Presence of formal document regulating gender issues at HEI.
- Number of initiatives aiming at preventing violence against women.
- Number of discrimination cases annually in division on: gender, sex, age.
- Number of students representing different nationalities.

Indicator 1: Presence of formal document regulating gender issues at HEI

Definition: The existence of an officially adopted policy, strategy, or formal document within an HEI that regulates gender-related issues, ensuring equal rights, opportunities, and protections for all genders.

Measurement:

Types of documents included, e.g.:

1. Gender equality policies.
2. Anti-discrimination guidelines.
3. Sexual harassment and violence prevention protocols.
4. Diversity and inclusion strategies.
5. Maternity and paternity leave policies.

Scope of the document: Whether it applies to students, academic, and administrative staff. Whether it includes recruitment, promotions, salaries, work-life balance, and campus safety.

Implementation mechanisms, e.g.:

1. Existence of an office, committee, or task force responsible for monitoring compliance.
2. Clear reporting and enforcement structures.

When compiling KPI HEI shall:

- Confirm the existence of at least one official, publicly available gender policy.
- Assess whether the document is up-to-date and aligned with national/international legal frameworks (e.g., CEDAW, EU Gender Equality Strategy).
- Evaluate whether the policy is monitored and enforced through institutional mechanisms.

Guidance: A formal gender policy is essential for promoting institutional gender equity, safeguarding against discrimination, and ensuring an inclusive academic environment.

Indicator 2: Number of initiatives aiming at preventing violence against women

Definition: The number of HEI-led programs, campaigns, training sessions, and policies aimed at preventing gender-based violence (GBV), with a specific focus on violence against women.

Measurement:

Types of initiatives included, e.g.:

1. Awareness campaigns on sexual harassment, domestic violence, and consent.
2. Workshops and self-defense training for female students and staff.
3. Hotlines, counseling services, and survivor support programs.

4. Bystander intervention programs to empower students and staff to prevent GBV.

Target audience: Whether initiatives focus on students, academic, and administrative staff, or the wider community.

Collaboration with external organizations: Whether HEIs partner with local NGOs, law enforcement, or women's rights organizations.

When compiling KPI HEI shall:

- Count all initiatives that directly address the prevention of violence against women.
- Identify whether the initiatives are mandatory (e.g., training for staff) or voluntary (e.g., student-led campaigns).
- Evaluate whether these initiatives have measurable outcomes, such as reduced harassment cases or increased reporting.

Guidance: HEIs must actively work to prevent violence, support survivors, and educate the academic community on gender-based violence issues.

Indicator 3: Number of discrimination cases annually in division on: gender, sex, age

Definition: The total number of formally reported cases of discrimination within the HEI, categorized by gender, sex, and age.

Measurement:

Types of discrimination covered, e.g.:

1. Gender-based discrimination: Unequal treatment due to gender identity or expression.
2. Sex-based discrimination: Inequality based on biological sex.
3. Age discrimination: Bias in employment, grading, or academic opportunities based on age.

Reporting mechanisms: Whether cases were reported through an HR office, student ombudsman, ethics committee, or independent complaint system.

Resolution status: Whether cases were dismissed, under investigation, or resolved.

When compiling KPI HEI shall:

- Record the number of officially reported discrimination cases annually.
- Categorize cases by type and severity.
- Ensure confidentiality and compliance with legal frameworks in handling cases.

Guidance: Tracking discrimination cases is essential for assessing institutional inclusivity, improving grievance mechanisms, and ensuring a safe academic environment.

Indicator 4: Number of students representing different nationalities

Definition: The total number of enrolled students at an HEI who come from countries other than the host country, representing international diversity on campus.

Measurement:

Categories to be included, e.g.:

1. Full-time international students (degree-seeking).
2. Exchange students (Erasmus+, study abroad programs).
3. Refugee or asylum-seeking students.

Data collection sources, such as: official student records, admissions data, and visa information.

Breakdown by country/region: Whether data is grouped by continent, country, or region to assess global diversity.

When compiling KPI HEI shall:

- Count the number of students with non-national residency or citizenship status.
- Provide a breakdown of student nationalities to measure cultural and geographic diversity.
- Identify trends in international student enrollment over time.

Guidance: International student diversity enriches academic exchange, global perspectives, and institutional reputation. A diverse student body supports cross-cultural learning, innovation, and inclusive policies.

SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth	Social	S9. Communication and Work Conditions

Indicator 1: Employee Satisfaction with Communication and Work Conditions

Definition: This KPI measures the level of satisfaction among university employees (faculty, researchers, and administrative staff) regarding internal communication and overall work conditions, including transparency, accessibility of information, work-life balance, and workplace culture.

Measurement:

1. Conduct an **annual survey** using a **Likert scale (1-5 or 1-10)** to assess employee perceptions of communication clarity, work environment, and institutional support.
2. Include key dimensions such as **internal communication effectiveness, managerial transparency, and satisfaction with workload and flexibility**.
3. Calculate the **average satisfaction score** and the **percentage of employees rating their conditions as "satisfactory" or higher (e.g., 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale).**

Compilation Requirements:

- Develop and distribute the survey among **all university employees**, ensuring **anonymity** to encourage honest feedback.
- Ensure a **minimum response rate (e.g., 60%)** to maintain data reliability.
- Benchmark results against **previous years** and similar institutions to track progress and identify improvement areas.

Guidance: conduct focus groups or interviews will help to gather deeper insights into concerns highlighted in the survey. Share a summary of survey results with employees, along with planned improvements will demonstrate commitment to change.

Indicator 2: Response Time and Resolution Rate of Internal Communication Channels

Definition: This KPI tracks the efficiency of internal communication mechanisms (email, internal platforms, HR support) in responding to and resolving employee inquiries or concerns related to workplace conditions.

Measurement:

1. **Response Time:** Average time (in hours/days) taken to acknowledge and respond to employee inquiries.
2. **Resolution Rate:** Percentage of resolved issues within a predefined timeframe (e.g., **resolution within five working days**).
3. **Employee Feedback on Response Quality:** Periodic feedback surveys measuring satisfaction with the resolution process.

Compilation Requirements:

- **Monitor university helpdesks, HR emails, and internal communication platforms** for request submissions and track resolution time.

- Implement **standardized logging** of employee requests and issues for accurate reporting.
- Set an **acceptable benchmark** (e.g., **90% of inquiries resolved within five days**) and track improvements annually.

Guidance: conduct regular reviews of response times and resolution quality will help to identify bottlenecks or areas for improvement.

Indicator 3: Work-Life Balance and Flexible Work Arrangements Adoption Rate

Definition: This KPI assesses the availability and usage of flexible work arrangements (e.g., remote work, flexible hours) to promote a **healthy work-life balance** for university staff.

Measurement:

1. **Percentage of employees with access to flexible work options** (e.g., hybrid work, adjusted schedules).
2. **Utilization rate of flexible work arrangements** (percentage of eligible employees actively using them).
3. **Employee perception of work-life balance** (assessed via annual surveys).

Compilation Requirements:

- Gather **HR data** on policies and employee participation in flexible work programs.
- Conduct **surveys and focus groups** to evaluate staff perceptions of work-life balance.
- Compare results with **best practices in the education sector** and adjust policies accordingly.

Guidance: flexible working options can be segmented by type (e.g. remote working, hybrid working, flexitime) to provide an in-depth view.

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities	Social	S11. Adequate Spaces

Indicator 1: Percentage of campus infrastructure designed for inclusive and sustainable use

Definition: The proportion of HEI campus spaces designed or adapted to promote accessibility, environmental sustainability, and social inclusivity.

Measurement:

1. Space functionality: Whether buildings and outdoor areas support diverse activities, including learning, research, community engagement, and well-being.
2. Accessibility compliance: Whether facilities meet universal design principles and accessibility standards for people with disabilities.
3. Sustainability features: Whether spaces incorporate energy efficiency, green architecture, or low-carbon construction materials.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Identify and report the percentage of total campus infrastructure meeting sustainability and accessibility criteria.
- Assess the extent of inclusive design elements, such as barrier-free access, gender-neutral facilities, and public green spaces.
- Track improvements in sustainable campus planning over time.

Guidance: Providing adequate spaces that align with sustainability and inclusivity principles enhances HEIs' role in fostering sustainable urban environments. A well-

designed campus contributes to student well-being, equitable access, and environmental responsibility.

Indicator 2: Number of community-accessible spaces developed or renovated for public engagement

Definition: The number of HEI-managed spaces—such as libraries, cultural centers, and co-working hubs—that are open to students, faculty, and the broader community to promote knowledge-sharing and civic participation.

Measurement:

1. Space typologies. Whether spaces include multi-use halls, open innovation labs, or sustainability-themed community centers.
2. Public engagement. Whether these spaces host events, workshops, or educational programs accessible to external communities.
3. Environmental and social impact. Whether developments align with principles of urban sustainability, green infrastructure, and social inclusion

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

- Count the number of newly developed or renovated community-accessible spaces.
- Assess the etent of their use by different stakeholder groups (students, researchers, local residents, businesses).
- Track the long-term impact of these spaces on community-building and sustainability awareness.

Guidance: HEIs play a crucial role in urban sustainability by offering public-access spaces that encourage lifelong learning, civic engagement, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Investing in shared infrastructure strengthens the link between academia and local communities.

Indicator 3: Percentage of green and open spaces on campus dedicated to student and staff well-being

Definition: The proportion of HEI's land area allocated to green and open spaces that promote mental health, relaxation, and social interaction.

Measurement:

1. Space allocation. Whether green areas include parks, rooftop gardens, urban forests, or eco-friendly recreational zones.
2. Well-being impact. Whether spaces support stress reduction, outdoor learning, and environmental education initiatives.
3. Maintenance and sustainability. Whether HEIs implement biodiversity-friendly landscaping, sustainable irrigation, and low-impact development strategies.

When compiling KPI, HEI shall:

1. Calculate the total percentage of campus land dedicated to green and opens paces.
2. Assess the impact of these spaces on student well-being through surveys or behavioral studies.
3. Track changes in green space development as part of institutional sustainability planning.

Guidance: Integrating nature into HEI infrastructure enhances social sustainability, fosters environmental stewardship, and creates healthier learning environments. Investing in green spaces demonstrates a commitment to holistic education and community well-being.

ESG dimension	ESG goal	ESG objective	Identified KPI's
Environment	SDG 4 – Quality Education	1. Lack of Awareness and Environmental Education	Student Engagement in Environmental Education Programs Faculty Participation in Sustainability Training and Research Awareness of Environmental Policies and Practices Among Students and Staff
Environment	SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals	2. Lack of Institutional and Systemic Support	Number of national and international multisectoral initiatives oriented on environmental protection (including projects) Number of rankings oriented on institutional change for sustainable development (like Higher Education Impact) etc. % of funds spent on multisectoral informal initiatives supporting sustainable development
Environment	SDG 12 – Responsible Production and Consumption	3. Inefficiencies in the Digitalization and Operationalization of the SDGs	Percentage of digitalized sustainability reporting and monitoring processes Number of digital tools implemented for sustainable resource management Percentage of procurement processes utilizing digital sustainability criteria
Environment	SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities	4. Infrastructure and Use of Energy Resources	CO2 footprint/employee and student MWh/employee and students m2/ employee and students
Governance	SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals	5. Lack of Connection and Coordination in the Implementation of the SDGs and ESG	Level of implementation of ESG in institutional strategy Training and capacity building of public officials on ESG Level of public knowledge and satisfaction

Governance	SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	6. Limitations in Governance and Participation	Number of initiatives aiming at ethical dimention at the academia Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in managerial positions Number of human rights violations annually
Governance	SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth	7. Budgetary Restrictions and Short-Term Decision-Making	Percentage of institutional budget allocated to long-term sustainability initiatives Number of financial risk assessments conducted for sustainable investment planning Percentage of revenue generated from sustainable and ethical funding sources
Governance	SDG 4 – Quality Education	8. Deficiencies in Training and Internal Communication	Quality system in university Programme success rate Programme employment rate, Student work in programme area after five years
Social	SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth	9. Unfavorable Communication and Work Conditions	Employee Satisfaction with Communication and Work Conditions Response Time and Resolution Rate of Internal Communication Channels Work-Life Balance and Flexible Work Arrangements Adoption Rate
Social	SDG 5 – Gender Equality	10. Gender Inequality and Diversity	Presence of formal document regulating gender issues at HEI Number of initiatives aiming at preventing violence against women Number of discrimination cases annually in division on: gender, sex, age

Social	SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities	11. Lack of Adequate Spaces	Percentage of campus infrastructure designed for inclusive and sustainable use Number of community-accessible spaces developed or renovated for public engagement Percentage of green and open spaces on campus dedicated to student and staff well-being
Social	SDG 4 – Quality Education	12. Equitable Access to Education and Resources	Access to digital resources (library) Students with non academic parental background Financial support for students

Conclusion

The **WP2** underscores the significance of **materiality assessments** and **stakeholder engagement** in evaluating **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors** within **Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**. **Materiality assessments** enable HEIs to prioritize critical issues affecting sustainability performance, identify key risks and opportunities, and enhance decision-making processes. **Stakeholder engagement strategies** are emphasized, highlighting the importance of **co-creation**, **diffusion**, **uptake**, **transformation**, and **directionality** in research and innovation. Effective communication of **stakeholder engagement outcomes**, **satisfaction among university employees**, and **awareness of sustainability policies** among students and staff are also underscored.

The **WP2** reflects the significant role of **HEIs** in addressing sustainability challenges and the **European Commission's emphasis** on **co-creation** and **knowledge diffusion**, underscoring the strategic importance of **research and innovation** in societal development.

The **WP2** integrates diverse viewpoints of stakeholders. However, challenges include **balancing diverse stakeholder interests** and **managing complex transdisciplinary projects**. The main outcome of **WP2** is that **effective stakeholder engagement** and **materiality assessment** are crucial for **HEIs** to address **ESG challenges** and contribute to **societal well-being**.

The **WP2** contributes to the **SHIFT project** by synthesizing theoretical and practical insights on **stakeholder engagement** and **materiality assessment** in the context of **HEIs**. It highlights the strategic importance of these processes for **sustainability** and **societal impact**, suggesting the need for more practices on their **effectiveness**. The findings underscore the importance of **HEIs adopting strategic approaches** to **stakeholder engagement** and **sustainability**.

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