

# SDGs & UAS4EUROPE

“The United Nations’ *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* is one of the most ambitious and important global agreements in recent history. The agenda, with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core, is a guide to tackling the world’s most pressing challenges - including ending poverty and bringing economic prosperity, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, peace, and good governance to all countries and all people by 2030”.

## Introduction

The past year has drawn much of our attention towards the Corona pandemic. This has for many organisation lead to less focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). However, also in times of this pandemic climate change remains to be an enormous challenge the world faces, and will still be there when the pandemic has become manageable and we return to a form of normality. Sustainability will be the key driver in developing future proof organisations, and this is no different for educational institutes. Research and education sit at the core of all Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) in Europe. UAS have a strong link with society; work closely together with regional partners and through that with society. This way research and innovation often stems from urgent, practical societal challenges, which are addressed in collaboration with the partners in the field. This regional embedding in research leads to constant improvement and contemporary updates in the education curriculum, which in return leads to students to be better equipped to enter and develop in the labour market.

## SDG as a purpose

The Universities of Applied Sciences have a unique position in society to demonstrate leadership in addressing the SDGs through four focus areas<sup>1</sup>:

- **Learning/teaching:** To train students today for the world of tomorrow. This means that students will be equipped with today’s knowledge and perspective of a sustainable world, the skills to apply this knowledge in future jobs and to encourage and facilitate entrepreneurship.
- **Research:** To contribute to the desired transition to a sustainable society through applied research with societal and regional partners. Sharing of knowledge, evidence-based, applicable innovations, and new technologies allow UAS to bring solutions for the SDGs to societies by implementing the knowledge and innovation agenda. On top of this, applied research supports keeping the learning curriculum up to date, disseminates SDG research results and the valorisation thereof into society and into the future work force.
- **Governance:** To show how each UAS contributes to the SDGs by designing the operational management, work and learning environment and reflecting on this

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Getting started with the SDGs in universities: A guide for universities, higher education institutions, and the academic sector.

continuously and transparently. This includes reducing the institutional impact on the environment, and supports creating a safe work environment for students and employees.

- **External leadership:** To support public engagement, policy development on international and national level, foster cross-sector dialogue & action, and show the commitment of UAS to the SDGs to the world.

As these routes are intertwined at UAS, an institutional approach to the SDGs is recommended. The fields above are closely interlinked, and addressing one of these in the SDG context will automatically have (a positive) effect on one or more of the others. Applied research is the core of UAS4EUROPE, and will contribute substantially to the SDGs. Specific contributions can be made through:

- Understanding the challenges
- Localising the SDG agenda
- Developing solutions
- Identifying and evaluating options and pathways
- Supporting the operationalisation of the SDG framework
- Life-long learning skills

There is strong interaction and mutual dependence between UAS and the SDGs. The SDGs need the work of UAS to provide the knowledge and desired impact, develop SDG education and with that preparing the future workforce for sustainable jobs, and provide cross-sectoral implementation of the SDGs. UAS need their SDG actions to demonstrate their impact and utilize this to show how universities contribute to (global and local) challenges and goals. On a practical note, the SDGs can support UAS in attracting research partners and funding, since European funding is increasingly connected to sustainability as one of the requirements for project funding.

## European perspective

The European Commission (EC) tries to foster sustainability in the new work programmes through the policy frameworks. A few buzzwords that often recur are ‘practice-oriented, interdisciplinary, social impact and quadruple helix collaboration’. The EC presents the Universities of the future as institutes that ‘adopt a challenge-based approach according to which students, academics and external partners can cooperate in inter-disciplinary teams to tackle the biggest issues facing Europe today’<sup>2</sup>.

## The way forward for UAS4EUROPE

Contributing to the achievement of the SDGs gives UAS4EUROPE the opportunity to help push the sustainability agendas of the partner UAS. The network is especially equipped to address the external leadership component described above by disseminating best practices from its

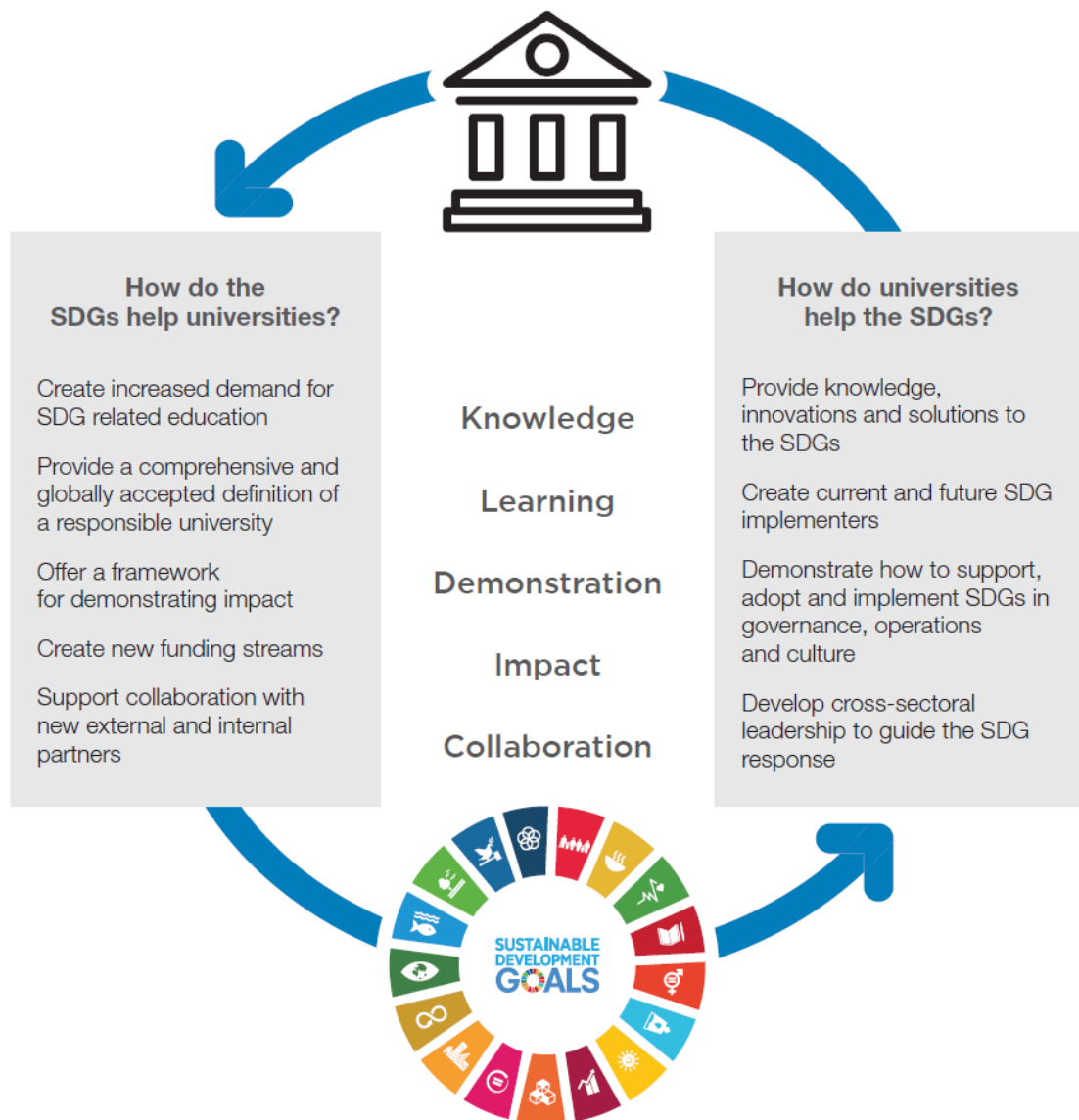
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<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative_en)

partner organisations at the European level. UAS4EUROPE can lead as a European UAS platform to share knowledge, ideas, best practices and liaise with European stakeholders on this topic. It furthermore helps to increase the SDG profile of the partners involved, which will support developing European partnerships and projects.

## Annex 1: Universities and SDGs

*Image 1: Interaction between Universities and the SDGs.*



**Image 2 : An overview of University contributions to the SDGs**



## Annex 2: Best Practices from our members

There are many examples of projects that address one or more SDGs and involve a UAS. The framework of these projects vary, where some focus on education and preparing students for their career, others focus on European funded research with a diverse international consortium. A few examples are listed below.

### 5G4Healthcare

Contributing to SDG 3 (Good Health & Well-Being), it is the objective of the project [5G4Healthcare](#) (GER) to establish a platform based on 5G technology, that enables testing and evaluation of digital applications in scenarios of rural healthcare in living labs (real environments) and test beds. Two defined use cases are the starting point in which exemplary scenarios are used to determine which added value and effects can be realised through digital solutions in healthcare and which additional potential through 5G technology can be unlocked.

#### Use case Integrated care

In the frame of the use case 'Integrated care', a comprehensive digital health-based integrated care approach for rural areas is to be implemented. The aim is to create a virtual care centre, which in addition to conventional care facilities will enable permanently available, high quality and efficient expert care.

### Use case Home care

The second use case ‘Home care’ aims at implementing a comprehensive digital health-based approach with the involvement of representatives of the outpatient sector, explicitly addressing home care and care in rural areas.

### Globalisation Engagement Strategy 2030 for Higher Education

VIVES University of Applied Sciences (BE) designed a holistic [framework on global engagement](#), bringing together the inclusive, international and sustainability agendas. This aims to encourage the discussion within higher education institutions on how to implement the Sustainable Development Goals in the institution's internationalisation strategy.

The framework is based on the five pillars of sustainable development. In the *People* section the focus is mainly on the acquisition of competences for sustainable development and international competencies. The *Planet* section centres on striving to make ecologically responsible choices. Regarding *Prosperity*, the emphasis is on globally relevant research projects that are innovative, interdisciplinary and have a positive impact on society. The *Peace* section deals with an institution's role as an advocate for peace, social and ecological justice and the use of non-stereotypical language and images. The *Partnership* component specifically focuses on a high quality and sustainable partner policy. Strategic goals and specific actions are linked to these different pillars within the framework.

### Zero Carbon Refurbishment

The ongoing refurbishment of a residential complex in the city of Salzburg is an Austrian milestone in social and technological sustainability. The award-winning project “[Zero Carbon Refurbishment](#)” (AT), also referred to as “ZeCaRe”, aims to reduce the carbon footprint of existing housing and making renovation possible without compromising social aspects.

ZeCaRe addresses SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) through the comprehensive renovation and re-densification of multiple residential quarters in the city of Salzburg, which are accompanied by a social-scientific progress to keep the burden on affected inhabitants as low as possible. Also involved is a mobility concept that seeks to increase quality of life for residents who do not own a car and thus work towards sustainable city mobility. Shared electric and cargo bikes will be available to the residents, as well as charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, both in a car-sharing pool and for individual use. Furthermore, the project focuses on SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) by seeking to reduce the energy costs of all residents while also decreasing carbon emissions to a minimum. The comprehensive building renovation with sustainable materials is bundled with an innovative energy concept, involving waste water and exhaust air heat pumps coupled with PV, Power-to-Heat and a biomass boiler for peak demand. The project results are essential components of an ongoing urban refurbishment offensive put forward by the city of Salzburg.

### DIGNITY

The overarching goal of [DIGNITY](#) (NL) is to foster a sustainable, integrated and user-friendly digital travel ecosystem that improves accessibility and social inclusion, along with the travel

experience and daily life of all citizens. The project delves into the digital transport ecosystem to grasp the full range of factors that might lead to disparities in the uptake of digitalised mobility solutions by different user groups in Europe. Analysing the digital transition from both a user and provider's perspective, DIGNITY looks at the challenges brought about by digitalisation, to then design, test and validate the DIGNITY approach, a novel concept that seeks to become the 'ABCs for a digital inclusive travel system'.

In line with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), the idea is to support public and private mobility providers in conceiving mainstream digital products or services that are accessible to and usable by as many people as possible, regardless of their income, social situation or age. Additionally, DIGNITY aims at helping policy makers formulate long-term strategies that promote innovation in transport (see SDG 9: Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure).

### Circular Economy Competence to Universities of Applied Sciences

The [project](#) (FI) addresses SDGs 4 (Quality Education) and 12 (Responsible Consumption & Production) by improving the quality and openness of multidisciplinary education at universities of applied sciences (UAS) by promoting circular economy competence and collaboration with emphasis on international activities.

The objectives are to

- Improve the quality of education, guidance, teaching and learning,
- Increase the selection of studies in circular economy,
- Enhance the circular economy competence of higher education institution staff members,
- Develop and pilot learning environments in cooperation with companies,
- Increase the international attraction of UAS and the export of competence by developing circular economy studies in different languages,
- Determine and agree on common operational concepts both between different UAS and between companies and UAS,
- Increase and establish corporate collaboration, openness and cooperation between UAS and the surrounding society,
- Reinforcing the role of students in teaching and competence development.

### Kommun:E

In the [Kommun:E](#) project (GER), feasible solutions for municipal energy suppliers are being developed which are in line with increased energy efficiency. The overriding criterion is the secure, low-cost, consumer-friendly, efficient and environmentally compatible grid-bound supply of consumers in accordance with SDG 7 (Affordable & Clean Energy).

The project aims to identify local energy scenarios and to describe suitable infrastructural development paths for the concrete implementation of the municipal energy system transformation. The scientific results obtained and to be published are partly directly transferable to other municipalities and are therefore of overriding interest. In some cases, they also form the basis for individual follow-up studies in other municipal supply areas and thus serve to further exploit the project results by the partners. In this way, not only can misinvestments with long-term effects be avoided, which in turn would cause lasting damage

to the business of municipal energy suppliers, but also business areas that will function as the energy transition progresses can be identified and already secured today with suitably planned infrastructure. The research project thus contributes to strengthening municipal energy suppliers as key decentralised players in the energy system's transformation process.

### CAMPUS ZUKUNFT

The campus development programme [CAMPUS ZUKUNFT](#) (GER) aims to implement the holistic sustainability agenda of Biberach UAS in accordance with the SDGs 4 (Quality Education), 7 (Affordable and Clean energy), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 13 (Climate Action). The university connects necessary restoration, expected spatial growth and shifting educational requirements to its long-term goals of climate neutrality by 2040. The concept rests on three strategic pillars: Biberach UAS is the first university in Baden-Württemberg to have had developed an *integrated climate protection concept*. Built upon its analysis and recommendations, the institution aims to develop and install measures for energy-efficient operations and renovation, institutional mobility as well as increasing biodiversity. Progressing, the university will increase *space-efficiency*, adjust spatial utilisation, reduce and prioritise parking space and therefore shape its spatial trajectory for at least the next twenty years. Considering the specifics of the rural setting, the third pillar looks beyond the institutional balance sheet. As 60% of overall study-related emissions fall upon commuting, strategies to avoid or shift *traffic* complement the approach. In close coordination with region and municipality charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, (cargo) bike sharing and incentives to live close to campus and switch to public-transport are on their way. CAMPUS ZUKUNFT taps into these capacities with an inclusive development, consulting and decision process. It involves students, employees and department heads in education and research, draws insights from accompanying participation and aims to continuously transfer its findings into the regional and national sustainability discourse.