

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION**

# **Universities driving sustainability Outlook on their strategies**

**10 April 2025**

## Sustainability: a common language for universities?

- Universities want to be key actors: **transversal role**
- **Responsibility** is the core driver for their commitment
- Recognition of the importance of sustainability-related topics and **growing commitment**: 72% of universities have an environmental sustainability strategy
- Focus on environmental aspects
- Goals tend to be broadly articulated in the strategies and more detailed in the action plans.



Source: [EUA Trends, European higher education institutions in times of transition, 2024](#).

## Sustainability in governance

- Governance models vary **between bottom-up and top-down approaches**
- 50% have leadership in charge on steering greening measures, 38% have a specific portfolio in the leadership team, 38% have a specific committee
- **Student-led initiatives** are rising (52% student engagement)
- Frameworks used: **UN SDGs** (69% of related strategies), **national policies** (39%), European policies (17%)



Source of quantitative data from this point onward: [EUA survey data, Greening in European higher education institutions, 2021](#).

## From words to action: key themes

### Most addressed:

- Footprint reduction (energy, waste, mobility) and carbon neutrality commitment
- Interdisciplinarity in research
- Integration of sustainability in education (mandatory courses, study programmes, thesis awards etc.)
- Community engagement (sustainability weeks, days, conferences, workshops etc.)

### Less addressed:

- Social sustainability and EDI
- Biodiversity and ecosystem focus
- Circular economy and climate justice



## Challenges and targets ahead

### Challenges

- General underfunding and few staff engaged
- Smaller universities lack resources
- Activities on sustainability not always integrated in the strategies

**82% of universities have concrete targets.** Among the targets:

- Net-zero campuses and low-carbon operations
- Sustainability embedded in all educational programmes
- Green campus labels



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