

# Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Higher Education

Z. Gareiou, N. Matsouki, E. Konstantinidis, C. Tsipa, S. Triantafillopoulos and E. Zervas\*

Hellenic Open University, 26335, Patra, Greece

\*zervas@eap.gr

## Introduction

At the 2015 United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development, the resolution “Transforming our world: Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development” was adopted [1]. Agenda 2030 is the new global sustainable development strategy and includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) [2]. The SDG framework has a specific goal regarding Education (SDG4—Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all); and, for the first time, an international agenda makes explicit reference to Higher Education [3].

## Universities and SDGs

Goal 4 consists of 10 targets and 11 indicators. Goal 4 recognizes, in particular, the importance of education for sustainable development and some goals of this Goal explicitly require the action of higher education institutions, given their direct relevance in teaching and learning activities, in the production of knowledge and in the development of skills to meet the challenges of today’s and the future world [4].

**Table 1. SDG 4 and Higher Education**

| SDG 4 : Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning |  |
|--|--|
| 4.3  | By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university  |
| 4.5  | By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations  |
| 4.7  | By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development |

As shown in Table 1, target 4.3 of SDG4 refers specifically to higher education by demanding equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, “including university”[3]. In addition, target 4.5 refers to ensuring equal access to all levels of education for vulnerable groups. Finally, target 4.7 explicitly mentions education for sustainable development (ESD) as the kind of education that can empower learners with important knowledge, skills, and attitudes to pursue sustainability [5].

## Conclusions

The 2030 Agenda is an opportunity for universities to rethink the role of higher education institutions and shed light on the convenience of embedding certain values and practices in their mission [3]. Universities should try to take advantage of the opportunities offered by SDGs, especially in teaching and research.

## References

- [1] Eurostat, 2017, *Sustainable Development in the European Union—Monitoring Report on Progress towards the SDGs in an EU Context*. Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg.
- [2] Chaleta, E., Saraiva, M., Leal, F., Fialho, I., Borralho, A., 2021. Higher Education and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)—Potential Contribution of the Undergraduate Courses of the School of Social Sciences of the University of Évora. *Sustainability*, 13, 1828.
- [3] Sáez de Cámara, E., Fernández, I., Castillo-Eguskiza, N., 2021, A Holistic Approach to Integrate and Evaluate Sustainable Development in Higher Education. The Case Study of the University of the Basque Country. *Sustainability*, 13, 392.
- [4] Leicht, A., Heiss, J., Byun, J., 2018, *Issues and Trends in Education for Sustainable Development; Education on the Move*. UNESCO: Paris, France.
- [5] UNESCO, 2017, *Moving forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. UNESCO: Paris, France.