FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

2025

SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

CONTENTS

Profile

In 1948, professors and students provided the impetus for the founding of Freie Universität Berlin. They were responding to the persecution of university members critical of the regime at the former University of Unter den Linden in the eastern part of the city. Against the backdrop of its founding history, Freie Universität Berlin is firmly committed to its social responsibility for democracy, equality, and diversity. The core values of freedom and internationalism continue to shape its development to this day.

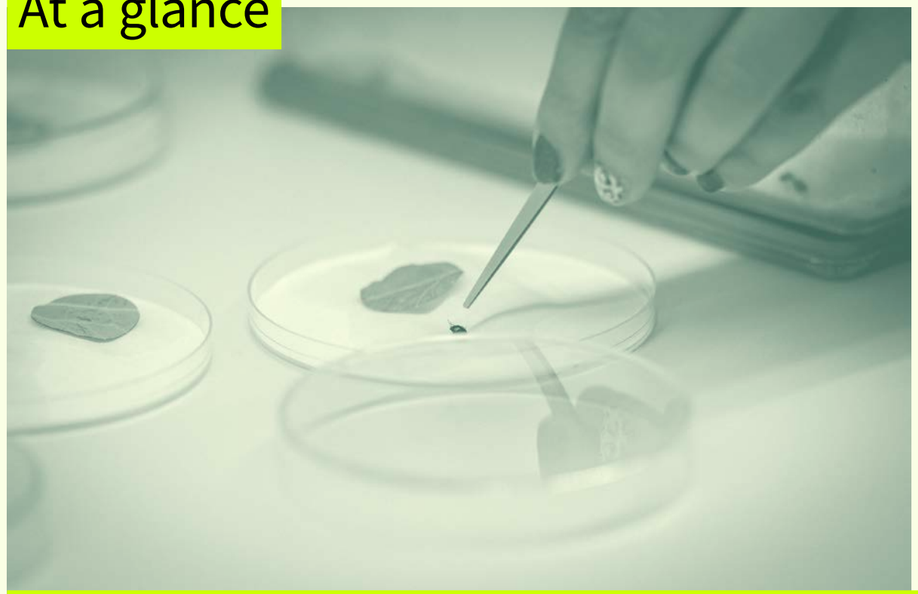
In its Sustainability Mission Statement published in 2016, Freie Universität Berlin anchored its commitment to sustainable development. In 2019, when Freie Universität took the bold step as the first German University to declare a climate emergency, it set seven ambitious goals. Since then, its most significant achievements have included EMAS-certified environmental management, sustainability-oriented idea and innovation management, the biodiversity strategy, regular Sustainability Reports, and the Climate Protection Fund.

Since 2007, Freie Universität Berlin has been one of the Universities of Excellence recognized in the Excellence Strategy competition organized by the federal and state governments. There are currently twelve universities and consortia of excellence in Germany.

Since 2019, the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) with its four Berlin partners — Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin and Charité — Universitätsmedizin Berlin — has been funded as the only consortium of excellence. The BUA sees itself as an open knowledge laboratory for the great transformations of our time. Freie Universität represents the theme of sustainability under the title «Hopeful Futures.»

With approximately 180 degree programs, Freie Universität offers its roughly 38,000 undergraduate and graduate students a broad spectrum of disciplines ranging from natural and life sciences to social sciences and humanities, as well as veterinary medicine. International collaborations play a prominent role in each of these fields. Today, Freie Universität is well-connected globally with over 200 university-wide partnerships, as well as over 400 university partnerships in the Erasmus+ mobility network (Europe and worldwide) and approximately 75 department and institute partnerships. International university networks such as the European university alliance Una Europa, established in 2019, and the International Sustainable Campus Network play an important role in driving initiatives and fostering connections in the area of sustainability.

At a glance



2024

First German university to have a biodiversity strategy

2025

Founding of CSR | Berlin

60+29

Sustainable Idea and Innovation Management: 60 applications and 29 projects supported by FUturist since 2021

46%

of all research projects address sustainability topics

25

years of sustainability management

20

years of Schools@University for Sustainability + Climate Protection: over 50,000 pupils and 4,500 teachers

15

years of the Sustain It! sustainability initiative holding regular Sustainability Days, FUdSharing and UniGardening

62%

of trips to/from university by public transportation and 24% by bicycle

32%

reduction in energy consumption since 2000/01, including increase in floor space

104 million

lower energy consumption reduced costs by 104 million euros since 2003

6

years of EMAS certification with 40 internal environmental audits/year

4,000

NatLab interface between schools, universities, and society: around 4,000 student visitors annually & over 100 teacher candidates trained

New: 35 bicycles, 19 electric cargo bikes, 700 bicycle racks, 8 covered bike parking areas, and 6 bicycle repair stations

Milestones

2001–2010
- Energy Controlling
- Energy Efficiency Programs (until 2011)
- Bonus Scheme for Energy Savings
- Green IT Action Program
- 1st Photovoltaic System
- 1st Schools@University for Sustainability + Climate Protection

2011
- 1st University Sustainability Days

2012
- 1st University Closing over Christmas/New Year

2013
- 1st Combined Heat and Power Plant

2014
- Joined International Sustainability Networks ISCN & UNICA Green
- UniGardening@Sustain It!

2015
- Foundation of University Alliance for Sustainability (UAS)

2016
- 1st Spring Campus Conference of UAS (until 2021)

2017
- Online Energy Monitoring
- FUdsharing Fairteiler@ Sustain It!

2018
- Sustainable Development Area in General Professional Skills Program
- 1st Sustainability Report

2019
- Sustainability Lead Una Europa

2020
- Community Garden «Leafy Green Canopy»
- 1st SDG Compass

2021
- Idea and Innovation Management with 1st FUturist Competition
- 1st Environmental Statement

2022
- 1st Mobility Survey
- Sustainable Campus Tour

2023
- Completion of the first cycle of EMAS validation

2024
- Biodiversity Strategy and Guidelines
- 1st Living Lab

2026
- Climate Protection Fund
- Sustainability Goals and Principles for Business Travel

2026–2028
- Position Paper on Footprint and Handprint
- Climate Protection Program 2035
- New international event formats
- Service learning courses in General Professional Skills Program
- Completion of FUturrad mobility project

Seizing Opportunities for Innovation in Times of Change

«The only certain thing is change.»

The day before John F. Kennedy delivered his speech at Freie Universität on June 26, 1963, he spoke at St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt, where he stated: «Change is the law of life.» And indeed: The only certain thing is change. For this reason, as well, it is an integral part of Freie Universität's self-image to not just observe, analyze, and understand change, but also to actively help shape it responsibly, with foresight and an awareness of our role in the academic system and in society.

The question of the social and political role of universities takes on urgency, especially at a time when skepticism toward science seems to be gaining ground, when academic freedom and university autonomy are being challenged and, in some cases, even undermined. For us, one thing is clear: Universities are not merely places that generate knowledge. Universities, and Freie Universität in particular, are spaces for understanding, critical reflection, and the development of shared visions of the future.

A look at the history of Freie Universität shows that actively shaping change goes hand in hand with the opportunity to open up new avenues for action. Sustainability management is an impressive example of this. Our energy management system, established early on along with the associated efficiency programs, contributed significantly to overcoming the energy crisis of 2022/23. At the same time, it also revealed further potential for savings that reduce our dependence and increase our resilience. Sustainability thus proves to be not primarily a constraint, but rather a prerequisite for future viability. This also applies, incidentally, to other areas of sustainability management, whose holistic principle of a whole-institution approach remains our guiding principle.

Today, Freie Universität is (once again) facing significant financial challenges that will also shape the coming years. Necessary cost-cutting measures will result in a smaller university. We are responding to this with sustainable space and resource management, as well as through the shared use of infrastructure, particularly with our partners in the Berlin University Alliance.

In 2026, we will look back on 25 years of successful sustainability management at Freie Universität, during which the concept of sustainability has become firmly established. We would like to take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has made Freie Universität a pioneer in this field and who has advanced and brought the topic to life in their departments, in the administration, or through volunteer initiatives at our university. We continue to work intensively to create favorable conditions for greater sustainability in research, teaching, knowledge transfer, and on campus. Building on our 2019 climate emergency declaration, we are now providing new impetus through the Climate Protection Fund. We are creating transparency regarding emissions and, through an internal CO_2 pricing system, are specifically supporting

projects in the areas of campus infrastructure, biodiversity, and participatory sustainability. At the same time, we are strengthening the discourse and personal responsibility within our university community, such as through new sustainability goals and principles for business travel, which will be binding parts of our new travel policy. Furthermore, by supporting so-called «CO_2 handprint» activities, we render our positive action for climate protection and sustainability visible and effective beyond the consideration of CO_2 emissions.

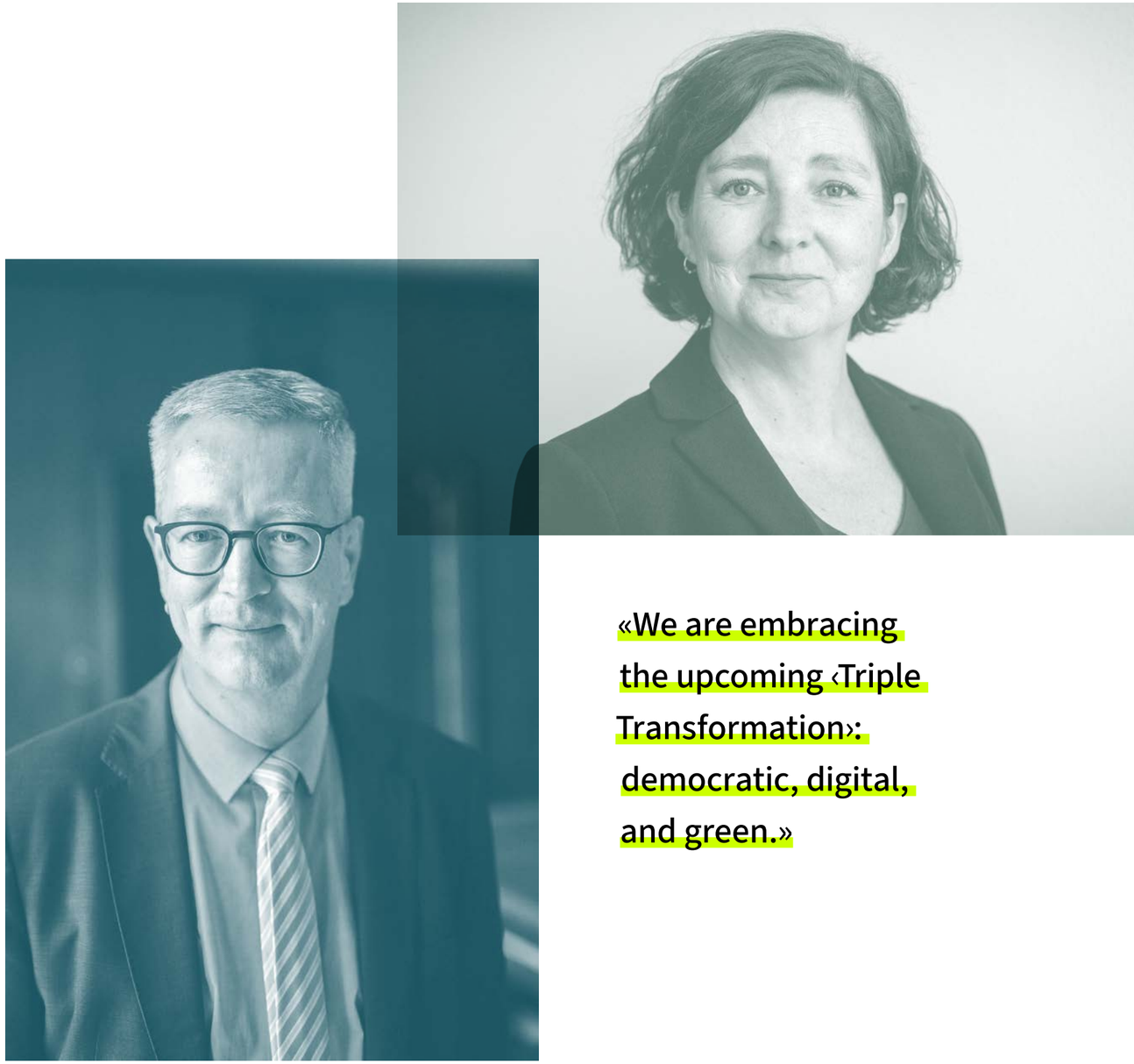
As we begin the new executive leadership term in 2026, we continue to look ahead. We are embracing the upcoming «Triple Transformation»: democratic, digital, and green. For us, these three dimensions are aspects of a vision of the future in which freedom is linked to responsibility, innovation to participation, and progress to sustainability. They shape how we treat each other within the university as well as how we collaborate with our partners in Germany, Europe, and worldwide.

With this commitment, we at Freie Universität as a learning institution, as a voice for academic freedom, and as a co-creator of a sustainable and democratic future, will continue to contribute our expertise to social and political processes.

We invite you to join us on this journey.

PROF. DR. GÜNTER M. ZIEGLER
President

ANDREA GÜTTNER
Chancellor



«We are embracing the upcoming ‹Triple Transformation›: democratic, digital, and green.»

25 Years of Sustainability Management: Freie Universität as a Driver of the Sustainability Transformation

We live in challenging times. Scientific findings leave no doubt that the climate and biodiversity crises must be addressed urgently. Nevertheless, the multiple crises and geopolitical dynamics of recent years have undermined the traction of the sustainability transformation in society and the political world. The interview in this report with Dirk Messner, President of the German Environment Agency and adjunct professor at our university, highlights the factors behind this disconnect between scientific evidence and its political and societal perception. But what does this mean specifically for our university?

In 2026, we at Freie Universität will look back on a quarter-century of intensive institutional engagement with the topic of sustainability. In 2001, more than two decades before legal requirements made addressing energy efficiency and environmental management mandatory, Freie Universität introduced an operational energy management system, which was expanded to include an externally certified environmental management system as early as 2004.

The motivations for these decisions in those early years were a blend of ambitious climate protection, operationally necessary cost reductions, and the desire for systematic environmental management rather than isolated activities. However, actual implementation required more than a coherent normative concept: Without the university-wide energy monitoring system launched right at the outset and a sustainable governance structure comprising agile coordination, clear support from university leadership, and central and decentralized steering and implementation committees, it would not have been possible to reduce the university's energy consumption by 26 percent in less than a decade while simultane-

ously establishing a certified environmental management system that also provided important impetus for other cross-cutting tasks such as occupational safety and the appointment and training of employees entrusted with special tasks. This forward-thinking approach pays off in multiple ways: through long-term reductions in energy costs, minimized environmental risks, and enhanced legal certainty and resilience.

In retrospect, the number of university stakeholders involved, and the momentum of the activities were remarkably high. This demonstrates the crucially important role that participation and effective communication play in such processes. These conditions for success — central coordination, ambitious goals, support from university leadership, transparency and measurability, as well as the committed participation of various levels of the university administration — also proved to be essential for our subsequent key activities. From the founding of the University Alliance for Sustainability (2015), the introduction of regular sustainability reports (2018), and the establishment of the Sustainable Development competence area within the General Professional Skills Courses (ABV) (2018), the establishment of idea and innovation management (2021), and the development of a Biodiversity Strategy (2024) have shaped and continue to provide the impetus for the future development of sustainability management at our university with its whole-institution approach.

With the recent decisions to introduce a Climate Protection Fund and the sustainability goals and principles for business travel, as well as the formulation of the strategy paper on the CO_2 handprint, we are sending a clear signal that we intend to continue playing a leading role in the context of sustainability. Other activities outlined in this sustainability report, such as the founding of the Center for Sustainable Resources CSR|Berlin and our Sustainability Program 2026–2028, also underscore this commitment. Noteworthy aspects of the latter include the planned integration of service learning into the General Professional Skills (ABV) program, the establishment of international exchange programs, the Climate Protection Program 2035, and the completion of the FUturrad mobility project. As you can see, there are many opportunities at our university to drive the sustainability transformation forward. We cordially invite you — students and staff — to join us.

Let’s stay ambitious together!

ANDREAS WANKE
Director of the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit

«This forward-thinking approach pays off in multiple ways: through long-term reductions in energy costs, minimized environmental risks, and enhanced legal certainty and resilience.»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GOVERNANCE

Sustainability and Climate Protection at Freie Universität Berlin

In 2026, Freie Universität Berlin will look back on 25 years of systematic sustainability management. The guiding principle of the whole-institution approach and breadth of the topics addressed are demonstrated by the university-wide energy management and monitoring (since 2001), a certified environmental management system (2004–2013 and again since 2021), participation in international university networks (since 2014), the Sustainable Development Competence Area within the General Professional Skills (ABV) program (since 2018), sustainability-oriented idea and innovation management (since 2021), and the adoption of the Biodiversity Strategy (2024). New milestones in sustainability management include the Climate Protection Fund and the sustainability goals and principles for business travel →, both of which were introduced in 2026. The publication of sustainability reports (since 2018) and environmental statements (since 2021) forms the basis for successful communication both within the university and externally, extending beyond the website. →

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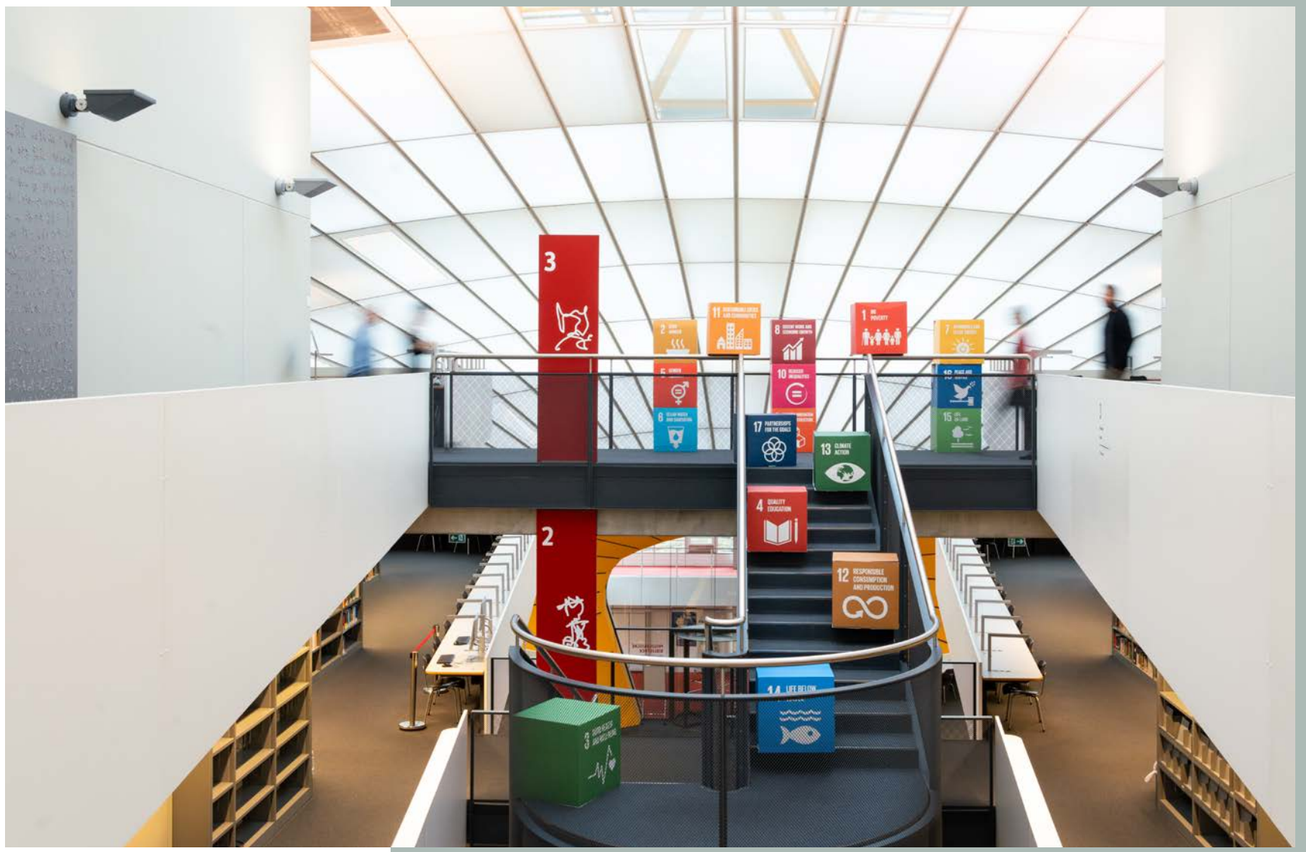
Global challenges are interconnected and call for collaborative forward-looking solutions: this is what Freie Universität emphasizes among the sustainability goals of the UN.



Ten years ago, Freie Universität committed itself to a Sustainability Mission Statement, pledging to incorporate the principles of sustainable development into research, teaching, knowledge transfer, and campus operations.

Ten years ago, Freie Universität committed itself to a Sustainability Mission Statement, pledging to incorporate the principles of sustainable development into research, teaching, knowledge transfer, and campus operations. At the end of 2019, it declared a climate emergency and defined seven goals for climate-friendly and sustainability-oriented university development. Another important commitment is its environmental guidelines, adopted as early as 2007 and updated in 2021 as part of the EMAS implementation.

Governance Structure

At Freie Universität, sustainability and climate protection are understood as core values and cross-cutting tasks that concern the entire university. The Executive Board has tasked the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit with steering and coordinating sustainability management. This unit reports to both the Chancellor and the Vice President responsible for sustainability, reflecting the university's understanding that sustainable development is both a leadership and an integration task.

In 2020, the Executive Board and the Academic Senate established the Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection, which advises the university leadership on the sustainability strategy. Chaired by the Vice President responsible for sustainability, the committee includes representatives from all university staff groups appointed by the Academic Senate. The committee's work is supplemented by representatives of sustainability initiatives and topic-specific working groups that develop recommendations on individual priority areas.

Further pillars of sustainability management include the integration of sustainability goals into the performance agreements between the Executive Board and the departments, as well as sustainability teams at the departmental level. Important impetus regularly comes from within the university. In addition to collaborations with researchers, this includes the initiatives Sustain It! (since 2010), Blooming Campus (since 2019), and GreenFUBib (since 2021). Sustain It! itself has fostered further initiatives such as FUdSharing and the community gardens Blätterlaube (Leafy Green Canopy) and UniGardening. Founded in 2021, Campus Zukunftsbildung also develops transdisciplinary educational programs on sustainable development for schools and other educational offerings in the Steglitz-Zehlendorf district.

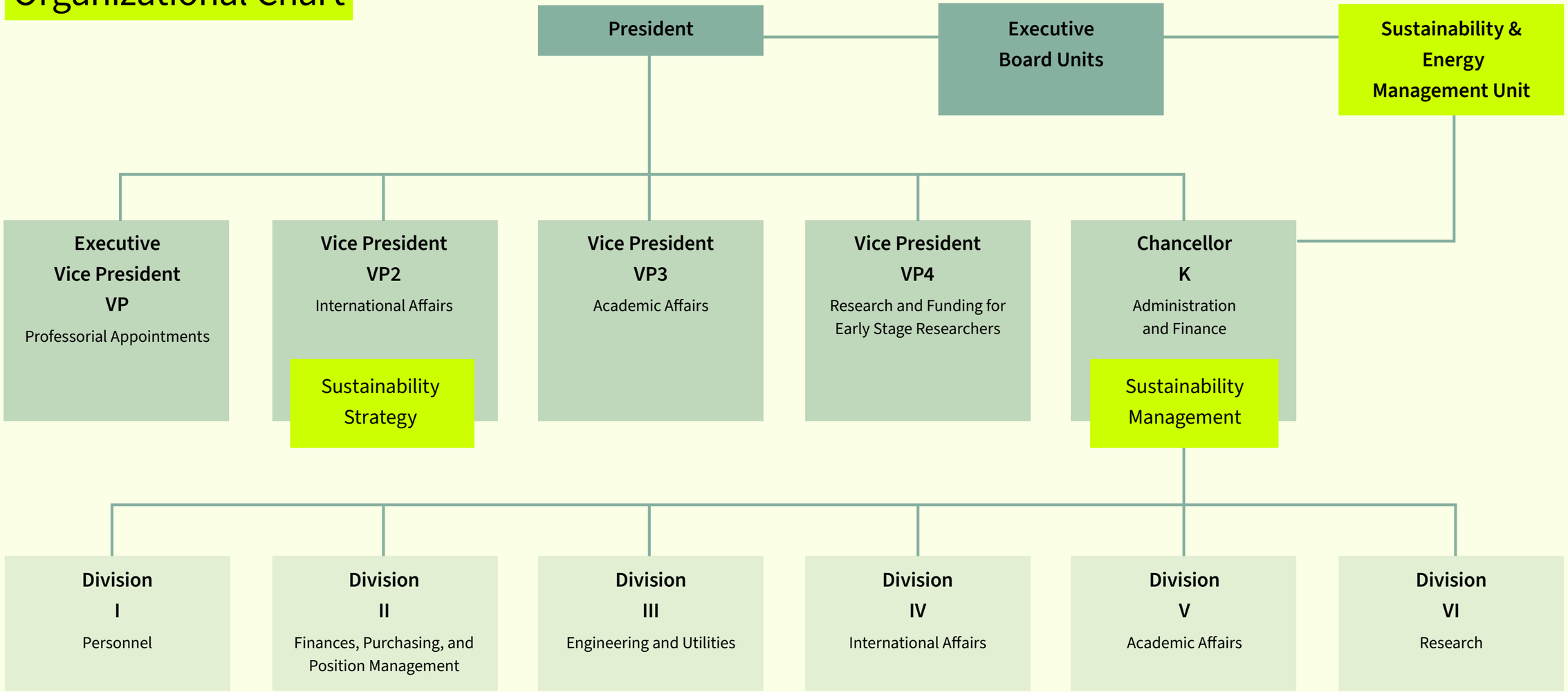
Sustainability & Energy Management Unit

Since 2015, Freie Universität Berlin has consolidated the key cross-cutting tasks of sustainability management within the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit. The team of eleven staff members and four student assistants (as of 2026) views itself not only as a strategic advisory body but also as a catalyst and development agency for the topics of sustainability and climate protection. The unit's actions are guided by the whole-institution approach, which encompasses all areas of the university: research, teaching, knowledge transfer, administration, and the campus.

Since sustainability management succeeds only with effective collaboration by many university stakeholders, the unit's key responsibilities include working with committees, creating opportunities for participation, and networking activities. It coordinates the Sustainability & Climate Protection Advisory Committee, the Sustainable Development Competence Area within the General Professional Skills (ABV) program, as well as idea and innovation management system. The unit is also responsible for the governance of the AGUM integrated management system and the associated EMAS certification process, as well as the university's energy monitoring. It also represents Freie Universität Berlin in regional and international university networks. Its areas of responsibility are evolving continuously; newly added areas include the introduction and implementation of biodiversity management, as well as the coordination of a mobility project to promote cycling on campus.

The team views itself not only as a strategic advisory body but also as a catalyst and development agency for the topics of sustainability and climate protection.

Organizational Chart



Last updated: July 2026

Governance and Participation Structure

Part of the Environmental Management system, validated according to EMAS

Advisory Councils
Sustainability & Climate Protection
2–4 meetings per year

Strategy recommendations

Working Groups
Thematic groups of experts
1–3 meetings per year

Initiation and preparation
of recommendations and instruments

Sustainability Teams
in the Departments
1–3 meetings per year

Development
of sustainability measures

Audits
On-site visits and discussions
30–40 audits per year

Identification
of optimization measures

strategic ← → operational

Initiatives for Sustainability and Climate Protection
Sustain It!, Blooming Campus, GreenFUBib, FURad, etc.

INTERVIEW

Climate Protection Under Pressure: Challenges of the Sustainability Transition

PROF. DR. DIRK MESSNER
President of the German Environment Agency (UBA), Adjunct Professor at Freie Universität

The discourse on sustainability has shifted significantly in politics and society in recent years. How can the sustainability transition be shaped successfully under these changing conditions?

Mr. Messner, in politics and society, perceptions of the importance of the sustainability transition have changed dramatically since 2019. Although ambitious climate protection continues to be an urgent task demanding action, sustainability no longer seems to be part of the narrative of progress. To what extent is this impression accurate?

DIRK MESSNER I would share that impression. The European Green Deal (EGD), championed by the conservative EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, was Europe's «Man on the Moon» project at the beginning of the 2020s. Europe wanted to demonstrate how securing prosperity and social progress are possible even while staying within the limits of ecosystems. Just a few years later, the EGD is coming under immense pressure and even losing support. And you are right: environmental research worldwide shows that planetary crises are intensifying. Institutions like the German Environment Agency are once again becoming Cassandras, whereas in the early 2020s, the implementation of ambitious environmental and climate policies as the core of our economic modernization was the primary focus.

To which factors is this development primarily attributable?

DM Three sets of causes are decisive here: First, the European economy is in a difficult condition; boosting the economy's innovative capacity must be aligned with the EGD's core objectives. In parts of the political, business, and social spheres, ambitious climate protection is now primarily viewed as an additional burden on the economy. Russia's war against Ukraine, the Gaza conflict, and the erratic policies of the Trump administration have also led the EU to massively increase its investments in (par-

ticularly military) security, thereby limiting the scope for investment in the transition to sustainability. The dual crisis of recession and security threats creates a climate of fixation on the present, preserving the status quo, and hinders future-oriented structural change.

Second, citizens' political priorities have shifted. From 2018 to 2020, environmental and climate policy were at the top of their agenda. Now, citizens find that other concerns are more pressing and should take precedence. The UBA Environmental Awareness Study from 2025 shows that people are now primarily concerned about the erosion of the health and education systems as well as internal security. Such shifts are also linked to the crises of democracy. Many people feel that the state is no longer fulfilling its core responsibilities. The social contract between citizens and politics is becoming fragile. As a result, environmental and climate issues seem «secondary» to many citizens.

Third, the EGD transformation has created «second-order problems» for which policymakers were not sufficiently prepared. For instance, the sustainability transformation creates a variety of distribution and equity issues that have not been adequately addressed. In Germany, for example, the «heating bill debate» was an expression of the feeling that many people cannot afford climate policy. Furthermore, the transformation places high demands on the state's capacity to act.

Today I would say: Without a massive modernization of the public sector, the transition to sustainability cannot succeed. The debate on «reducing bureaucracy» must be steered in this direction: How can ambitious climate and environmental policy function with the leanest possible regulatory burden?

Are there also examples of successful transformation processes? If so, what can we learn from these successes?

DM Yes, there have also been successes. Renewable energies are on a global expansion trajectory that even many optimists could not have imagined ten years ago. Fossil fuel investments are losing significance: A solid 70 percent of new investments in the global energy sector are going into renewables. The challenge here is to phase out the existing fossil fuel infrastructure by around 2050. Yet fossil fuel capacities are being defended, in some cases very successfully, by established lobbying alliances. The debate over phasing out internal combustion engines or the pressure to maintain gas and oil heating systems fit into this context. Interests of the present and past are often better organized than those of the future. →

«Renewable energies are on a global expansion trajectory that even many optimists could not have imagined ten years ago.»

The energy transition was once the flagship project of Germany's sustainability transformation. How do you assess the current state of affairs, including in an international context?

DM The energy sector is the driving force behind climate neutrality. Our projections show that we can achieve key goals of the energy transition if we continue to work ambitiously: 80 percent renewables in the electricity mix by 2030 is achievable; a 65 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions between 1990 and 2030 is within reach. In addition to the continued expansion of wind and solar energy, in the energy sector the current focus is on investments in the overall energy supply system: grids, storage capacities, digital control, and green hydrogen potential as a backup to renewables. These are the levers for building a climate-neutral energy sector by 2045. However, our projections also show that if the German government's commitment to the green transition in the energy sector wanes and supposed freedom to choose among all technologies leads to rising emissions once again, the energy transition could still fail. We can also now learn from China as a forerunner in several respects. The country is investing enormous sums to move beyond the fossil fuel foundations of its energy supply by mid-century.

«Our projections show that we can achieve key goals of the energy transition if we continue to work ambitiously.»

What role will the ETS 2 emissions trading system, planned for 2027, play in future climate protection?

DM The ETS 2 system will introduce emissions pricing in the building and mobility sectors. Unfortunately, it was recently postponed until 2028 because many EU member states are concerned that sufficient mechanisms have not yet been developed to cushion the costs for citizens, particularly for vulnerable groups. The UBA has proposed solutions for a socially equitable design of ETS 2. We propose a socially differentiated climate allowance, supplemented by targeted support for particularly vulnerable groups, both of which could be financed from the revenues of CO_2 pricing. We should promise the bottom 50 percent of the income pyramid that they will not be financially worse off as a result of the introduction of ETS 2. The ETS 2 toolkit is very important for climate protection, because we have not been meeting our climate targets in the building and mobility sectors so far. That could change with ETS 2, but only if the social design is successful in all member states. There is still much to be done.

In your opinion, which areas of action are the largest causes for concern?

DM I have already mentioned mobility and buildings. Beyond that, I am highly concerned about ecosystems. A large portion of emissions is stored in the oceans and terrestrial ecosystems. If these ecosystems fail to act as «sinks,» it will further accelerate global warming. Studies worldwide show that ecosystems in many places are themselves becoming sources of greenhouse gases or that their capacities as sinks are eroding. This could apply, for example, to the Amazon rainforest region. Another potential risk lies in the tipping points within the Earth system. These include, for

example, the melting of the Greenland ice sheet, the collapse of the monsoon system, or the thawing of permafrost. A decade ago, most of these tipping points were thought to lie beyond the three-degree warming threshold. New studies point to increasing probabilities that tipping points could already be triggered at around two degrees. Such a change in the Earth system represents a challenge for future generations that is still largely misunderstood.

How can science and universities help address the problems identified? In particular, what special challenges do you see for science communication?

DM Without research, we cannot understand the dynamics of climate and Earth system change. Research is our telescope into conceivable futures. Research is also the foundation for solutions to address planetary crises. At the same time, university education in these fields is indispensable for societies to remain capable of taking action. Science communication is becoming even more important. We have seen that technocratic transformation strategies fail because people cannot understand what they are intended to achieve. Science must make itself understandable to society and policymakers. «Science for scientists,» which neglects to communicate research findings to society, undermines research's shared responsibility for society's problem-solving capabilities.

You have served on a number of high-level political Advisory Committees on sustainability transformation. If you could travel back in time, would you advise policymakers differently with the knowledge you have today?

DM I have drawn three lessons from 30 years of scientific policy advising: First, I mentioned «second-order problems of the transition to sustainability.» Today, I would attribute significantly greater importance to them. Second, environmental and climate challenges can only be solved through interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and international collaboration. I would say that there is significant room for improvement in all three dimensions. Third, in the sustainability transformation community, we assumed that planetary issues would represent «the» central challenge of the 21st century. Now we see three further, profound dynamics of change (tectonic plates, so to speak) that have begun to shift. It appears as though we are dealing with four «major transformations» that must be understood and addressed in their interplay. In addition to the sustainability transformation, we observe: the comprehensive crisis of democracy in the core countries of democracy; the erosion of the international system, in an age of global interconnectedness, which could lead to a renaissance of imperial structures in world politics; the power and reach of AI-driven disruptions, which challenge all subsystems of our local, national, and global societies and the role of humans in the process of civilization. There is still much work to be done in the field of scientific policy advising.

This interview was conducted on March 12th, 2026.

From Commitment to Action: An Interim Assessment of the Climate Emergency Declaration

With its climate emergency declaration (CED) in 2019, Freie Universität Berlin became the first university in Germany to send a clear political signal regarding the urgency of climate protection within its own institution. Since then, based on its seven goals, several instruments and measures have been developed to further embed sustainability in university structures. The interim status towards these goals as of 2026 is as follows:

Regular Reports

With biennial sustainability reports (since 2018), annual environmental statements (since 2021), and annually updated SDG reports (since 2022), Freie Universität maintains an above-average reporting frequency, ensuring high visibility within the German and international higher education landscape.

Continuous Improvement on Campus and within the Institution

With the AGUM → integrated management system established in 2021 and the EMAS validation launched at the same time, Freie Universität has a certified environmental management system that is considered the highest seal of quality for sustainable environmental management. The annual audit by the external environmental auditor is prepared through approximately 40 internal audits and supplemented by additional components of the management system, such as sustainability programs, management reviews, and action item checks. This lays the foundation for a continuous improvement process and enhanced legal certainty.

Promoting Individual and Collective Engagement

In 2021, we established sustainability-oriented idea and innovation management → as defined in the CED. One important part of this, the annual FUturist competitions have so far attracted 60 submissions for projects, of which 29 have received funding. Three Living Labs, cross-departmental real-world laboratories bridging research, teaching, and administration, have also received financial support.

Integrating Climate Protection and Sustainability into Teaching

To anchor permanently the topic of sustainability in teaching, Freie Universität has established the «Sustainable Development» competence area within the General Professional Skills (ABV) program (2018) and the Teaching and Studies Mission Statement (2021). The ABV → program offers 8–11 seminars per semester with a total of 150–200 students enrolled. In

addition, there are regular training opportunities for faculty members. Also at the faculty level, the university established the Junior Professorship → for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and transformative education in subject-specific didactics within the Department of Political and Social Sciences, which has significantly strengthened ESD competence and expertise in this field of action and laid the foundation for networking with other departments about their course offerings in this thematic area.

Highlighting Sustainability Issues

Regular evaluations of research projects and courses aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demonstrate that sustainability has long been a core area of university research → and teaching → at Freie Universität. The results also form an important basis for targeted networking among stakeholders. Through active participation in regional and international sustainability networks →, the university is purposefully advancing its visibility in this area.

Climate Neutrality by 2025

The CED set the goal of becoming climate neutral by 2025. However, an assessment of the options for implementing this goal concluded that it could only have been achieved through the purchase of external offset credits. Following intensive discussions within the Executive Board and the Advisory Committee on Sustainability & Climate Protection, the university leadership deliberately decided against this form of emissions offsets and instead opted for the more challenging path of structural

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For implementing the goals of the climate emergency declaration, Freie Universität Berlin emphasizes participation and inclusion.

changes within the institution itself. To this end, a Climate Protection Fund was established in 2026, the resources of which are used to support additional climate protection and biodiversity measures that go beyond statutory requirements. The size of the Climate Protection Fund is determined by the total of unavoidable CO_2 emissions from campus operations (Scopes 1 & 2), business travel, and paper consumption (Scope 3). In 2024, this amounted to approximately 264,000 euros. Starting in 2026, an internal CO_2 price of 30 euros per ton will be set. The goal is to rapidly increase this to 50 euros per ton. A cross-departmental working group will in the future define climate protection measures in the areas of campus infrastructure, biodiversity, and participatory climate protection. The Climate Protection Fund ensures transparency regarding emissions caused by university operations as well as the measures taken to mitigate them and promotes an ongoing dialog on sustainability issues.

Taking climate impacts into account in all planning and decision-making

The most ambitious goal applies to all areas, levels, and decision-making processes at the university and ultimately encompasses more than the sum of the activities already outlined. To name just a few developments and results: Freie Universität's decades-long efforts in the area of energy efficiency have led to a total energy savings of 32 percent since 2000/01. This also includes the activities outlined in this report in the areas of biodiversity management, sustainable mobility, the vehicle fleet, and paper use. Business travel → accounted for nearly 40 percent of total recorded emissions in 2024. To reduce these, new sustainability goals and principles for business travel will be introduced in 2026. By carefully assessing the necessity of business travel, utilizing digital alternatives, choosing climate-friendly modes of transportation, and conducting regular evaluations, the goal is to reduce emissions by 20 percent compared to the baseline of 2018/19.

Interim Assessment

The interim assessment presented here shows that, since 2019, Freie Universität Berlin has implemented the key objectives of the Climate Emergency Declaration at the structural level. However, the credibility of a sustainability-oriented university also depends on the recognition that the vision of a firmly established (decision-making) culture of sustainability still requires a wide range of further efforts. This gives rise to the central challenge of continuing to effectively integrate sustainability goals into strategic institutional planning supported by the entire university. In this context, the focus is increasingly shifting to the positive contributions of research and teaching to climate protection and sustainability.

From the Blooming Campus to a Biodiversity Strategy

Prof. Dr. Jens Rolff heads the Biodiversity Working Group and is well-connected within the university's sustainability structures. A conversation about successes and challenges.

PROF. DR. JENS ROLFF
Evolutionary biologist, Department of Biology, Chemistry, and Pharmacy

Mr. Rolff, you have been committed to sustainability at the university for years, including in the Academic Senate (AS), the Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection, and the Biodiversity Working Group. What motivates you?

JENS ROLFF Two things: Freie Universität is one of those universities that is already doing a great deal in the areas of sustainability and climate protection, and in that respect, it offers a wide range of opportunities for engagement. Universities also have an implicit duty to try new things and to share these experiences with society. Personally, I have been committed to environmental protection since my youth. →

«First and foremost, the Blooming Campus initiative demonstrates that something positive can emerge from frustration.»

What role does this issue play in the work of the Academic Senate?

JR Despite higher education policy being dominated by austerity measures, I consistently find the body to be a reliable partner when it comes to concrete sustainability issues. This was also evident during the presentation of the annual report by the Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection in February 2026, which received an overwhelmingly positive response.

You co-founded the Blooming Campus initiative in 2019. In your view, what were the key factors behind its success? Can we learn anything from this for other areas of action?

JR First and foremost, the Blooming Campus initiative demonstrates that something positive can emerge from frustration. Until 2019, the early-blooming plants which are so vital for wild bees were mowed in front of our institute every spring. This is how we came up with the idea of using our expertise to turn the problem into a positive outcome. Driven by the commitment of a doctoral student at the time, an internal university initiative developed that, thanks to support from the Executive Board, established connections with the administration and green space management and ultimately led to the proclamation of the Year of Biodiversity 2024. Just ten months after the first meeting with the university administration, the Biodiversity Strategy was published in April 2024. Today, the dedicated members of the Blooming Campus, together with other university stakeholders, care for ten hectares of land. →

Where do you see biodiversity in five years? What successes will the working group look back on?

JR With the consistent implementation of the strategy, biodiversity-oriented maintenance of green spaces and the greening of facades will become the norm, while simultaneously improving the microclimate on campus. In the future, there will also be a greater focus on de-sealing since sealed surfaces intensify heat. However, the long-term success of biodiversity management depends on its permanent institutionalization within the administration. In teaching and research, the «Blooming Campus» is already well established, with 14 bachelor's and master's theses. There is potential for expansion, particularly through the greater integration of other disciplines such as psychology, social sciences, and teacher training. The Botanical Garden with its grounds and seed bank also offers important expertise for the conservation of global biodiversity. At the same time, it opens up concrete research opportunities on site. With the opening of the Biodiversity Research Building in collaboration with the Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries in June 2026, the topic of biodiversity on the FU campus will be further strengthened by top-tier research and laboratory infrastructure.

In your view, what are the largest challenges on the way there?

JR The current cost-cutting measures are naturally dampening morale. However, biodiversity should be understood more as a positive added value rather than a burden: Biodiverse green space maintenance is more cost-effective than conventional methods, and the university itself possesses diverse expertise in this field. Furthermore, studies show that nature-oriented spaces can promote health and job satisfaction and reduce absenteeism.

You have been involved with the Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection for several years. How could it gain even more traction at the university?

JR The committee's strength lies in its broad representation of all staff groups, reflecting the university's diversity. With the extension of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) this year, the focus is now on initiating projects in collaboration with other universities. Freie Universität Berlin is already very sustainable, but new initiatives such as implementing optimized resource efficiency in laboratories require time and money. I hope that the BUA will continue to advance the Green Labs initiative by establishing a coordinator position. This could lead to significant energy and resource savings on a large scale.

In Focus: Freie Universität has had its own biodiversity strategy since 2024.

Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection

Since 2020, the Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection has been advising the university administration on strategic goals and priorities for sustainability initiatives in line with the university's climate emergency declaration and Sustainability Mission Statement. The committee was established following an initiative by the General Student Assembly in June 2019 and was subsequently approved by the Executive Board and the Academic Senate. Replacing the Central Sustainability Steering Committee which had been in place since 2016, it ensures that decision-making proposals are grounded in broad expertise and a participatory approach by bringing together diverse perspectives from across the university. The committee monitors regional and international developments and trends in the field of sustainable development at universities, derives concrete priorities for action from these, and thereby strengthens the strategic advancement and implementation of sustainability and climate protection at the university.

In-depth Expertise Through Working Groups

The Advisory Committee is composed of individuals from all staff categories and is chaired by the Vice President responsible for sustainability. Representatives of the university's sustainability initiatives also regularly participate in the meetings.

During the reporting period, the committee's substantive work was expanded through working groups on the topics of libraries and sustainability, teaching, climate neutrality, and the CO_2 handprint. These groups regularly report to the committee based on their expertise. In August 2025, the Advisory Committee sent a letter of recommendation to the Executive Board urging the establishment of the planned Climate Protection Fund despite the difficult budgetary situation.

The working groups meet one to four times a year, and the Advisory Committee itself meets three to four times a year. The Sustainability & Energy Management Unit is responsible for coordinating and documenting the results of the meetings.

«I believe in the importance of Freie Universität Berlin continuing to fulfill its pioneering role in climate protection as well as in other areas of sustainability. I currently see a central task of the Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection as helping to ensure that Freie Universität maintains this course reliably and ambitiously, even under conditions of financial constraints.»

PROF. DR. HOLGER DAU
Department of Physics, Member of the Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection

Sustainability Systematically Embedded: EMAS and AGUM

Freie Universität Berlin's sustainability and environmental management system has been certified according to the European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) standard since 2021 and was successfully re-validated in 2024 and 2025. The EMAS seal of approval is considered the most demanding environmental management standard in Europe. Freie Universität is thus part of a relatively small group of about 20 universities in Germany that apply this standard. The EMAS seal of approval underscores the university's commitment to continuously improve its environmental management.

Since 2020, central regulations, processes, and responsibilities in the areas of occupational safety, health, and environmental protection have been consolidated into the integrated management system AGUM (Occupational Safety, Health, and Environmental Protection Management System). It is available to all university members on the intranet. AGUM specifically supports the implementation of legal requirements by managers and employees entrusted with special responsibilities, such as safety, first aid, and fire safety officers. At the same time, it also contains university-specific guidelines and information, such as the environmental mission statement, the climate emergency declaration, and information on opportunities for participation in sustainability initiatives. The university administration has designated the AGUM as a binding framework for action for all university members. To help with its adoption, the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit offers regular training and workshops on AGUM and EMAS validation.

Transparency for University Members

The AGUM and EMAS certification, with their diverse tools, support Freie Universität in systematically recording, evaluating, and continuously improving its environmental impacts. The structured collection of environmental indicators enables the identification of potential savings. On this basis, the university develops and implements targeted measures to reduce harmful environmental impacts. AGUM also ensures transparency for all university members regarding responsibilities and organizational processes.

Regular internal self-audits as well as annual external audits conducted by an independent environmental auditor help to monitor progress and identify opportunities for improvement. At the same time, internal mechanisms such as the annual management reviews ensure that planned measures are actually implemented. →

↑
Audit in the Department of Veterinary Medicine
→
Up to 40 internal audits are performed each year.

Strengthening Collaboration

As part of the internal and external audits conducted from 2024 to 2026, in addition to the Executive Board and the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, all administrative departments of the Central University Administration, the Continuing Education Center, FUB-IT, as well as all academic departments and sustainability initiatives active at the university were audited. In addition, the independent environmental auditor reviewed the annually published environmental statements that document Freie Universität Berlin's progress in areas such as resource conservation, emissions reduction, and waste prevention.

Another intended, positive effect of the EMAS certification process is the strengthening of cooperation among various stakeholders within the university. Cooperation between administration, research, teaching, and central facilities creates synergies and helps to establish sustainability as a shared responsibility. At the same time, the system promotes awareness of environmental and sustainability issues among university members. The integration of sustainability into everyday activities is also supported by the inclusion of sustainability aspects in the regular mandatory occupational safety training sessions.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT
THE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

INTERVIEW

Sustainability Team: Achieving More Together

PROF. DR. STEFAN KRUMM
Scientific Director of FU Diagnostik

DR. SIBYLLE DETEL
Research Associate at FU Diagnostik,
Department of Education and Psychology

Prof. Dr. Stefan Krumm and Dr. Sibylle Detel founded a sustainability team in their department at the end of 2024. A conversation about their motivation and experiences.

Professor Krumm, Dr. Detel, what motivated you to establish a sustainability team in your department?

STEFAN KRUMM In our own personal lives, we try to act in an environmentally conscious and sustainable manner. It therefore made sense to also take a closer look at our actions and the conditions of our daily work. For us, it is also about how Freie Universität's climate and environmental protection guidelines can be put into practice in our daily work. We discussed this within our department in 2024, and this led to the desire to establish a sustainability team for the Department of Psychology in order to involve more people from our work environment and have a greater impact.

What was the response to your activities in the department?

SIBYLLE DETEL We quickly found other interested individuals. Currently, eight colleagues from among the research staff, professors, and administrative staff participate in regular meetings. We have discussed many ideas here; initial measures are in the works. →

What topics did you address first?

SK We focused primarily on what is likely the most difficult topic: air travel. Business air travel is a major driver of CO_2 emissions in academic research. In 2024, this amounted to approximately 56 tons of CO_2 emissions for our department. At the same time, presentations at international conferences are important for the visibility of researchers, especially in the early stages of their careers. We were able to agree with the departments and administration to implement internal departmental reporting of flight mileage and associated CO_2 emissions starting in 2026. Following the example of the Physics Sustainability Team, we would have liked to require all employees to calculate their respective emissions using a CO_2 calculator and record them on a form when submitting a travel request. Unfortunately, this plan has not been feasible so far, as any additional form is perceived as an unreasonable burden in a workday that is already heavily burdened by bureaucracy. We have recently announced a sustainability award in our department, which is intended to recognize not only climate-friendly business travel but also sustainable teaching and research practices, resource use in daily work, and administrative processes. It aims to provide concrete incentives for more sustainable behavior and increase visibility within the department. A website is also currently under development for this purpose.

Where do you see the challenges for the department in the coming years? How do you deal with obstacles?

SK The amendment to the Higher Education Contract between Freie Universität and the State of Berlin, signed at the beginning of the year, includes the goal of striving for climate neutrality by 2035. Given the three to four thousand tons of CO_2 emitted annually from business air travel alone, it seems to us like an enormous challenge to be climate neutral in nine years. At the same time, we are aware that university-wide regulatory measures sometimes fail to account for the realities of individual research groups. It is important to us that certain groups of people, such as those with significant caregiving responsibilities, who often have to prioritize air travel due to time constraints are not disadvantaged. Therefore, we are focusing more on awareness, information, and incentives in areas that fall within each individual's sphere of influence. While we have little control over building conditions that affect heating and energy costs, we can certainly influence our own heating and ventilation habits or the choice of transportation.

What are the sustainability team's next steps?

SD We first want to focus on what is immediately feasible within our area. We are putting direct implementation opportunities into practice, such as pointing out a meadow that is currently in bloom and should not be mowed. We want to work even harder on the visibility of the sustainability team to gather even more ideas from employees outside the sustainability team and keep awareness of «employee green behavior» high. This also includes greater involvement of students. Regular exchanges with other sustainability teams would be helpful for learning from one another and coordinating measures. Looking ahead, we would like to see business travel requests processed through a university-wide online system that includes a built-in CO_2 calculator by default.

TEACHING

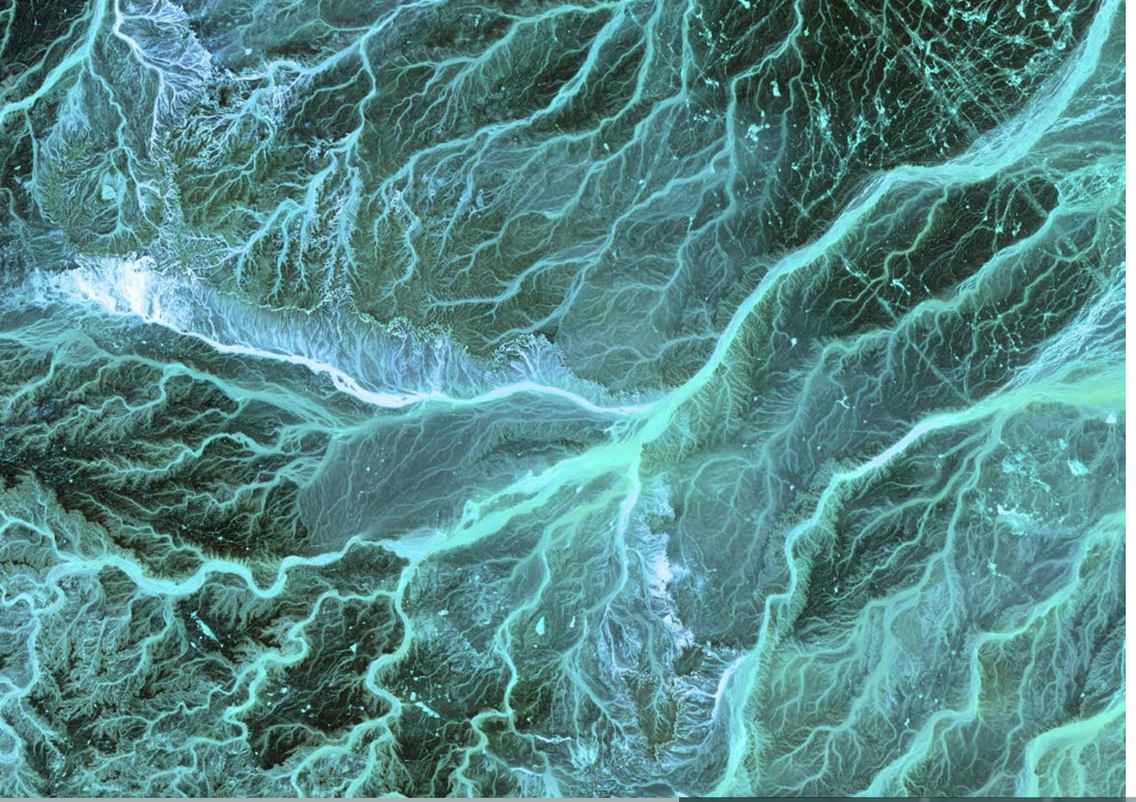
Sustainability in Teaching: Imparting Skills for Change

↑
Teaching specialized knowledge and competence for forward-looking thinking and acting

Integrating sustainability into academic teaching is a key priority for Freie Universität Berlin. This goes beyond imparting specialized knowledge to include fostering sustainable thinking and responsible action. Freie Universität views this as an interdisciplinary and pedagogical task in which all departments participate. In addition to traditional topics such as climate change, the energy transition, and global justice, the focus is on innovative teaching and learning formats based on the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework.

Since 2016, the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit has evaluated all course offerings in relation to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. In this, a distinction is made between courses related to sustainability and courses focused on sustainability. «Related to sustainability» here means that the courses address sustainability topics corresponding to at least one of the UN SDGs. A focus on sustainability means that the courses examine at least one of the UN SDGs from a specialized or interdisciplinary perspective that is consistent with the priorities of sustainability, such as weighing ecological aspects higher than social or economic aspects.

In the 2025/2026 winter semester, 845 (21.6%) of 3,912 courses offered were related to sustainability, and 218 (5.6%) focused on sustainability. See infographic →



→
First practical test: teachers in training develop workshops for 5th and 6th grade pupils.

Anchoring in the Mission Statement for Teaching and Education

In 2021, Freie Universität Berlin published its Teaching and Education in 2030 mission statement. Sustainability is defined therein as a natural part of learning, teaching, and campus life. Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches play a central role in addressing complex societal challenges holistically.

The Dahlem Center for Academic Teaching (DCAT) supports faculty integrating sustainability topics into their teaching in a methodologically and didactically meaningful way. This university-based institution also offers continuing education in higher education pedagogy and collaborates with the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit on sustainability-related topics.

Teachers as Important Multipliers

Education for sustainable development is particularly relevant in teacher training. Future teachers are key multipliers and should be able to teach sustainability topics across disciplines. For this reason, Campus Zukunftsbildung in cooperation with the Center for Political Didactics and Civic Education offers practice-oriented formats such as the seminar «Integrating Education for Sustainable Development into Social Studies,» which combines theory with practical application. Here, students develop workshops for 5th and 6th graders and implement them as part of the Schools@University for Sustainability + Climate Protection, which is held twice a year at Freie Universität for Berlin schools. In this way, sustainability is not only taught but actively brought into society.

COMPETENCE AREA IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainability in the General Professional Skills Program

The General Professional Skills (ABV) program is designed to prepare bachelor's students for the job market by equipping them with practical skills. The ABV Competence Area in Sustainable Development provides the necessary tools to actively shape sustainability in daily work and professional life. Interdisciplinary, practice-oriented seminars are offered in the five modules «Managing Sustainability,» «Understanding Sustainability,» «Communicating Sustainability,» «Shaping Sustainability in Practice,» and «Researching Sustainability.» Collaboration with external partners in the field consistently proves to be particularly valuable.

In addition, formats such as lecture series, the Public Lecture Hall, workshops, and university-wide events ensure that sustainability becomes visible and tangible as a cross-cutting issue for everyone at Freie Universität and beyond.

→
Learning in order to actively collaborate to shape forward-looking professional routines

Education for the Future: Civic Education, ESD, and Social Change

PROF. DR. LUISA GIRNUS
Assistant Professor, Center for Political Didactics, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and Transformative Education

In December 2024, Dr. Luisa Girnus was appointed as a junior professor of political didactics. In this interview, she explains how she aims to drive innovation in teaching, research, and knowledge transfer through her focus on ESD.

Dr. Girnus, how can civic education contribute not only to reflecting on societal transformations but also to actively shaping them?

LUISA GIRNUS A core element of civic education is both to empower participation and to contribute to the critical and emancipatory maturity of citizens. For this reason, civic education is, by its very nature, well-suited to advancing democratization and social transformation. Civic education at a university operates on multiple levels and is particularly relevant, for example, in teacher training programs: Here, students become multipliers in both democracy education and ESD.

We are currently witnessing many social upheavals, which are also reflected in a growing skepticism toward science. What new challenges arise from these currents for civic education and its teaching methods, and how do you address them?

LG Fundamentally, we must engage more intensively today than we did a few years ago with the challenges posed by anti-democratic movements. However, there is no evidence of a general skepticism toward science among the population. What we do observe among our students, however, is that despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the numerous available sources of information, they do not consistently base their views on evidence and are, in some cases, susceptible to populist narratives. Here, we try to demonstrate, without lecturing!, the importance of science and how it can provide guidance. There is no single, grand solution here; that would also contradict the fundamental principle of pluralism. Rather, the focus should be on how diversity, including the diversity of learning, can be lived out.

Given this context, what priorities have you set in your work?

LG Given the multitude of challenges and tasks, this is not always easy. It is important to me to bring more people into contact with science and scientific findings, but also to generate enthusiasm for political ESD. To this end, I rely on collaborations both within the university, such as currently with colleagues for political-literary learning in elementary schools, and outside the university. For me, it is essential to link ESD more closely to issues of social justice and to reflect more deeply on human-nature relationships from a political-didactic perspective, including intersectionally. We implement these ideas in our own practice within our department and explore what transformative education can look like in teaching and university life.

The Center for Political Didactics works closely with the Schools@University for Sustainability + Climate Protection. Can you explain how ESD and political education are successfully linked here?

LG This collaboration beautifully illustrates how synergies can be leveraged. As part of the Schools@University program, students of political didactics can put their own workshop concepts and ideas into practice with school classes and test how well they work. Naturally, our students gain much more from this practical experience than if they were merely presenting a concept.

One of your goals is to further advance ESD at Freie Universität. How are you going about this?

LG Work on sustainability and ESD is already underway in many areas of Freie Universität, but not everyone is always aware of each other's efforts. My goal is to identify and make this networking potential visible in cooperation with other university units, such as the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit. I also focus on leveraging synergies, for example by bringing together separate discourses. Another goal is to integrate existing successful structures, such as the Dahlem School of Education and the Campus Zukunftsbildung, into our ESD activities as effectively as possible.

If you could make a wish, how would you like to see Freie Universität Berlin positioned in the area of ESD in five years?

LG I would be quite happy if as many of the projects mentioned as possible were implemented, both within Freie Universität and outside of it. In the future, we would certainly like to serve as and be perceived as a key point of contact and sounding board for ESD at our university. And my greatest wish, of course, is that in five years, Freie Universität will be even more sustainably positioned in teaching with an even more refined ESD profile.

«It is important to me to bring more people into contact with science and scientific findings, but also to generate enthusiasm for political ESD.»

Teaching Day: Teaching & Learning Sustainability

Of particular importance here is the promotion of skills such as critical thinking, systemic understanding, and the ability to act in a complex world.

Since 2021, the Dahlem Center for Academic Teaching (DCAT) has been inviting students and faculty from all departments and central institutes to a theme day on teaching. Under the patronage of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and in cooperation with the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, the sustainability initiative Sustain It!, and the Schools@University for Sustainability + Climate Protection, the 2024 theme day took place under the motto «Teaching & Learning Sustainability in the Year of Biodiversity.» Freie Universität had chosen this theme against the backdrop of the publication of the Biodiversity Strategy.

Interactive formats such as workshops, poster sessions, and discussion panels that highlighted examples of good and next practices took center stage. The goal was to share innovative teaching approaches and further develop them collaboratively. One of the accomplishments of this event was that it demonstrated how closely sustainability-oriented teaching is linked to participatory and student-centered concepts. The theme day also aimed to strengthen interdisciplinary dialog, as sustainability is understood as a cross-cutting issue that affects all disciplines. Through the exchange between faculty, students, and central institutions, a shared understanding emerged of how teaching can contribute to societal sustainability transformation. Of particular importance here is the promotion of skills such as critical thinking, systemic understanding, and the ability to act in a complex world. As a result, the theme day served as an important catalyst for the development of a sustainability-oriented teaching and learning culture at Freien Universität Berlin.

LEARN MORE ABOUT
TEACHING DAY (IN GERMAN)

Sustainability Days: Courses as Testing Grounds

Every summer semester, the Sustain It! initiative hosts Sustainability Days, a participatory event that creates an open space on campus for dialog, exchange, and creative experimentation around sustainable futures. Since 2024, seminars from various departments have increasingly participated in program design, with individual program items developed and implemented by students. In 2024 and 2025, the Center for Political Didactics, the Department of Educational Sciences, and General Professional Skills (ABV) were involved. In this way, courses become experimental spaces where theoretical knowledge is put to the test in practice. Formats such as interactive workshops, exhibitions, or hands-on activities enable bringing topics like global justice, consumption, urban development, and environmental awareness to life.

These practice-oriented approaches promote not only subject-specific knowledge but also key competencies such as teamwork, creativity, and social engagement. At the same time, they create spaces for interaction and exchange between the university and the general public. The Sustainability Days thus demonstrate how teaching can contribute to actively shaping sustainable development by combining knowledge, engagement, and practice.

←
Dynamic Teaching: Students Develop Program Activities for Sustainability Days as part of their seminars.

LEARN MORE ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY DAYS (IN GERMAN)

Courses

related to sustainability and courses focused on sustainability

3,912 courses in Winter Semester 2025/26

1,063 of which are related to sustainability * = 27.2%

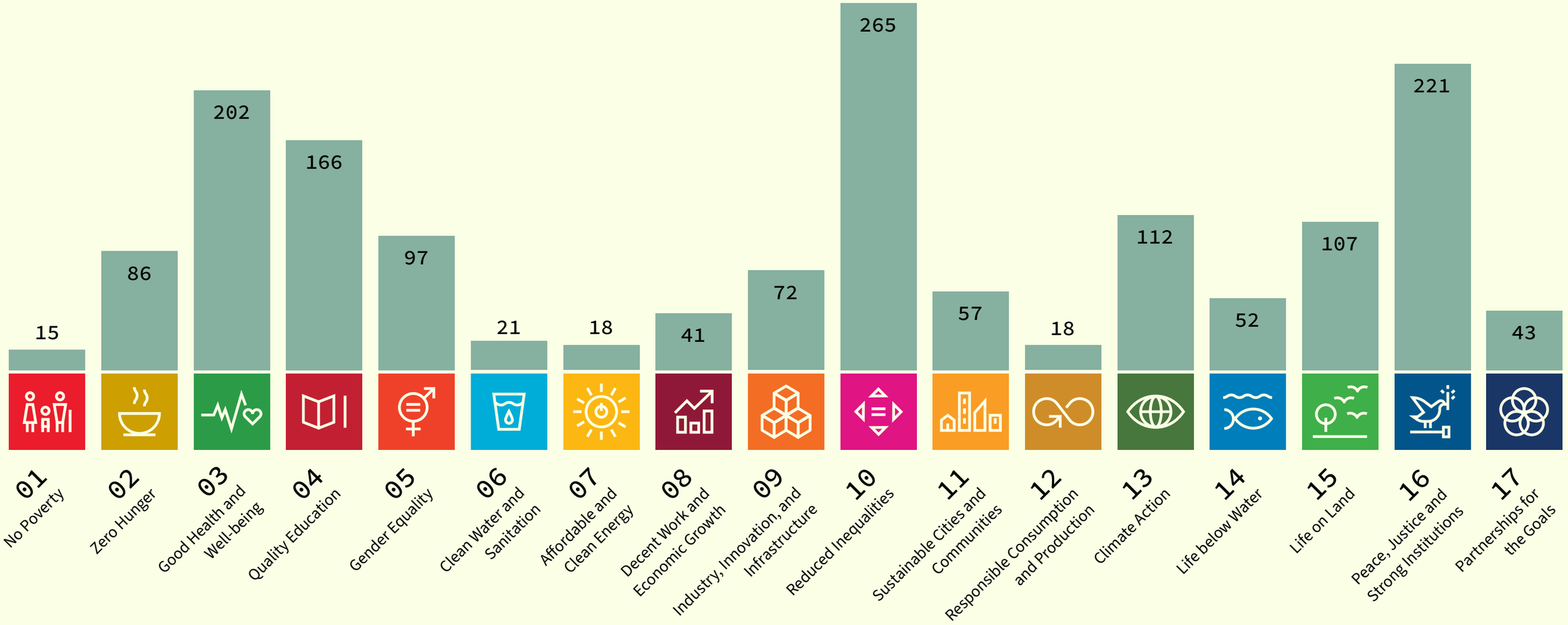
218 of these are focused on sustainability * = 5.6%

* Courses related to sustainability address sustainability topics corresponding to at least one of the UN SDGs. Courses focused on sustainability address sustainability topics from a specialized or interdisciplinary perspective that is consistent with the priorities of sustainability.

Courses related to sustainability, by department

211	Biology, Chemistry, Pharmacy
182	Political and Social Sciences
94	Education and Psychology
93	History and Cultural Studies
89	Philosophy and Humanities
85	Veterinary Medicine
69	Earth Sciences
34	Economics
33	John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies
29	Institute for Latin American Studies
26	Law
24	Berlin University Alliance
21	Mathematics and Computer Science
17	Dahlem School of Education
16	Institute for Eastern European Studies
13	Physics
12	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit
6	Margherita von Brentano Center
9	All other departments, institutes, and centers
1,063	**Total**

Courses related to sustainability, by SDGs*



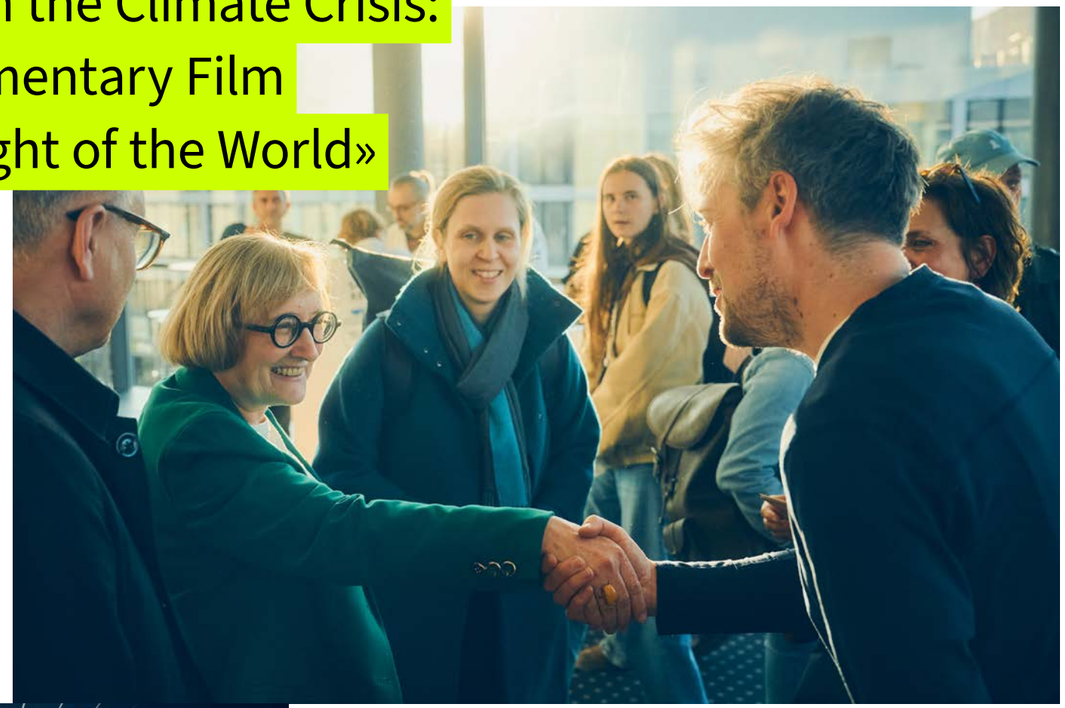
* up to three SDGs may be assigned / Data based on Winter Semester 2025/2026 / SDG = Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN)

Courses by SDG and department

1–5 | 6–10 | 11–15 | 16–20 | 21–25 | 26–30 | 31–35 | 36–40 | 40+

DEPARTMENT / SDG	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Biology, Chemistry, Pharmacy	2	43	89	18	16	12	13	0	39	4	13	11	29	36	76	6	0	407
Political and Social Sciences	3	1	5	12	21	0	0	4	7	60	4	1	23	1	1	98	21	262
Education and Psychology	1	0	12	63	4	0	0	2	5	30	0	0	2	0	0	6	2	127
History and Cultural Studies	0	1	2	10	11	0	0	3	3	41	7	2	4	3	6	33	6	132
Philosophy and Humanities	1	0	0	25	16	0	0	1	5	33	3	0	3	2	3	18	1	111
Veterinary Medicine	0	33	77	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	7	0	0	120
Earth Sciences	2	5	0	2	0	8	1	0	0	13	22	0	27	4	7	0	6	97
Business and Economics	5	0	2	2	4	0	0	14	1	10	2	0	2	0	0	4	0	46
John F. Kennedy Institute	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	8	1	22	2	1	2	0	1	10	2	54
Institute for Latin American Studies	1	0	0	0	3	1	1	6	1	18	2	1	2	0	2	6	2	46
Law	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	8	0	1	5	0	0	22	3	40
Berlin University Alliance	0	0	2	4	6	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	30
Mathematics and Computer Science	0	0	5	4	3	0	0	0	8	1	1	0	2	0	3	3	0	30
Dahlem School of Education	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Institute for Eastern European Studies	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	1	0	1	1	0	9	0	19
Physics	0	2	0	5	3	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
Sustain. & Energy Management Unit	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	7	1	1	0	0	18
Margherita von Brentano Center	0	0	1	0	5	0	0	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
All others	0	0	4	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
TOTAL	15	86	202	166	97	21	18	41	72	265	57	18	112	52	107	221	43	1,593

Science in the Climate Crisis: Documentary Film «The Weight of the World»



↑
First Vice President Prof. Dr. Verena Blechinger-Talcott greets the film's director, Florian Heinzen-Ziob.

Over 240 Freie Universität students attended the screening.

«The Weight of the World» follows three researchers, including a former leader of a Junior Research Group of the Institute of Chemistry and Biochemistry in their efforts to address the growing climate crisis. The film centers on a glaciologist, a molecular biologist, and a chemist who confront the consequences of global environmental change and the social responsibility of science. Since its release in late April 2026, the director and protagonists have traveled to 30 German cities to discuss the film's content and background with audiences. Collaborations with numerous scientific institutions, universities, and civil society organizations underscore the project's high content standards.

The film premiered in Berlin on April 28, 2026. Freie Universität Berlin partnered with the event, which First Vice President Prof. Dr. Verena Blechinger-Talcott opened. The protagonists and Prof. Dr. Rainer Haag from Freie Universität then engaged in a discussion with Florian Heinzen-Ziob, the film's director. Over 240 Freie Universität students from the Institutes of Chemistry and Biochemistry, Theater Studies, and the Competence Area for Sustainable Development in the General Professional Skills (ABV) Program attended the screening.

Berlin University Alliance: Innovative Integration of Research and Teaching

Combining Research and Teaching: StuROPx as a driving force for sustainable support of early-career researchers

Through the Student Research Opportunities Program (StuROPx), the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) specifically strengthens the integration of cutting-edge research and teaching, thereby contributing to the support of early-career researchers and a sustainable research culture. Here, students are given the opportunity at an early stage to actively participate in ongoing research and to initiate their own projects.

A key component is the so-called X-Student Research Groups, in which early-career researchers work together with students for one semester on specific research questions. Sixteen of these groups are selected for funding in each call for proposals. The projects are often interdisciplinary in nature and networked across institutions. They help promote knowledge transfer and develop innovative solutions to social and environmental challenges. The program also includes the X-Tutorials, designed and implemented independently by students. This is the first research fellowship for students in the German-speaking world.

The results of the projects are presented annually at the Berlin Conference for Student Research.

Solutions for Social and Environmental Challenges

Early-career researchers and students at Freie Universität Berlin also actively participate in StuROPx, contributing to research on sustainability-related topics, among other things. The diversity of the projects demonstrates how StuROPx empowers students to address sustainability-related questions in a practical and scientifically sound manner. The 2026 X-Student Research Groups funded at Freie Universität Berlin are analyzing, among other things, coral skeletons as indicators of environmental stress and historical changes in marine ecosystems. Another research project examines the social and environmental costs and impacts of strategies for a sustainable future along global supply chains.

BUA Certificate Programs: New Microcredential «Entrepreneurship in Green Chemistry»

Chemical innovations are essential for addressing global challenges such as recycling, water treatment, and energy storage. At the same time, fossil and toxic substances are used extensively in chemistry. Green chemistry focuses on the circular economy, the use of renewable resources, and the avoidance of toxic and fossil substances. Starting in October 2025, master's students can earn a new microcredential for «Entrepreneurship in Green Chemistry» as part of the BUA Certificate Program ↗. It combines the field of chemistry with entrepreneurial skills and sustain-

ability knowledge and is aimed at students at Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and Technische Universität Berlin. At Freie Universität, for example, the master's-level lecture «Physics and Chemistry of Sustainability» counts toward the microcredential. The program is set to be further expanded and publicized widely in the coming semesters.

As part of the BUA Certificate Program, the departments of the four BUA partner institutions have the opportunity to develop interdisciplinary and cross-institutional module packages that students can use to fulfill course requirements for parts of their studies. All such BUA Certificate Programs conclude with a BUA Certificate.

greenCHEM Hackathon

The greenCHEM Hackathon ↗ in 2025 offered a great opportunity to combine idea generation in the field of green chemistry with real-world challenges from industry. Participating students worked in interdisciplinary teams on topics such as CO_2 utilization, fly ash recycling, and the reuse of rotor blades from decommissioned wind turbines. Supported by mentoring and pitch training, they developed ideas for technical solutions and business concepts and presented their results. In addition to prize money, the hackathon offers valuable contacts with partners and opens up career opportunities.

↑ →
The greenChem Hackathon combined brainstorming with real challenges facing the industry.

RESEARCH

Sustainability in Research

→
Plantings in the Willdenow Herbarium/Herbarium Berolinense in the Botanic Garden Berlin

Every two years, the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit evaluates the third-party funded research projects of the university for a relation to or focus on sustainability. 650 (45.9%) of the over 1,400 research projects in 2025 had a relation to sustainability, and 160 (11.3%) of them had a focus on sustainability. The departments of Biology, Chemistry, and Pharmacy as well as Political and Social Sciences were especially well represented. Research projects addressed SDGs 3 (health and well-being) and 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) particularly strongly.

In 2025, Freie Universität developed six key future research fields through a multi-stage, participatory process. These fields reflect major societal, technological, and ecological challenges, bring together interdisciplinary research expertise, foster collaboration with international partners, and simultaneously create new interfaces between basic and applied research. The future research area «Resilience within Planetary Boundaries: One Health, Environment, and Wellbeing,» for example, is based on the One Health approach and links global environmental changes, health issues, and social and ecological resilience. «Resources and Multiscale Materials for Adapting Societies» explores innovations in materials science in the context of sustainability, equity, and global adaptability. →

A Strong Partnership: Berlin University Alliance

Since 2019, Freie Universität Berlin has been collaborating with Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin, and Charité — Universitätsmedizin Berlin as part of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) network of excellence. Since 2024, Freie Universität has continued to serve as the network's spokesperson. Freie Universität also plays a central role within the alliance regarding sustainability: Through the Berlin Center for Global Engagement (BCGE) based at Freie Universität Berlin, it strengthens international scientific cooperation and the expansion of science diplomacy, particularly in addressing crises and global challenges. In the area of infrastructure, it also contributes to the development of shared equipment and data resources. Of particular note is the Alliance Center for Electron Microscopy (ACEM), a virtual, interdisciplinary equipment center for electron microscopy operated by the four BUA partner institutions that provides highly specialized resources across locations and thus creates sustainable synergies. →

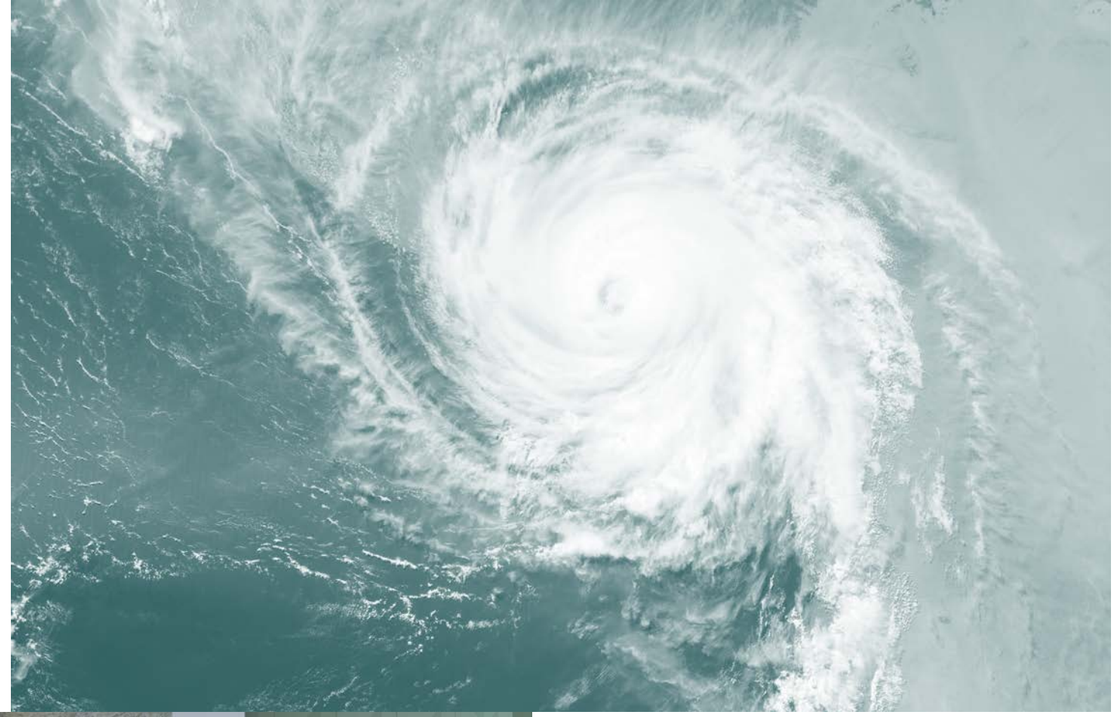
Freie Universität also plays a central role within the alliance regarding sustainability.

→
Poster exhibition at the ACEM Symposium
↓
CORE Facility Tour at the ACEM Symposium

Research Center for Sustainability:
Democracy Research as Sustainability Research

The Research Center for Sustainability (FFN) is the home of the Chair of Politics with a Focus on Sustainability, based at the Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science. FFN researchers examine from a social science perspective how systems, processes, and institutions are designed to ensure their long-term survival, and why their sustainability is threatened. The analysis focuses primarily on social developments that can weaken or strengthen democracy and that also have a direct impact on further sustainability transformations: poverty, wealth, exclusion, and social and economic inequality. The FFN is closely linked to the Cluster of Excellence Contestations of the Liberal Script (SCRIPTS), which focuses on the current diverse threats to the liberal order. A particular focus of the FFN's work is an interdisciplinary and cross-university research project on wealth inequality and wealth (funded by the Volkswagen Foundation). →

A particular focus of the FFN's work is an interdisciplinary and cross-university research project on wealth inequality and wealth.



← Mastering Grand Societal Challenges Together: the BUA Grand Challenges Conference 2026.

BUA Grand Challenges Conference 2026

Under the patronage of the Vice President for Research at Freie Universität, the Berlin University Alliance's first Grand Challenges Conference took place in the spring of 2026 under the motto «Joint Research for Better Futures.» Over 400 participants from academia, politics, and society discussed the role of research and cooperation in promoting sustainable development, as well as shared responsibility in addressing global challenges.

Center for Sustainable Resources

Since 2025, research activities in chemistry aimed at resource-efficient and circular material synthesis and use have been brought together under the umbrella of CSR|Berlin (Center for Sustainable Resources).

Sustainability in Laboratories

After the first working group dedicated to improving sustainability in its laboratories was awarded the My Green Lab certificate in 2023/24, the Department of Biology, Chemistry, and Pharmacy is encouraging other laboratories to seek certification as well. The experiences and approaches gained through this process will be shared as best practices and further developed with the Berlin University Alliance.

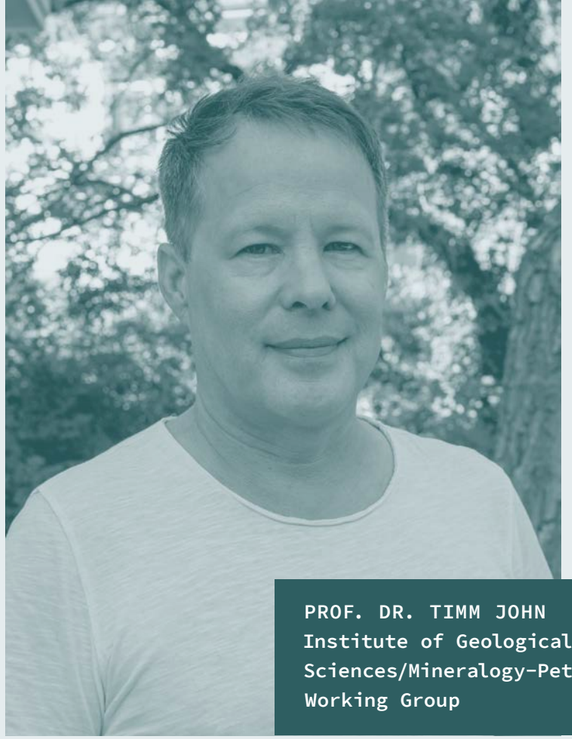
Numerous research projects on sustainability issues related to societal resilience are analyzed by the Crisis and Disaster Research Center (KFS). This includes the «ClimXtreme» consortium at the Institute of Meteorology, which researches extreme weather events, particularly in urban areas.

The installation «Eternity Scanner» by the artist Saša Spačal works with soil chromatographs. It was realized in collaboration with the Art Laboratory Berlin and the Rillig Lab for the Ecology of Plants at Freie Universität Berlin.

INTERVIEW

Urban Mining as the Key to Sustainable Resource Use

Urban mining recovers metals from electronic waste and mining tailings. Currently, this process is still energy-intensive and environmentally burdensome. Prof. Dr. Timm John's team is working on solutions.



PROF. DR. TIMM JOHN
Institute of Geological Sciences/Mineralogy-Petrology Working Group

Mr. John, why do you believe urban mining is one key to sustainable resource usage?

TIMM JOHN In which products and industries are strategically and economically critical elements found in large, economically viable concentrations? This is the central question addressed by urban mining. This is the case with electronic waste and tailings piles from past mining operations. To give an example: While each smartphone contains only a small amount of gold, between 30 and 50 milligrams, one ton of smartphones, however, which corresponds to about five to six thousand smartphones, contains more gold than one ton of gold ore, which must be extracted from mines at great logistical expense. The gold already incorporated into smartphones produced globally is worth several billion euros. From a purely technological standpoint, extracting metals from electronic waste is a relatively simple process. However, it has so far been very energy-intensive and environmentally damaging; it involves high temperatures and the use of corrosive liquids.

What research questions are your department addressing in this context? What role does the newly founded Center for Sustainable Resources (CSR|Berlin) play?

TJ In a project funded by the Werner Siemens Foundation, we are experimenting with ionic liquids developed by the research group led by Prof. Dr. Sebastian Hasenstab-Riedel. The project is also part of the research conducted by CSR|Berlin. These liquids are capable of very effec-

tively leaching metals from tailings and electronic waste at low temperatures. Additionally, we are working on incorporating the liquids and waste products used into a closed-loop process; in other words, recycling them. Ultimately, achieving zero waste will not be possible. But we see the potential to make these processes, which have been very energy-intensive up to now, significantly more efficient and environmentally friendly in the future.

That sounds quite intriguing from a resource perspective. How application-oriented is your research? Can we expect quick results?

TJ Personally, I consider myself part of the basic research community. However, since there are already patent applications and industry contacts in this area, I am optimistic that the first commercial applications could emerge within five to ten years. The energy savings are enormous compared to currently established processes. My optimism also stems from the fact that we have seen significant progress in this field of research over the past ten years. At the same time, dependence on rare earths and critical elements is increasingly coming into the spotlight of German politics.

What are the biggest obstacles?

TJ Since the infrastructure for circular economy processes in industry and commerce is not yet sufficiently developed, it is still easier to purchase raw materials for products from «new» conventional resources. At the same time, structural conditions prevent quick successes, such as long-term investment planning and contracts in mining or ownership structures in the electronics waste sector. From our perspective, German policymakers must not cede these industries and opportunities to other countries but rather develop their own strategies for «getting a foot in the door» in the primary ore sector as well as in urban mining.

What role do you see for research in this field of action? And how do your activities fit into the international context?

TJ Research currently plays a clear and important role in setting the agenda and providing impetus, thereby promoting greater awareness of the issue in politics and business. As researchers, we can take on an important initiating role, for example through pilot projects in the Global South. It helps not to think in terms of a perfect solution, but rather to develop the necessary processes and collaborations step by step. Other countries are also making significant contributions to research in this field. However, we at Freie Universität are currently particularly well-positioned in the area of ionic liquids, a fact that is also reflected in the interdisciplinary composition of our CSR|Berlin team. We are pleased that the Executive Board has recognized the exceptional quality of our collaboration and has recently made a decisive contribution to the establishment of CSR|Berlin through infrastructure commitments.

«My optimism also stems from the fact that we have seen significant progress in this field of research over the past ten years.»

Research projects

related to sustainability and focused on sustainability

1,415 research projects 2024/2025

650 of which are related to sustainability * = 45.9%

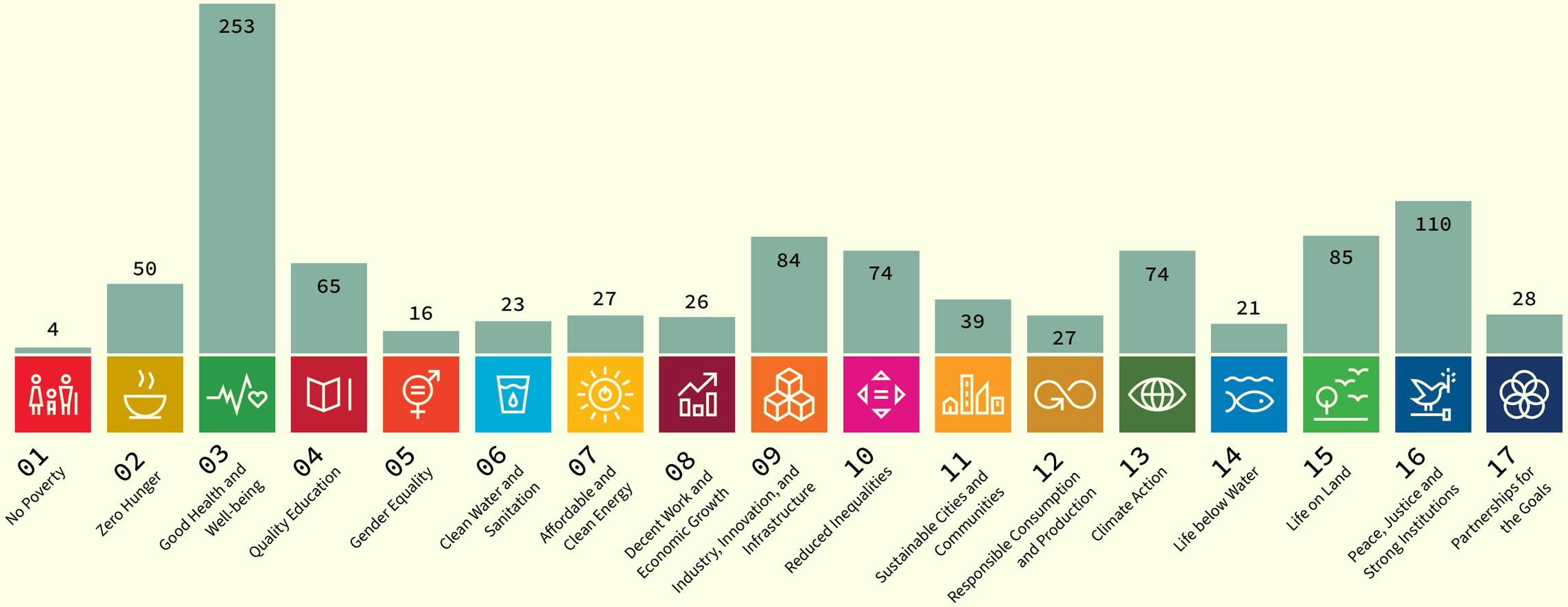
160 of these are focused on sustainability * = 11.3%

* Research projects related to sustainability address sustainability topics corresponding to at least one of the UN SDGs. Research projects focused on sustainability address sustainability topics from a specialized or interdisciplinary perspective that is consistent with the priorities of sustainability.

Research projects related to sustainability, by department

143	Biology, Chemistry, Pharmacy
87	Political and Social Sciences
80	Veterinary Medicine
72	Earth Sciences
70	Education and Psychology
34	Mathematics and Computer Science
29	Economics
25	Botanical Garden / Botanical Museum
22	Physics
22	History and Cultural Studies
17	Institute for Latin American Studies
16	Philosophy and Humanities
8	Institute for Eastern European Studies
8	Law
6	Central Administration
6	John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies
2	Margherita von Brentano Center
2	University Library
1	University Sports Center
650	**Total**

Research projects related to sustainability, by SDG*



* up to three SDGs may be assigned / Data based on 2024/2025 / SDG = Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN)

Research projects by SDG and department

1–5 | 6–10 | 11–15 | 16–20 | 21–25 | 26–30 | 31–35 | 36–40 | 40+

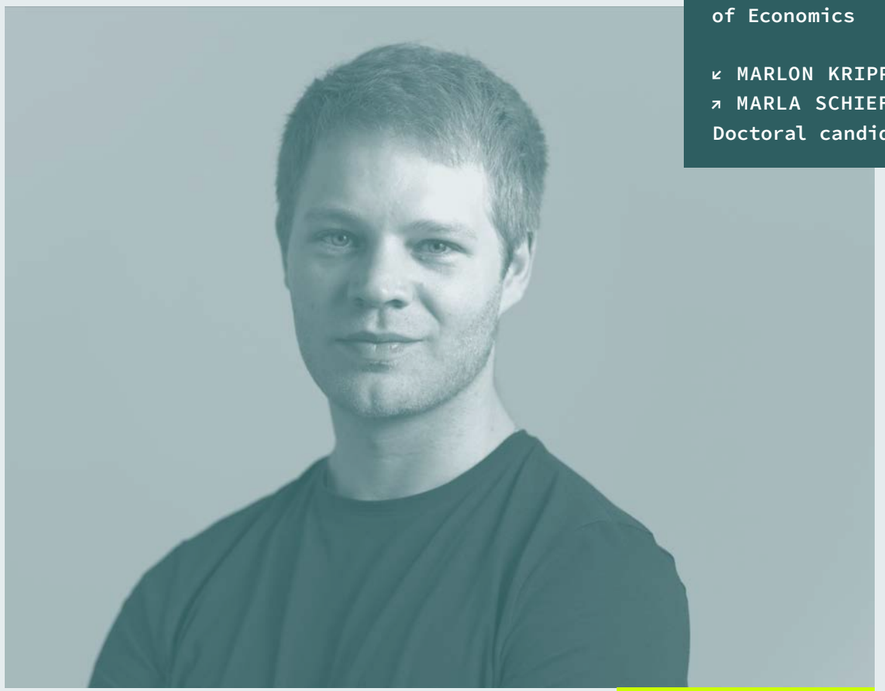
DEPARTMENT / SDG	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Biology, Chemistry, Pharmacy	0	16	85	8	0	8	5	0	25	0	1	17	4	6	32	0	0	207
Political and Social Sciences	0	1	11	7	3	0	0	4	4	31	2	1	6	0	1	58	10	139
Veterinary Medicine	0	25	73	2	2	3	0	1	8	1	5	3	0	2	4	1	1	131
Earth Sciences	2	4	14	0	0	9	2	1	4	2	14	2	47	7	15	1	3	127
Education and Psychology	1	0	41	32	1	0	0	4	4	9	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	96
Mathematics and Computer Science	0	1	12	5	1	3	1	1	10	0	2	1	6	0	2	5	1	51
Business and Economics	0	0	4	1	1	0	3	12	13	3	6	2	0	0	0	2	0	47
Botanical Garden / Botanical Museum	0	3	1	1	0	0	1	0	3	0	2	0	1	6	24	0	3	45
Physics	0	0	6	2	1	0	11	1	6	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	28
History and Cultural Studies	1	0	1	2	4	0	1	0	2	8	2	0	0	0	2	8	4	35
Latin American studies	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	1	0	1	0	2	11	2	27
Philosophy and Humanities	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	2	0	0	10	1	22
Institute for Eastern European Studies	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	2	5	1	13
Law	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	6	0	12
Central University Administration	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	2	1	3	1	2	0	1	0	0	13
John F. Kennedy Institute	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	7
Margherita von Brentano Center	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
University Library	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
University Sports Center	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	4	50	253	65	16	23	27	26	84	74	39	27	74	21	85	110	28	1,006

INTERVIEW

The Financial Side of Sustainability

↑ PROF. DR. BARBARA FRITZ
Institute for Latin American Studies and Department of Economics

↙ MARLON KRIPPENDORF &
↗ MARLA SCHIEFELING
Doctoral candidates at the EQUALFIN Graduate School



The new doctoral program EQUALFIN investigates how the global financial system exacerbates social, economic, and ecological inequalities. It examines the monetary dimension of sustainability.

Dr. Fritz, the impact of the global financial system on inequality is a new but highly relevant field of research. How did the EQUALFIN doctoral program come to be founded, and what makes it unique?

BARBARA FRITZ The doctoral program «Finance and Inequality in Times of Polycrisis,» or EQUALFIN for short, emerged from a gap in the research landscape: Inequality research has so far neglected monetary dimensions such as global financial flows, currencies, or debt, even though these are often the bottlenecks. To close this gap, Freie Universität Berlin and HTW Berlin launched EQUALFIN in 2025. Funded by the Hans Böckler Foundation, up to twelve fellows here investigate the extent to which the global financial system contributes to the exacerbation of current social, economic, and ecological inequalities. What sets our approach apart is its methodological openness and strong emphasis on qualitative approaches. We rely on agile structures: Instead of a rigid curriculum, in addition to the colloquium, we offer tailored interdisciplinary workshops for doctoral students and intensive exchange sessions with experts.

Ms. Schiefeling, your dissertation focuses on climate policy in an unequal world and the potential of international monetary cooperation. What is this all about?

MARLA SCHIEFELING Currently, countries in the Global South are hoarding foreign exchange reserves to stabilize their weak currencies and avert crises caused by capital flight. However, because these reserves remain unused, there is a lack of funds to finance imports, both for urgent structural reforms and for climate protection measures. The microeconomic level is often not fully considered from a macroeconomic perspective. Yet this is precisely where great potential lies; a fundamental systemic shift could lay the groundwork for a green transformation. International cooperative approaches offer possible solutions. These include regional agreements through which countries pool their foreign exchange reserves and use this collective strength to defend against currency fluctuations.

«A fundamental systemic shift could lay the groundwork for a green transformation.»

MARLA SCHIEFELING

In public discourse, climate protection, social justice, and economic stability are often pitted against one another. What is your assessment of this?

BF Climate and environmental issues are quite clearly always also issues of distribution. But that does not mean that climate issues must or should be put on the back burner for the sake of social justice. On the contrary, these three cornerstones must always be considered together.

MS Upon closer examination, even supposed conflicts of interest between these levels can be resolved and synergies found. Take the example of renewable energy. It can simultaneously ensure economic independence and contribute to affordable electricity and heating supplies as well as climate protection. →

«Climate and environmental issues are quite clearly always also issues of distribution.»

BARBARA FRITZ

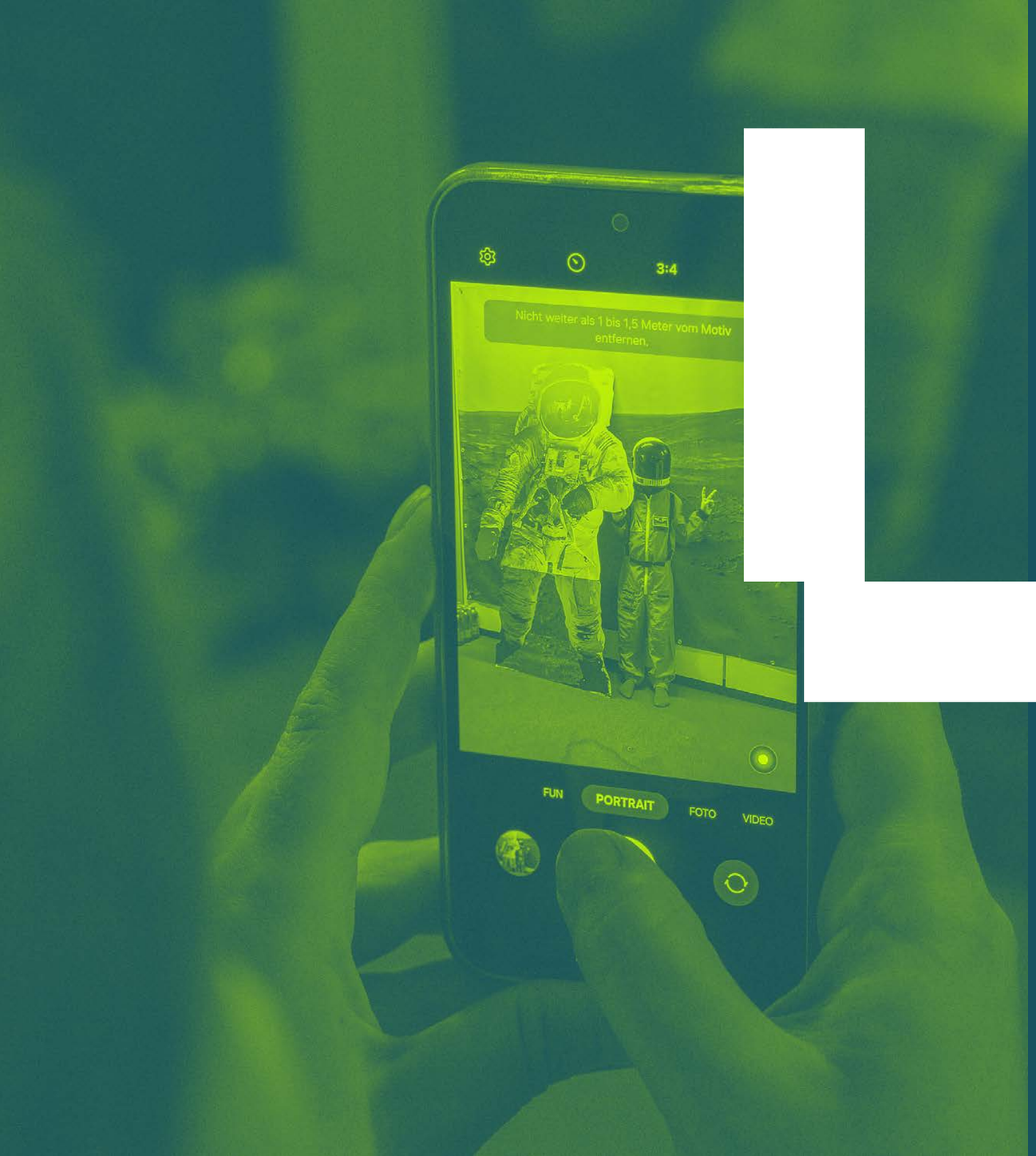
«Ideally, development aid would thus yield benefits not only for recipient countries but also for the donor country.»

MARLON KRIPPENDORF

Issues of distribution are also being discussed more intensely with regard to the occurrence of rare earths in countries of the Global South. Mr. Krippendorf, could you tell us more, also in light of your own dissertation on the topic of funding for the green transformation in the context of development work?

MARLON KRIPPENDORF Until now, German development cooperation has primarily been presented as driven by altruistic motives, although geostrategic interests have, of course, always played a role here as well. Against the backdrop of radical changes in U.S. foreign policy, a paradigm shift is also taking place in Germany. Today, there is an open debate on how to combine both altruistic and self-interested goals in development cooperation, albeit with significantly tighter budgets. There is now increased discussion of so-called mutual-interest development cooperation. Ideally, development aid would thus yield benefits not only for recipient countries but also for the donor country, for example in the form of improved trade relations or access to key raw materials. Whether this can work is an important area for academic research.

BF German and European actors would be well advised to strengthen the position of mutual interest in order to continue playing a role in the future, for example regarding access to raw materials. In the area of partnership-based cooperation, German development cooperation has a long tradition, is known for it, and has the necessary networks.


3:4
Nicht weiter als 1 bis 1,5 Meter vom Motiv entfernen.
FUN
PORTRAIT
FOTO
VIDEO

DIALOG

4

Research and Society in Dialog

Freie Universität Berlin is in constant dialog with numerous societal actors, including civil society initiatives, cultural institutions, political bodies, and the city's residents. Outreach formats and public events create spaces for encounter, discussion, and shared learning, open the university to diverse audiences, and invite people to participate directly in academic processes.

Student and volunteer initiatives in particular make an important contribution to this exchange. Initiatives such as Sustain It!, Blooming Campus, and GreenFUBib combine engagement within the university with societal concerns such as biodiversity, sustainable consumption, and the transformation of libraries. They create spaces for teaching and learning, such as the educational and community garden Blätterlaube (Leafy Green Canopy) and formats like the Sustainable Campus Tour, which foster dialog between the university and the urban community and make sustainable development on campus visible and tangible. →

↑
Hands-on Research:
The Long Night of Science

30%

In 2025, nearly one-third of the 36,000 Long Night visits across Berlin took place on the Dahlem Campus.

↑
Exchanges with society is a key concern of Freie Universität.
↖
Regular events on campus make science and research tangible.
←
Lost in Transformation: Participatory activities and discussion rounds about sustainability research in the Philological Library of Freie Universität Berlin.

Inspiring with Science

Freie Universität Berlin reaches a particularly broad audience during the Long Night of Science. Since 2001, the university has offered visitors annual insights into research and everyday university life. In 2025, nearly one-third of the 36,000 Long Night visits across Berlin took place on the Dahlem Campus, where researchers and staff at Freie Universität hosted more than 200 events. Topics related to sustainable development are also regularly featured here. For example, during the 2025 Long Night of Science, the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit and the GreenFUBib working group organized a multifaceted marketplace in the Philological Library with interactive stations for sustainable ideas and activities. This made the topic of sustainability tangible and accessible to visitors. The event concluded with an interdisciplinary roundtable discussion on the topic «Lost in Transformation» featuring researchers from Freie Universität Berlin.

Public Forum for Sustainability

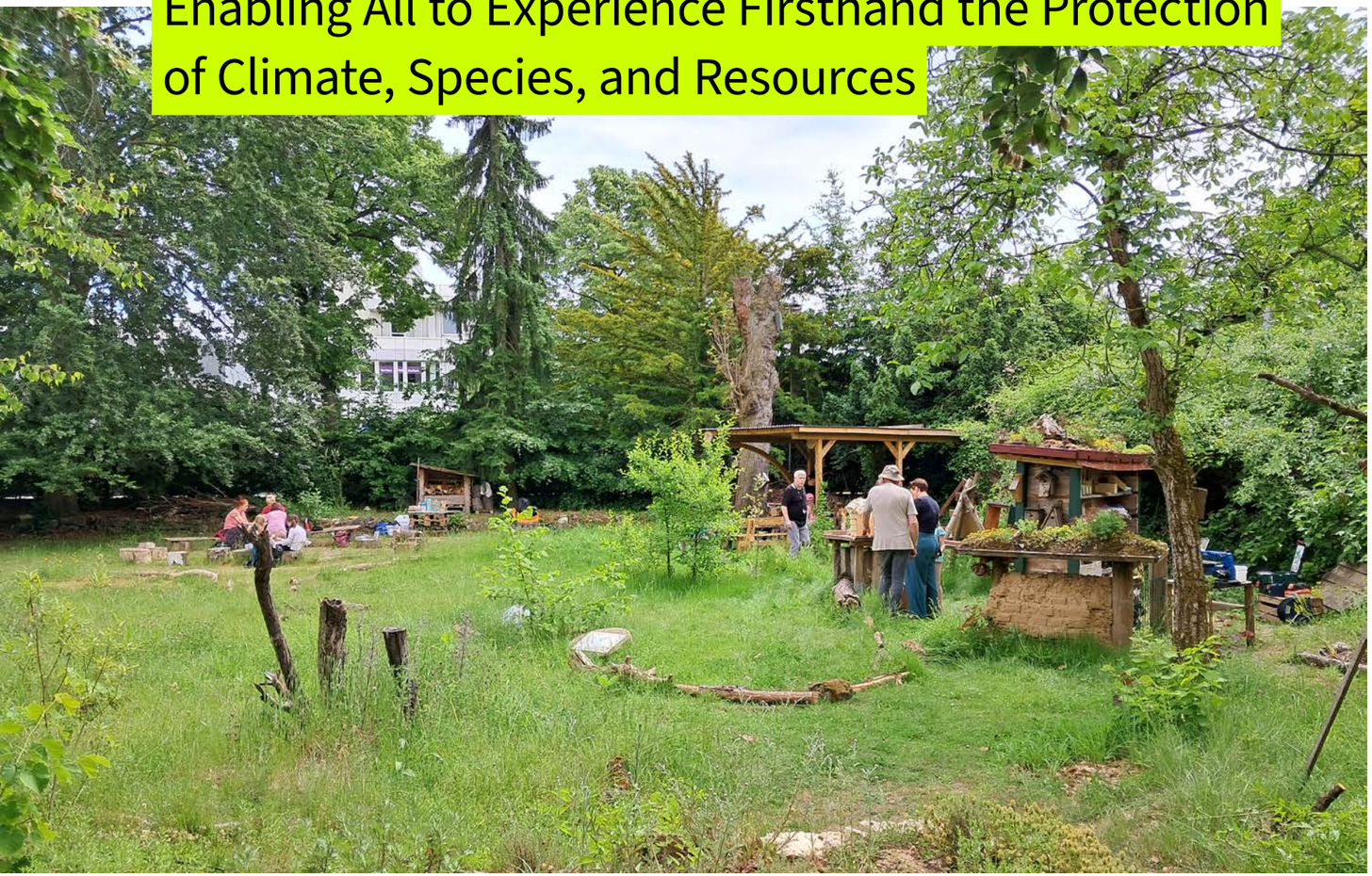
The Public Lecture Series format also provides a continuous space for public debates on topics related to sustainable development, addressing key societal issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. Researchers present current research findings and discuss them with a broad audience. In 2025, the lecture series «Biodiverse Berlin — from the Perspective of Research, Nature Conservation, and Society» examined the capital's biological diversity from scientific, political, and societal perspectives, while also highlighting the importance of urban nature for quality of life, health, and nature conservation. The lecture series was organized by the Berlin-Brandenburg Institute for Biodiversity Research (BBIB), the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, and the Berlin Species Knowledge Network (BerNA).

Freie Universität Berlin is also active at the intersection of science, art, and society. As part of Berlin Art Week 2024, the think tank metaLAB (at) FU Berlin, based not only at Freie Universität Berlin but also at Harvard University and the Academy of Art and Design Basel, participated with the exhibition «Up-Dates on Weather.» In cooperation with ZK/U Berlin (Center for Art and Urbanistics), the project explored the (in)visibility of climate change.

200+

program events were organized by Freie Universität members during the Long Night of Science.

15 Years of Sustain It!: Enabling All to Experience Firsthand the Protection of Climate, Species, and Resources



↑
A vital teaching and exchange venue at Freie Universität:
the Blätterlaube (Leafy Green Canopy) community garden

Founded in 2010 by students and staff as an interdisciplinary initiative, the sustainability initiative Sustain It! has accompanied Freie Universität Berlin critically and constructively on its path toward becoming a sustainable and climate-neutral university. Among its most memorable accomplishments is the central role it played in promoting the development of the sustainability mission statement adopted in 2016. This year Sustain It! celebrated its 15th anniversary with an event as part of the Sustainability Days.

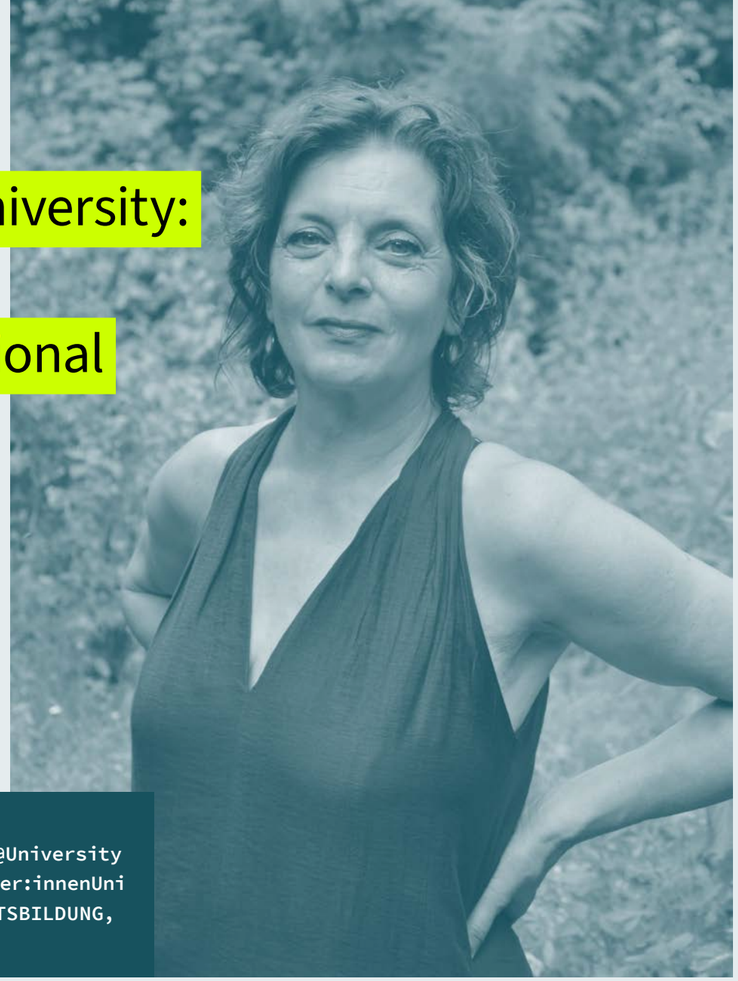
Since its inception, Sustain It! has initiated an impressive range of activities: These include the annual Sustainability Days, art labs, and creative workshops, as well as numerous events that have reached several thousand students. The ecological community gardens Blätterlaube and UniGardening, the food-sharing station for rescued food FUdSharing, and various other sharing formats such as clothing swaps also offer concrete opportunities to try out climate- and resource-friendly lifestyles in everyday life and to foster connections on campus.

The initiative has also provided an important impetus for teaching about sustainability. Numerous interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary seminars, living labs, and lecture series have been developed in collaboration with stakeholders from the university and the city. Thanks to Sustain It!, around 100 student workshops and projects have integrated sustainability topics into academic studies and campus life in diverse and interdisciplinary ways.

Clothing swap at the Sustainability Days organized by the participatory initiative Sustain It! They transform the campus into a vibrant hub for exchange, ideas, and collective action.

INTERVIEW

20 Years of Schools@University: The History of a Learning-Based Educational Format



KAROLA BRAUN-WANKE
Initiator and Project Manager of the Schools@University for Sustainability + Climate Protection (Schüler:innenUni Nachhaltigkeit + Klimaschutz), CAMPUS ZUKUNFTSBILDUNG, Department of Earth Sciences

The multi-award-winning Schools@University for Sustainability + Climate Protection has been offering week-long programs and training sessions on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for classes and teachers twice a year for 20 years now.

What was the idea behind the project?

KAROLA BRAUN-WANKE The Schools@University program was first implemented as a pilot project in 2006 as part of an international conference on issues related to the energy transition. As a scientist, it was clear to me at the time: we must also open these future-relevant discussions to children and young people. My research at Berlin schools quickly showed that teachers had a fundamental interest in energy and sustainability topics but often lacked the technical foundations and pedagogical approaches. This is exactly where I wanted to start. To this day, the Schools@University stands for transformative education that focuses on climate, species, and resource conservation as well as issues of justice, and teaches children through all their senses how they can use knowledge and creativity to shape a climate-friendly, just life in harmony with nature. It is, by the way, a true success story: Over 50,000 students and 4,500 teachers have now participated in our educational program.

In your view, what factors were crucial in establishing Schools@University so successfully over the past 20 years?

KBW Any project idea is only as good as the conceptual and financial support it receives. But to keep going for so long, you also need a high level of intrinsic motivation and staying power. Opening the university as a learning space for climate and sustainability to schools was a novelty in education policy at the time and immediately resonated widely. We received early support from key stakeholders such as the Federal Ministry for the Environment, renowned climate scientists, and the university administration. This was supplemented by funding from the European Com-

mission and the Berlin Senate. The fact that the Schools@University program remains so widely accepted today is because we see ourselves as a learning project. This means that we constantly adapt the program's content and methods to the challenges faced by teachers.

It may come as a surprise to find an educational program for 5th and 6th graders at a university. Why is Freie Universität the right place for such a project?

KBW Schools@University is not just an add-on; it creates real added value for the university. Following an initial pilot phase, the educational format has been continuously refined as part of a three-year international research project in collaboration with five European universities. With our free program, Freie Universität also serves as a role model for educational equity and social participation. Children get to know the university as an inspiring place of learning and engage with future-oriented topics such as climate, species, and nature conservation. This supports the next generation while also contributing to the fulfillment of the goals set forth in the climate protection agreement between the Berlin Senate and the university. It also benefits teacher education. As key advocates for education for sustainable development, student teachers develop workshops for us and implement them in practice. Our university thus underscores its credibility in the area of sustainability.

«Schools@University is not just an add-on; it creates real added value for the university.»

The core of Schools@University is based on a strong network of around 100 trainers, both from Freie Universität and from the wider community. How important is this network?

KBW Cooperation and co-creation are in our DNA. Over the years, we have built a strong educational network spanning academia, culture, business, and associations. It is only through the diversity of our trainers from various backgrounds that we can offer the quality and variety of perspectives found in our approximately 150 annual workshops and training sessions. Our partners also benefit from this. Through us, they reach new target groups and can test new educational formats.

Given current developments, what path will Schools@University take next?

KBW To ensure successful social cohesion, we will continue to need spaces for learning and experience where children and young people can engage in negotiation processes and foster solidarity. With our program, we aim to remain closely attuned to current social issues and the students' lived experiences. This needs-based and personalized approach is and will remain the key to our success.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT
SCHOOLS@UNIVERSITY (IN GERMAN)

RESEARCHING, EXPERIMENTING, AND UNDERSTANDING

The NatLab Teaching and Learning Lab

4,000

Each year, around 4,000 students visit the NatLab.

At NatLab, the hands-on and experimental laboratory of Freie Universität Berlin, students from 4th grade through high school primarily experience biology and chemistry as subjects of research, experimentation, and understanding. From 2024 to 2026, NatLab continued this dialog with schools, teachers, and student teachers, clearly conveying aspects of sustainable development from biological and chemical perspectives.

This is particularly evident in programs directly related to climate, environmental, and resource protection. In the course «Understanding Climate Change with Natural Sciences,» students experimentally explore global warming, ocean acidification, and the role of humans and plants. In the ecology course «Fantastic Fungi,» they investigate whether mycorrhizal fungi can protect plants under stressful conditions such as microplastic pollution and learn how plants, fungi, and the environment interact. In the «Rare Earths/Critical Metals» course, the example of smartphones illustrates how limited strategically important raw materials are and why recovery and responsible use of resources are becoming increasingly important. Questions of the circular economy are also addressed in the polymer chemistry experimental cycle: In CD and PET recycling, raw materials are recovered and the products are experimentally analyzed.

The NatLab thus serves as an interface between schools, universities, and society: Each year, around 4,000 students visit the NatLab, and over 100 teacher candidates are trained there; continuing education courses are offered for teachers. In this way, the university promotes sustainability education through schools and teacher training.

VISIT THE NATLAB WEBSITE (IN GERMAN)

Saving Wild Plants — Preserving Diversity, Protecting the Climate

The dramatic decline in our plant diversity has particularly serious consequences, as plants play a central role in the resilience of ecosystems. In light of climate change, it is essential to protect species-rich habitats as effective CO_2 sinks, and to promote the genetic diversity of species so that they can adapt to changing environmental conditions and survive in the course of evolution.

The Botanic Garden Berlin has been committed to botanical species conservation since the 1980s. The Dahlem Seed Bank stores wild plant seeds that are available for conservation efforts and research. Endangered plant species are cultivated and propagated in the garden. Some endangered species in the region have been saved from extinction through reintroduction efforts, accompanied by conservation genetics studies. These tried-and-true measures must be secured and funded for the long term. →

↑
Field work: Wild plant seeds are collected in accordance with European standards
←
It is quite time-consuming to collect the seeds of highly endangered species, when it comes to tiny plants like marsh cress.

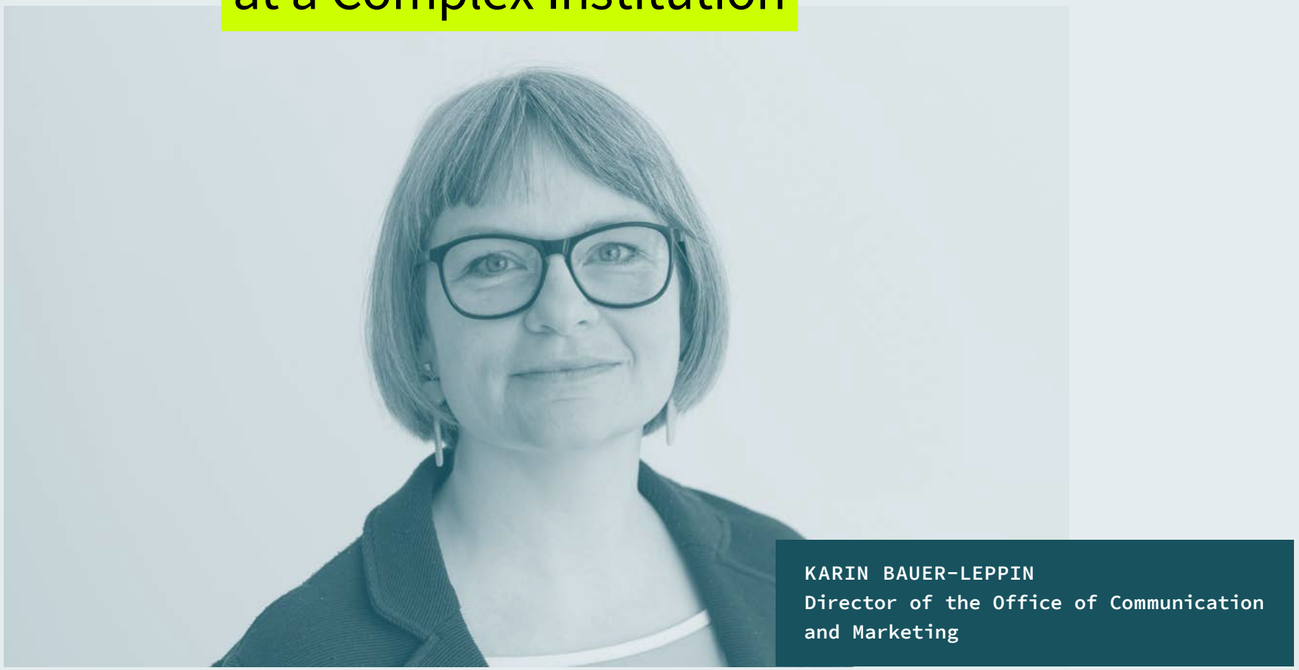
The Dahlem Seed Bank in the Botanic Garden Berlin contains seeds and spores of over 3,600 wild plant species from all over the world. They are available for research or species conservation purposes.

This is where the three-year collaborative project «Saving Wild Plants: Preserving Diversity, Protecting the Climate» (WiVi-Klima) of the botanical gardens of Berlin, Mainz, Osnabrück, Potsdam, and Regensburg comes in. It has been funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment since early 2026 as part of the «Natural Climate Protection» action program. The goal is to develop a cross-state concept for securing, conserving, and promoting endangered plant species, including the exemplary implementation of measures to conserve plant species diversity on-site alongside measures outside the natural habitat. In addition, it develops sustainable structures for data documentation and publication, along with dialog formats and training programs for botanical species conservation. The concept will be implemented throughout Germany starting in 2029.

↑
Germination tests are used both to study the often-unknown germination conditions of wild plant seeds and for quality assurance.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT (IN GERMAN)

Building Visibility, Strengthening Trust: Communicating Sustainability at a Complex Institution



KARIN BAUER-LEPPIN
Director of the Office of Communication and Marketing

The Office of Communication and Marketing serves as the public face of Freie Universität. A conversation with its director, Karin Bauer-Leppin, about the role of sustainability.

Ms. Bauer-Leppin, one of the Communication and Marketing Office's tasks is to communicate the university's core objectives and values actively and credibly. What role does the topic of sustainability play in this?

KARIN BAUER-LEPPIN Sustainability is a cross-cutting task and a guiding principle. It affects research, teaching, operations, and knowledge transfer, and thus also communication. At the same time, it holds a special position because it is strongly linked to societal expectations. For us, this means that sustainability must be visible, but it must also be communicated credibly from within the university itself, showing what Freie Universität actually does and where it does more than others. After all, practically every university, and probably every educational institution, lists sustainability as one of its goals.

From a communications perspective, what opportunities and risks are associated with the topic of sustainability?

KBL Sustainability's status as a topic of high relevance and appeal to many members of the university community and prospective students alike presents us with a great opportunity. It garners attention and is truly important to many stakeholders. However, the collision of different expectations poses a risk: while academia is supposed to mainly conduct research and provide context, some people often also expect a stance or action. «You just talk and do nothing!» is the common refrain. And in fact, researchers do actively advocate for sustainability and engage in political or volunteer work. Misunderstandings can arise quickly when these roles are not clearly indicated. Effective communication must consciously address such tensions. →

Climate protection and sustainability have been en vogue in politics and society over the past decade. Today, skeptical attitudes toward science and the topic of sustainability tend to prevail. How do you deal with this? What demands does this place on science communication?

KBL We are indeed observing that people question scientific expertise more closely. Especially when it comes to climate issues, the public sometimes dismisses research findings as being mere opinions. This places greater demands on science communication: it must distinguish even more clearly between classification, evaluation, and possible courses of action, and make who is speaking and in what capacity transparent. At the same time, universities also have the responsibility to highlight and protect the scientific integrity of their researchers.

… and here at Freie Universität Berlin?

KBL At Freie Universität, this tension is quite salient. By declaring a climate emergency, the university has deliberately put itself in the spotlight, presenting itself in a certain sense as an activist institution and thereby raising high expectations. After all, Freie Universität is one of the universities that have already made significant progress in implementing climate goals within their own operations. From a communications perspective, we could state our achievements even more clearly and take confident steps to make them more visible. Especially in an increasingly skeptical environment, it is important not only to talk about goals but also about what has already been concretely achieved.

Universities have very complex organizational structures. What challenges does this pose for successful sustainability communication?

KBL The biggest challenge is actually the complexity itself. A university does not speak with one voice, and it doesn't have to. What matters is that the different voices can relate to one another. Internal sustainability communication plays a central role in this. Formats such as the sustainability report and other internal information resources create a shared knowledge base: What is actually happening at the university? Where do we stand? What goals are we pursuing? Only on this basis can researchers, departments, and the central communications team contribute their respective perspectives without talking past one another. Good sustainability communication therefore begins internally, then it will come across as credible and consistent to the outside world.

«It is important to think about communication at an even earlier stage, not just at the end, but at the beginning of a process.»

You have been involved with the Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection for several years. From a communications perspective, do you have any requests for the Advisory Committee?

KBL It is important to think about communication at an even earlier stage, not just at the end, but at the beginning of a process. That's why it's an advantage to be involved in the committee from the very start. This also includes the question: What do we want to achieve communicatively with certain measures or positions, and who is our intended audience?

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Building for the Future: Sustainable Innovations from the University

Berlin has become a hotspot for knowledge-based startups. Research findings from universities provide concrete solutions for social and economic transformation processes and drive sustainable development.

In recent years, Freie Universität Berlin has fundamentally restructured its systems for transferring research findings into practical applications. The former startup service Profund Innovation has been further developed and now operates as SHIFT ↗, the service unit for university innovations and research transfer within the Knowledge and Technology Transfer Department of the Central University Administration. SHIFT identifies innovation potential within research groups, advises aspiring founders, and supports them in classifying, validating, and selecting suitable commercialization pathways. →

↑
The teams intend to develop their ideas until they are commercially viable. They are funded through the ProValid program of the State of Berlin.

Even Better Collaboration

Since 2019, the startup services of Freie Universität Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin, and Charité — Universitätsmedizin Berlin have been working closely together within the Science & Startups network. The partners share infrastructure, incubator space, funding, mentors, coaches, a pool of co-founder contacts, and contacts with investors. This collaboration was reorganized into a joint startup service in 2024.

In addition, Freie Universität founded FUB Innovation GmbH in 2025, which makes it easier to offer research-related services to external partners. A new Scale-up Lab enables materials and molecules for research to be produced in larger quantities for the first time, thereby bridging the gap between the lab and practical application.

In the Science & Startups for Future project, startup teams were supported in three clusters between 2023 and 2025: «Sustainability × Society — Improving the Way We Live Together,» «Healthcare × Prevention — Responding to Today's Health Challenges,» and «Technologies × Resources — Transforming Tech for a Green Tomorrow.» As part of the Berlin Startup Scholarship (BSS), 38 teams and 137 scholarship recipients received support for one year. Since 2021, the sustainable impact of the funded startups has also been systematically tracked to raise founders' awareness of the impact of their innovations at an early stage.

Supporting sustainable business ideas

In 2026, Science & Startups was once again commissioned by the Berlin Senate Department for Economics, Energy, and Public Enterprises to support promising startup teams over the next three years through the Berlin Startup Grant, with a particular focus on sustainable business ideas. In addition, the program provided key impetus for the development of the Startup Factory Berlin-Brandenburg JUNI (formerly UNITE). The project strengthens technology-driven spin-offs from academia in the fields of artificial intelligence, health, and green technologies. In 2025, JUNI was recognized by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy as one of ten flagship projects.

Awards also provide momentum: In 2025, the Berliner Sparkasse Startup Award by Science & Startups went to a startup that improves the integration of foreign healthcare professionals in Germany.

A special focus is placed on supporting female scientists. Mentoring programs, awards, and scholarships support their career paths and strengthen their presence in the startup scene. Since 2018, the proportion of women in startup projects at Freie Universität has been steadily increasing and now stands at around 50 percent.

MORE INFORMATION ON
TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

CAMPUS

Between Economic Challenges and Climate Neutrality

The energy crisis from 2021 to 2023, with sharply rising energy prices, presented Freie Universität Berlin with challenges that continue to have repercussions today. Despite some stabilization in global energy markets over the past two years, reducing energy costs remains a key priority for the university. While the price for electricity in 2026 has fallen back to just below the 2019 level, district heating and natural gas saw significant cost increases of over 80 percent during the same period.

2.0%

Freie Universität used less energy in 2025 than in the previous year.

Energy Consumption in 2025

In 2025, Freie Universität consumed a total of 109.5 million kilowatt-hours of electricity and heat. Compared to the previous year, this represents a decrease of 2.0 percent. Electricity and heat consumption developed differently. While the university's electricity consumption declined by 5.1 percent compared to 2024, heat consumption remained roughly constant.

Compared to the pre-crisis year of 2019, the decline in energy consumption totaled 7.6 percent. It should be noted that three major buildings were put into operation in 2021/22, including two state-of-the-art, technology-intensive laboratory buildings.

Compared to the 2000/01 baseline, the university's energy consumption decreased by a total of 32.2 percent in 2025. Consumption decreased by 37.5 percent on a per-square-meter basis, excluding the buildings newly constructed during this period. Space-adjusted heat consumption during this period fell by 43.2 percent. This clearly demonstrates the strengthening of the university's energy resilience due to the energy efficiency measures implemented over the past two decades.

Infographic «Energy Consumption» →

CO_2 emissions

With its declaration of a climate emergency in December 2019, Freie Universität set itself the goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2025. After an intensive consultation and deliberation process, the university administration decided against achieving climate neutrality primarily through external offset credits. Instead, starting in 2026, Freie Universität will es-

tablish an internal mechanism, the Climate Protection Fund, to support additional climate protection and biodiversity measures. The Climate Protection Fund is calculated on the basis of unavoidable campus-related emissions from energy consumption and the vehicle fleet (Scope 1 and 2 in accordance with the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol), as well as emissions resulting from business travel and paper consumption, which form part of indirect emissions (Scope 3). In 2024, these totaled approximately 8,800 tons of CO_2.

Thanks to the extensive reduction in energy consumption over the past 25 years and the procurement of CO_2-free electricity through the state contract since 2010, the university has reduced its CO_2 emissions ↗ by 88 percent compared to 2000/01. However, it should be noted that both district heating and natural gas have highly fluctuating CO_2 factors. The specific CO_2 emissions of district heating are certified annually by an institute at the University of Dresden; natural gas emissions follow changing policy guidelines regarding the proportion of biogas in natural gas procurement.

In 2025, although paper consumption increased by about 13 percent compared to the previous year, due largely to a change in the level of supplies regularly stored by certain departments, this still represents a decrease of 46.37 percent compared to 2019.

−30%

CO_2 emissions from business travel have been reduced by about 30% compared to 2018/19.

In 2025, CO_2 emissions resulting from business travel amounted to 2,806 tons, which is about a 21 percent decrease compared to the previous year (3,567 tons). However, compared to the 2018/19 baseline of 3,988 tons, this represents a decrease of just over 30 percent. This significant reduction is due to the overall drop in business travel and structural shifts in air travel. However, about half of the reduction is specifically due to lower CO_2 emissions in air travel. Since 2018/19, the reduction in trips taken by air is primarily due to the decrease in short-range flights of less than 1,500 km.

The vehicle fleet is being steadily electrified. More than one-third of the vehicles at Freie Universität are now electric vehicles. Accordingly, CO_2 emissions caused by the vehicle fleet in 2025 (39.3 tons) have decreased by 81 percent compared to 2019.

The following chart reflects the composition of carbon dioxide emissions in 2024 and 2025 compared to the 2018/19 baseline. In 2024, they decreased by approximately 11 percent compared to the baseline, and in 2025 — at a total of 9,731 tonnes — by approximately 16 percent compared to the baseline.

CO_2 Emissions

in tons, weather-adjusted

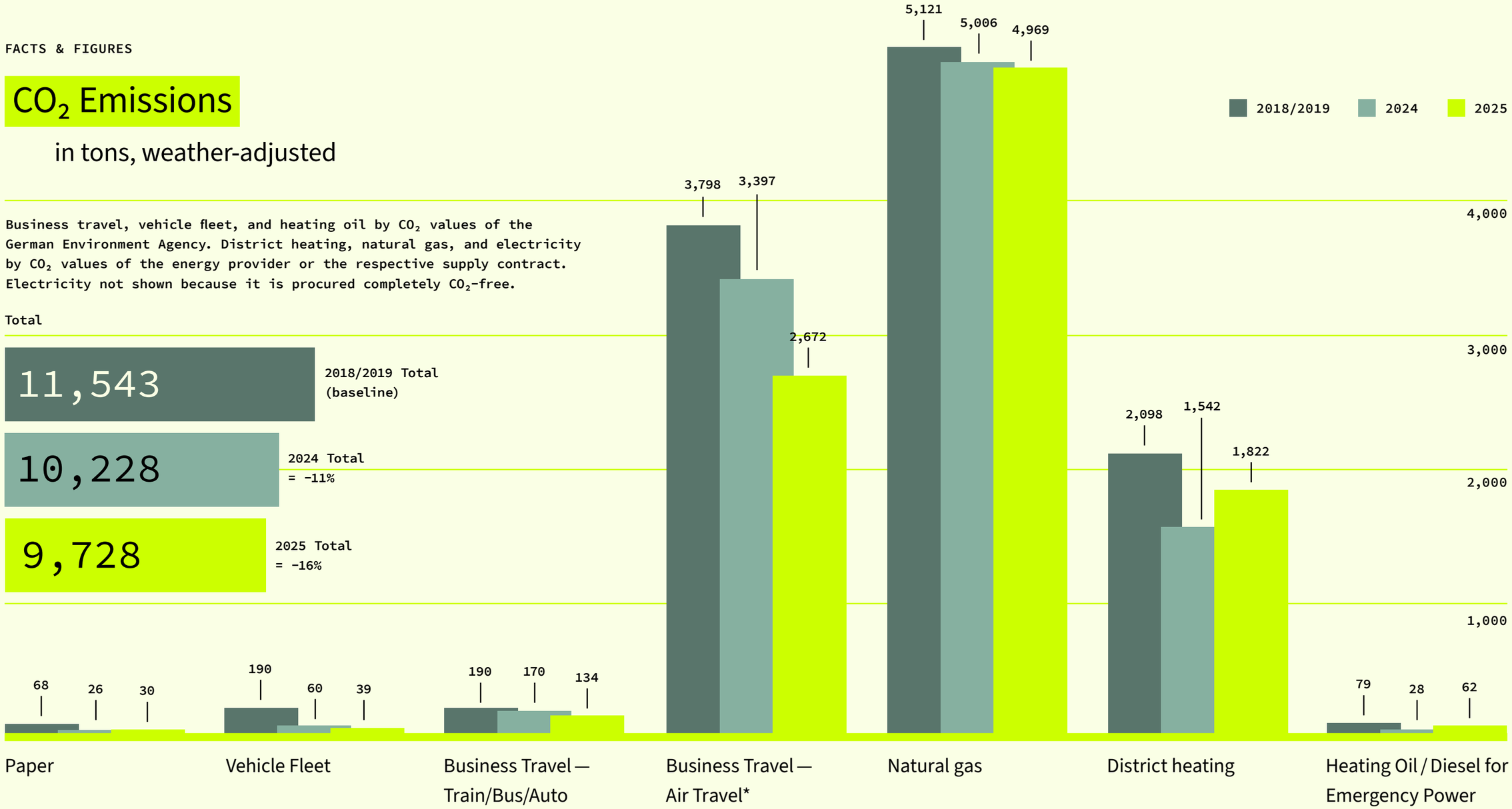
Business travel, vehicle fleet, and heating oil by CO_2 values of the German Environment Agency. District heating, natural gas, and electricity by CO_2 values of the energy provider or the respective supply contract. Electricity not shown because it is procured completely CO_2-free.

Total

11,543 2018/2019 Total (baseline)

10,228 2024 Total = -11%

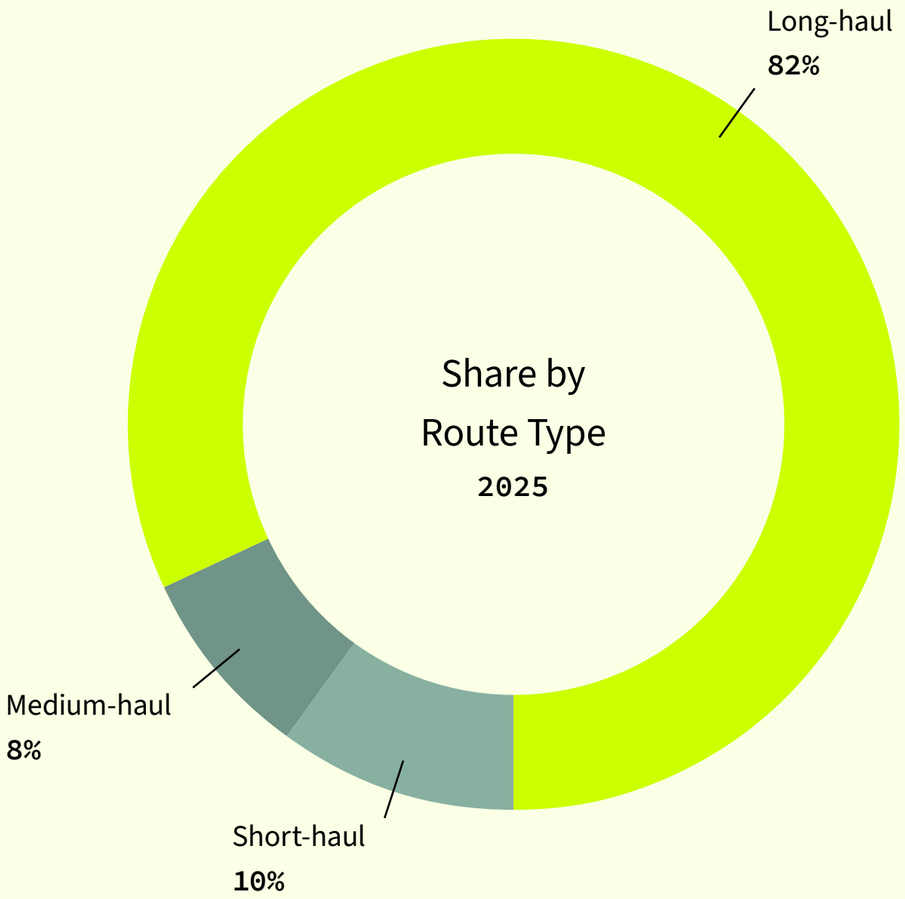
9,728 2025 Total = -16%

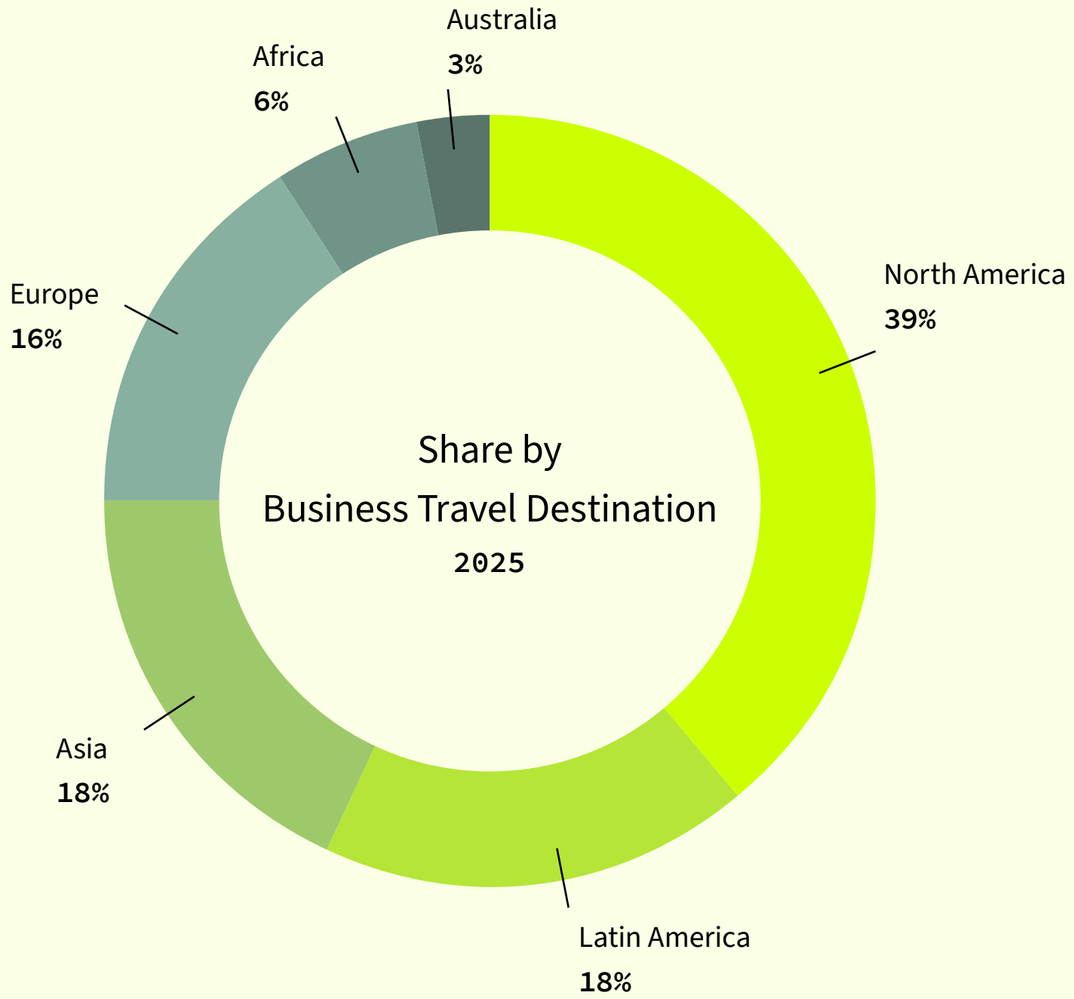


* Air travel processed by the Business Travel Cost Center, does not include student mobility

CO_2 Emissions from Business Travel — Flights Only

2,672 tons CO_2





Climate Protection in Numbers

88% reduction in CO_2 emissions compared to 2000/01

37.5% lower energy consumption than in 2000/01, excluding floor space growth

30% reduced CO_2 emissions from business travel since 2018/19

11 photovoltaic systems with a capacity of 921 kWp

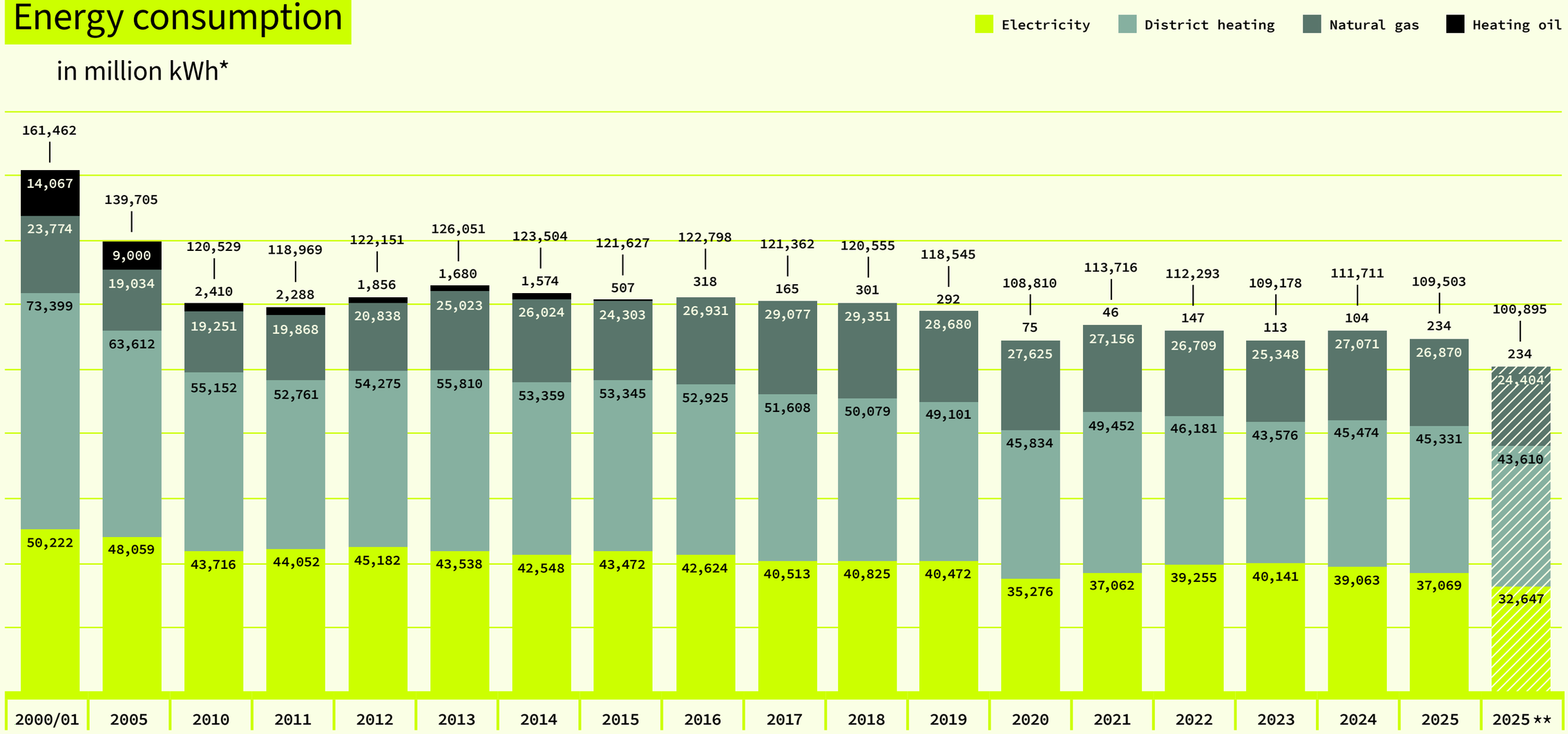
5 combined heat and power plants with a capacity of 737 kWel

9 million Euro in costs avoided through reduction in energy consumption in 2025 compared to 2000/01, excluding increase in floorspace

43% reduction in heat consumption compared to 2000/01, excluding increase in floor space

Energy consumption

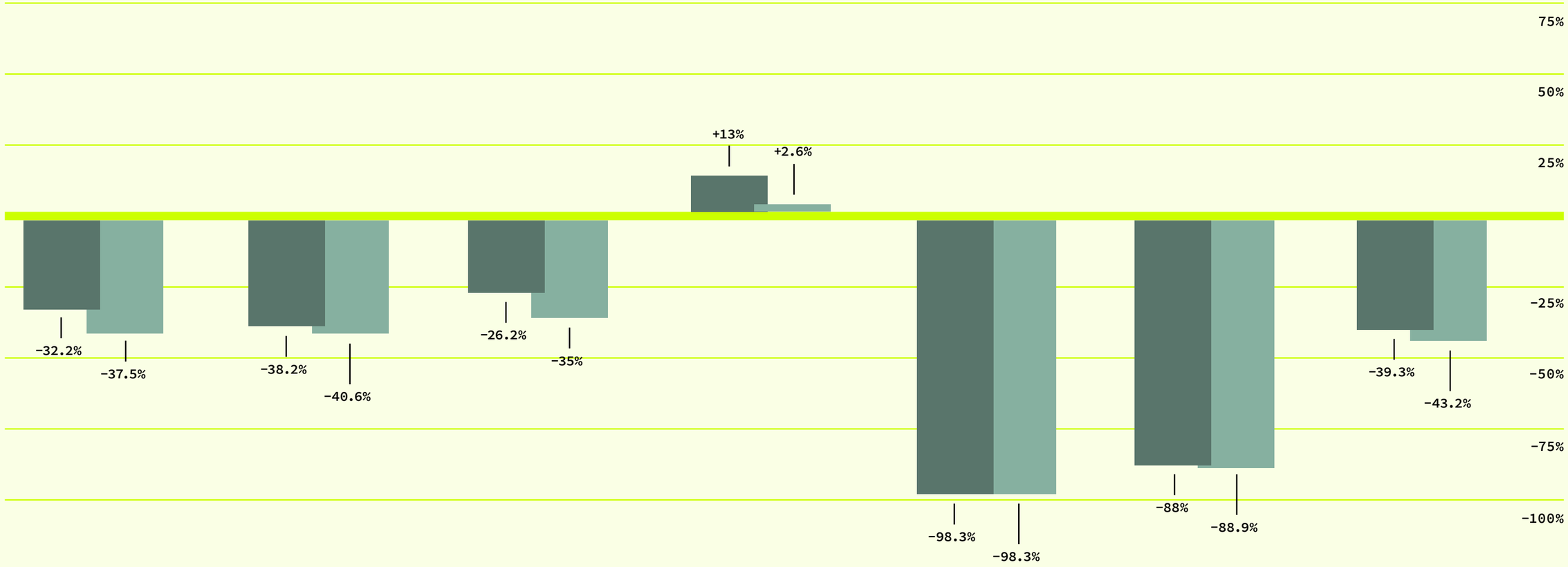
in million kWh*



* weather-adjusted figures ** excluding increase in floor space

Development of Consumption and Emissions

2025 compared to 2000/01



Business Travel and Greenhouse Gases

International cooperation is a particularly integral part of Freie Universität Berlin's DNA. As an international network university, it places exceptional importance on global exchange. However, international exchange also requires mobility. Business travel, particularly air travel, is among the forms of mobility with the highest climate impact; in 2025 it was responsible for 2,672 tons, almost 30 percent of the total CO_2 emissions recorded at Freie Universität Berlin.

As part of its Climate Emergency Declaration, Freie Universität Berlin also committed to reducing CO_2 emissions resulting from business travel. The sustainability goals and principles for business travel adopted in 2026 will raise awareness among university members and provide information and incentives for climate-conscious business travel. In addition to making full use of digital communication, the policy, based on the premise of «avoidance before reduction before offsetting,» also includes opportunities for dialog and informational guidance on climate-conscious business travel planning.

The goals and principles stipulate that:

- CO_2 emissions caused by business travel shall be reduced by 20 percent between 2026 and 2030 compared to the baseline of 2018/19,
- business travelers should be aware of and reflect on the environmental impacts before embarking on a trip and, where possible, use climate-friendly modes of transportation,
- the development of business travel will be regularly evaluated and the evaluation results will be discussed by the relevant committees,
- unavoidable travel is subject to an internal CO_2 levy, the proceeds of which are transferred to an internal Climate Protection Fund that finances additional climate protection and biodiversity projects.

For over ten years, countless people have volunteered with UniGardening@ Sustain It!

INTERVIEW

Recucing Energy Consumption and Costs: Closing University Buildings at the Turn of the Year

MELANIE QUILITZ
Sustainability and energy management, Representative for the Director of the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit

Freie Universität systematically shuts down buildings, heating, and ventilation during the Christmas and New Year’s holiday, saving up to 250,000 euros.

In the winter of 2025/26, the university administration once again announced a general closure period at Freie Universität. What is this all about?

MELANIE QUILITZ The closure period around Christmas and New Year’s falls during the academic break, when there are no classes and many employees are on vacation anyway, so building usage is limited. This period is particularly well-suited for targeted energy and cost savings. The concept is not new: such closures were already implemented at the turn of the year from 2012/13 through 2021/22. In subsequent years, we focused instead on low-impact measures without a widespread closure. The university administration resumed this practice in 2025.

What specific measures can be implemented during the closure period?

MQ The focus is on technical, organizational, and behavioral measures. We inform employees well in advance about all important tasks through mass emails, checklists, and notifications on work computers. One such notification concerns the importance of clearing hazardous substances from fume hoods in the laboratories. Only then can ventilation be reduced or even shut off entirely. Heating and ventilation systems are turned down both on-site by university staff, custodians, and maintenance personnel, as well as centrally via the building management system, so that a minimum temperature of about 12 to 14 degrees is maintained in the buildings. In addition, during this period, buildings are systematically inspected through energy audits, including on-site inspections and online energy monitoring, to identify opportunities for optimization. →

How are employees involved in the planning process, including fostering acceptance of climate-friendly measures?

MQ Transparent communication is crucial. We provide information via the aforementioned channels about goals, measures, and the specific procedures during the closure period. In doing so, we rely on clear guidelines and also highlight the contribution each individual can make. In the period leading up to the closure, I receive many calls and emails. It is important here to address concerns and worries. Furthermore, acceptance increases with careful planning. Experience from past years shows that participation is growing when people understand why measures are necessary and what effect they have.

What organizational hurdles need to be considered?

MQ A key challenge is managing areas that must operate continuously, such as those that care for animals or plants, or handle hazardous materials. This requires individual exemptions and close coordination between the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, the Engineering and Utilities division, custodial staff, and the relevant departments. Additionally, emergency response plans, operational procedures, and responsibilities for the reduced-operations phase must be clearly defined. This requires careful planning and coordination. A comprehensive planning template serves as the basis for detailed building profiles that include the exempt areas with all individual rooms, as well as the exact times and settings for the heating and ventilation systems. This provides all stakeholders with a roadmap for each building. For safety reasons, inspections of the technical systems are also particularly important during this period.

«Transparent communication is crucial. We provide information via the aforementioned channels about goals, measures, and the specific procedures during the closure period.»

What are the results of these measures, and how can they be evaluated and communicated transparently?

MQ The closure period has proven effective. Energy and cost savings can be measured and analyzed, for example, using consumption data and comparative figures from previous years. We are able to track the energy consumption of nearly all institute buildings online. The closure period alone yielded additional savings of up to 250,000 euros. At the same time, the online analyses and audits provide important insights for further optimizing the buildings' energy needs, which we share internally.

What does the future hold?

MQ The university administration continues to view the closure period as an opportunity to respond to rising energy costs and the obligatory cost-saving targets imposed by the Berlin Senate. For many employees, the option to work remotely during the closure period is an attractive alternative to working on-site. At the same time, we will use the insights gained to continuously improve our measures and adapt them to new requirements.

Sustainability in Dual Vocational Training

Freie Universität also pursues the United Nations' sustainability goal of «Quality Education» within the framework of its dual academic and vocational training programs, which currently cover eleven professions. Each profession in the dual system is governed by a binding training regulation ↗ that has long included environmental protection and, since 2021, has been expanded to include the aspect of sustainability as a so-called standard occupational profile. Each year, around 35 new trainees begin their professional careers at the university.

The libraries place special emphasis on establishing sustainability as a cross-cutting theme early on, going beyond the legal requirements. Here, new professionals learn to put sustainable practices into action in their daily work. The visible successes of these projects strengthen the trainees' motivation, independence, and self-efficacy and foster the development of a comprehensive understanding of sustainability.

The libraries of Freie Universität Berlin first enshrined sustainability in their 2020–2025 strategy. Since then, a workshop held for trainees in their first year has taught the fundamentals of sustainable development, such as the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals or national and international best-practice examples. Afterward, the new recruits develop their own project ideas. For example, an unused atrium was transformed into a lounge area with homemade pallet furniture, items from Freie Universität's furniture depot were repurposed, a «Digital Cleanup» checklist was created for staff, and the carbon footprint of these measures was calculated.

The topic remains a focus throughout the entire training program: Trainees learn about reuse approaches and resource-efficient work practices, are made aware of gender-inclusive language, and are encouraged to participate in events such as the Sustainability Days. Participation in the GreenFUBib working group is also an option.

35 **Each year, 35 new trainees start their careers at the university.**

Innovative Office and Laboratory Building FUHUB

Opened in May 2025, FUHUB provides an innovative office and laboratory building for companies in the life sciences, biotech, healthcare, and information and communication technology sectors. Located on the grounds of the FUBIC Innovation Campus in the immediate vicinity of Freie Universität Berlin, it was constructed using a hybrid timber structure with green roofs and features sustainable rainwater management as well as a holistic, nearly CO_2-neutral energy concept. FUHUB is aiming for DGNB Platinum certification, the highest award for sustainable construction in Germany.

The Berlin-based greenCHEM transfer facility, operated by Berlin's universities, is among the first tenants at FUHUB: In the Scale-up-Lab →, chemical processes are scaled up from the laboratory to larger scales using sustainable methods. FUB Innovations GmbH is in charge, enables contacts with industry partners and helps verify the applicability of new research findings.

VISIT THE
FUHUB WEBSITE

↑
FUHUB sets new standards for sustainable research laboratories.

Sustainability as a Leadership Task

14 people participate each year in the certification course for new managers.

Freie Universität's commitment to sustainability as a central priority also extends to its leadership culture. Managers are trained in the relevance of sustainability and learn how to implement it in their daily work and communicate it to their teams. This can mean, for example, how to specifically address issues of lighting and heating in rooms in everyday work or how to implement sustainable purchasing of goods and services.

In particular, those new to leadership roles receive guidance right from the start: Since May 2026, the topic has been firmly integrated into the Center for Continuing Education's successful certificate course for new managers, which is held annually with 14 participants. The course comprises six modules on leadership fundamentals such as team management, communication skills, and labor law in universities. Sustainability is taught in a practical way: Using concrete case studies, such as on the topics of energy efficiency or business travel, small groups develop solutions that are then discussed in a plenary session. In this way, sustainability becomes a tangible part of leadership responsibility.

MORE INFORMATION ON CONTINUING EDUCATION (IN GERMAN)

Embedding Sustainable Procurement

With its substantial annual procurement volume, Freie Universität is a significant market player. Central Purchasing is responsible for procuring goods and services, excluding construction work and major procurements in the area of facility management. Procurement totaling approximately 40 million euros is carried out annually through the university's budget and third-party funding budgets alone, which are consolidated by Central Purchasing. Additional procurement volumes are generated, particularly by the Engineering and Utilities Division and Building Management. In addition to economic criteria, procurement also considers social responsibility, resource efficiency, and the reduction of greenhouse gases. In this way, Freie Universität fulfills its role as a model for greater sustainability. The university has also been gradually integrating sustainability criteria into the tendering processes for products and services since 2011. In addition, sustainability labels such as the Blue Angel, EU Ecolabel, TCO, Oeko-Tex, or Fairtrade are key features of the central procurement portal: Environmentally friendly products are clearly marked here, appear at the top of search results, and product searches can be filtered by label.

Key principles considered even before an order is placed — avoid, share, reuse, repair, and re- or upcycle — are supported by a corresponding infrastructure: The central marketplaces for the reuse and sale of used furniture, appliances, and other items are the FUndgrube ↗ (surplus equipment depot) and the furniture storage depot ↗. In addition, employees and students can borrow, lend, rent, and lease items free of charge as private individuals through the FUB-fainin Sharing Community ↗.

Training Gatekeepers as a Recipe for Success

In particular, the staff members responsible for purchasing in the individual departments and divisions are crucial for sustainable procurement. For this reason, a training program was developed for these individuals in 2024 by the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit and Central Purchasing and has since been implemented in cooperation with the Continuing Education Center (WBZ). The training series «Shopping Spree?! Sustainable Purchasing at Freie Universität Berlin» regularly offers opportunities, in both in-person and online formats, to learn more about integrating sustainability and cost-effectiveness into the procurement process. Topics addressed include existing regulatory requirements in the bidding process, such as the Administrative Regulation for Sustainable Procurement, fair working conditions, and the approval seals for environmentally sound and sustainable products shown on the university-wide purchasing portal.

Research, Practice, Engagement: Bringing Biodiversity to Life

As a research and educational institution that includes the Botanic Garden Berlin and many biodiversity research projects, Freie Universität sees its special responsibility in the protection of species and their diversity. This involves not only imparting knowledge about biodiversity but also making an active contribution to its conservation and promotion.

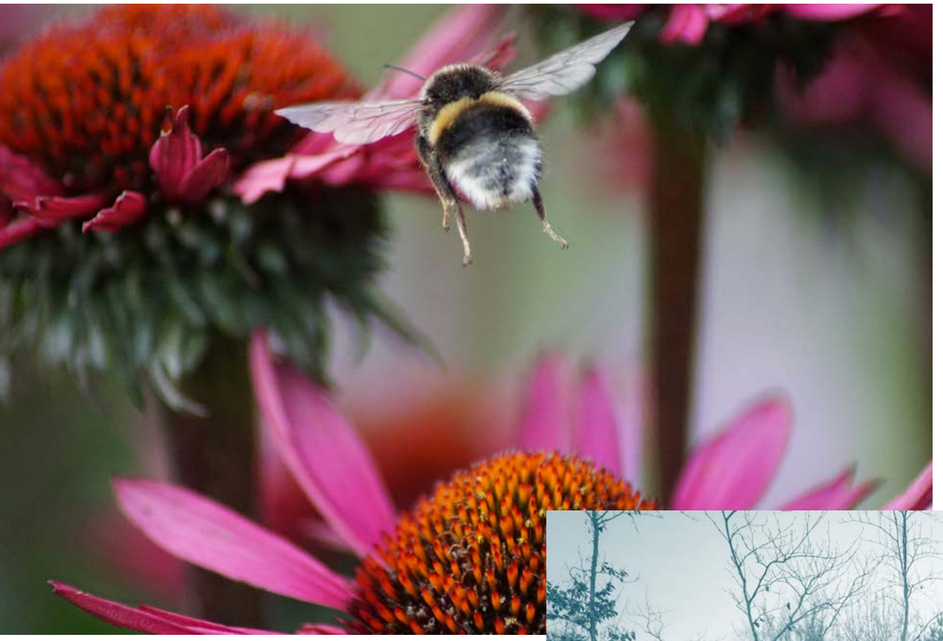
Freie Universität Berlin expanded its sustainability activities with the Biodiversity Strategy, developed through a participatory process and adopted in 2024, to include the protection and promotion of nature and biodiversity on its campus. To this end, it combines the scientific expertise of its biodiversity and nature conservation research with the planning and management of its own green spaces, bodies of water, and buildings. At the same time, the strategy aims to improve the networking and visibility of activities in the areas of nature and biodiversity that Freie Universität carries out in research and teaching, as well as through the volunteer work of its sustainability initiatives. Another key component is the promotion of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary teaching and educational programs. In 2024, Freie Universität became the first German university to adopt its own strategy for the protection and promotion of biological diversity.

Year of Biodiversity 2024

Freie Universität declared 2024 the «Year of Biodiversity,» marking the start of the long-term integration of this area of action. Following the publication of the Biodiversity Strategy in May 2024, concrete guidelines were adopted in December 2024 by the newly established Biodiversity Working Group which consists of members from the academic community, the administrative departments responsible for sustainability, campus design, and green space management, and the Executive Board.

These guidelines form the basis for further work: In 2025, the outsourcing of green space maintenance services was adapted to the new guidelines. Since then, a comprehensive mapping of habitat types has provided important data for future planning. In collaboration with Studio Animal-Aided Design, target species were identified whose habitats are to be promoted. Additionally, in partnership with the Berlin Botanic Garden, a positive and a negative list for plants and trees was created that not only identifies species to be promoted but also invasive species that should be reduced on campus.

In 2026, the Biodiversity Working Group plans to publish a paper on the implementation of the guidelines in construction projects. There are also plans to test new concepts for promoting biodiversity on pilot sites. →



→
Planting action in the Climate Forest: Research into the climate adaptation of the European beech tree is being conducted here.

1st German university to have its own biodiversity strategy.

Connecting Local measures with Global Networks

The Year of Biodiversity had an impact not only on campus but also on teaching. Several teaching modules are now being implemented more extensively on campus.

A key driver of the biodiversity initiative is the creation of a three-year part-time position within the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit to coordinate all related activities. The Blooming Campus initiative, which was involved in all processes to promote biodiversity, also contributed significantly to the success of the initiative and received the 2024 International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN) Award in the «Whole Systems Approach» category. In 2025, the successes of the Blooming Campus were recognized with the UN Decade Award for Ecosystem Restoration in the «Focus on Urban Nature» category and the PSD Bank Future Prize.

At the same time, the university strengthened its international network: it joined the Nature Positive Universities network and has led the ISCN's «Biodiversity Community of Practice» since 2024. The topic was also discussed in depth within the European university network Una Europa during an online meeting and a workshop in Berlin in February 2025. →

Multispecies Campus Combines Nature Conservation, Art, and Science

A key project in the context of biodiversity in 2025 was the «Multispecies Campus» Living Lab, funded by project grants, in which innovative measures for species conservation were developed and implemented. This was supported by a Campus Nature Ranger who carried out practical measures on site. Additionally, an art exhibition on campus addressed the societal acceptance of biological diversity. A research project also demonstrated that biodiversity positively influences students' well-being.

→
Inauguration of the new building for collaborative biodiversity research on June 30, 2026, together with Dr. Ina Czyborra, Senator for Science, Health, and Care for the State of Berlin.

Strengthening Biodiversity Research on Campus

As a result of the focus in 2024, biodiversity research at Freie Universität is now increasingly taking place on its own campus. In 2025, another research project on biodiversity and ecosystem functions in intensively and extensively mowed areas was launched. According to initial preliminary results, both the diversity of various species groups and carbon storage in the soil increased on the extensively managed areas. Within this framework, twelve biology students worked on projects for their respective theses. Here, pollinators, herbivores, and small mammals were quantified, and greenhouse gas measurements and tests on the influence of predators on prey populations were conducted.

In June 2026, a new science building dedicated to biodiversity was inaugurated, deliberately designed as a hub for collaboration: Modern research infrastructure, digital platforms, open meeting spaces, and flexible laboratory concepts all foster interdisciplinary exchange. At the same time, networking and cooperation with the Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries (IGB) are being further strengthened.

To make research on urban biodiversity accessible to a broader public, Berlin-Brandenburg Institute of Advanced Biodiversity Research (BBIB), Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, and the Berlin Network for Species Knowledge (BerNA) organized a lecture series titled «Biodiverse Berlin — from the Perspectives of Research, Nature Conservation, and Society» as part of the Public Lecture Series program during the 2025/26 winter semester.

BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES (PDF) (IN GERMAN)

VISIT THE ISCN WEBSITE

Managing Mobility Sustainably

Mobility is a key area of action for sustainable development. With approximately 38,000 students and 5,400 employees, Freie Universität Berlin sees itself as having a responsibility to actively help shape sustainable mobility solutions and serve as a role model for society.

The university pursues this challenge through a holistic approach. For several years now, emissions from the university's own vehicle fleet as well as Scope 3 emissions from business travel have been tracked. In 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the commuting patterns of university members were surveyed for the first time, and a follow-up survey was conducted in 2025. For the first time, data was collected on accessibility, previous use of university bicycles, use of external bike-sharing services, and awareness of the FURad ↗ self-help bicycle repair stations.

The mobility survey (PDF) ↗ revealed the following modal split: 62 percent of university members use public transportation to get to Freie Universität, followed by 24 percent who bike and 12 percent who use private motorized vehicles. Two percent of commutes are made on foot. The average commuting distance for university members is 15 kilometers per person.

Promoting Environmentally Friendly Alternatives in Everyday Life

One key focus of the measures to reduce emissions is boosting eco-friendly alternatives in everyday life. In cooperation with the mobility service provider Jelbi, bike-sharing, e-scooter, and e-moped services were launched at eight university locations in 2023 to enable flexible travel on campus. In 2025, another Jelbi station ↗ was added at the Lankwitz campus. Yet another station is planned for 2026 at the Düppel campus.

In the area of commuting and work-related mobility, incentives are also being created to encourage the use of public transportation: Employees receive an employer subsidy for a Berlin region company ticket and the nationwide Deutschlandticket company ticket. Since the summer semester of 2024, the semester fees paid by students now include the nationwide Deutschlandsemesterticket which replaces the previous Berlin-only Berliner Semesterticket.

FUturRad Gets Rolling: Funding Project for a Bicycle-Friendly Campus

In recent years, Freie Universität has significantly expanded its bicycle infrastructure. The Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, together with the Engineering and Utilities Division, has successfully secured funding under the «Climate Protection through Cycling» program. The funds come from the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) and are part of the National Climate Protection Initiative. Between

810,000

Freie Universität has invested 810,000 euros to make its campus more bicycle-friendly.

2025 and 2027, various measures will be implemented through the FUturRad funding project ↗ to make the campus more bicycle-friendly. In total, Freie Universität is investing approximately 810,000 euros in improved parking facilities, service offerings, and more intensive mobility communication. In 2025, 35 bicycles and 19 electric cargo bikes were purchased and made available, particularly to departments with high mobility needs.

Expansion of Bicycle Infrastructure

At the same time, 213 new bike racks and covered parking facilities were installed at the Dahlem, Lankwitz, and Düppel campus locations. Further expansion steps will follow in 2026. In addition, the campus offers a new service: Several bike repair stations allow for minor repairs around the clock and are available for free to university members and residents.

In addition, FUturRad focuses on information and participation: In 2025 and 2026 it convened several highly successful and well-attended workshops and events about bicycle mobility, such as cargo bike training, choosing the best bike route, and bicycle repair options.

↑
24% of the trips to/from the university are made by bicycle.
←
FURad, the volunteer-run self-help bicycle workshop

NETWORKS

INTENSIVE EXCHANGE

Strengthening Sustainability Through Networks

Freie Universität Berlin collaborates nationally and internationally with universities, research institutions, and other local partners to exchange knowledge, expertise, ideas, and best practices in the field of sustainability. While some of these networks are explicitly dedicated to sustainability issues, Freie Universität Berlin also advocates for the integration of sustainability, a key issue for the future, within broader academic university networks.

Freie Universität Berlin is particularly active in the European university alliance Una Europa and the International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN). Founded in 2007, the ISCN offers more than 100 universities on six continents a platform for the global exchange of expertise regarding the strategic integration of sustainability at universities. Membership requires an outstanding commitment to sustainability within one's own area of responsibility. Since 2016, Freie Universität has been represented on the Advisory Committee. It also hosts the «Biodiversity» Community of Practice and the «Sustainability Communications Roundtable.» →

↑
Collaboration with national and international partners provides important impetus in the context of sustainability.

100

ISCN offers more than 100 universities on six continents a platform for the global exchange of expertise regarding the strategic integration of sustainability at universities.

The European university alliance Una Europa pursues the vision of a shared European campus that promotes innovative teaching and research as well as collaboration on cross-cutting institutional issues. Freie Universität Berlin serves as the lead institution for the sustainability theme. Founded in 2019, the network consists of eleven universities and sees itself as a real-world laboratory for European cooperation in education, research, and innovation. Sustainability is understood as an interdisciplinary field and in the sense of a whole-institution approach. Freie Universität Berlin coordinates the activities of the «Self-Steering Committee on Sustainability» which brings together expertise from the natural sciences, social sciences, law, and economics, among other fields.

Locally, Freie Universität is also engaged in intensive exchange with other universities and state institutions, including through the «Berlin University Alliance» (BUA). The consortium of Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt Universität Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin, and Charité — Universitätsmedizin, funded as part of the Excellence Strategy, aims to establish Berlin as a leading, integrated research hub. It pools expertise to address global challenges, enhance research quality, and promote knowledge transfer to society.

In addition, Freie Universität is active in the Sustainability and Environment Network coordinated by the Technische Universität Berlin, the Working Group of Energy Officers from Berlin's municipal districts, municipal enterprises, and universities, and the Working Group for Occupational Health, and Environmental Protection Management (AGUM e. V.). Key topics include energy efficiency, climate protection, the preparation of carbon footprint assessments, waste management, occupational safety, health protection, and environmental protection, as well as biodiversity. Regular exchanges on sustainability-related topics such as mobility and environmental certifications also take place with partner universities in Berlin.

Ideas and Innovation Management: Strengthening Engagement & Enabling Progress

Freie Universität Berlin is able to develop and promote sustainable development initiatives due to the commitment, creativity, and perseverance of numerous individuals and initiatives within the university community. To support them, it has also established structures that enable ideas to be identified, tested, and further developed. A central role in this is played by the Ideas and Innovation Management, established in 2021 and based within the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit.

It brings together students, researchers, and staff, offering them a forum to discuss ideas and learn about the methods and processes that turn ideas into concrete projects. This enables measures that contribute to the university's sustainable transformation. In this process, the FUturist funding program serves as an important catalyst. The annual call for proposals supports projects that make a direct contribution to the goals of the Climate Emergency Declaration and the Sustainability Mission Statement of Freie Universität Berlin. Project teams receive financial support of up to 5,000 euros, as well as accompanying workshops, consulting, and coaching.

↑
The Baaackyard Mower (Rasenmäääher) project addresses both sustainable greenspace management and the preservation of heritage livestock breeds.
←
FUturist project Making sUStainability Effective («Nachhaltig WIRksam»): Students develop communications strategies against anti-democratic narratives in a teaching project.

29 selected projects

Since its launch in 2021, a total of 60 applications have been submitted across five rounds of calls for proposals, juries selected 29 of these for funding. These juries are reconstituted for each round and consist of experts in sustainability and innovation from various university departments. The range of topics over the past two years has spanned diverse areas: from the search for strategies to address the crisis of democracy to the preservation of old livestock breeds to the deconstruction of gender stereotypes in academia and targeted interventions on campus. In the FUtures Literacy learning project, students developed approaches for shaping engagement in the context of climate change. With their approach of collectively storing rainwater and helping trees, the Rain Barrel Heroes demonstrated that cooperative learning and action strengthen individual and collective self-efficacy. The Feuerwanzen (firebug) project taught biodiversity topics to children and their parents through experimental workshops. The Zukunftslaube podcast makes sustainability research accessible to a broad audience. Green room dividers led to more vibrant workspaces in the Geosciences Library, while the FU Mini Forest on the Dahlem campus creates new habitat for biodiversity. There were teaching projects and learning workshops that strengthened democracy, diversity, and equality, as well as projects that improved bicycle repair services on campus and others that combined sheep grazing with landscape maintenance. The range of projects illustrates just how diversely the concept of sustainability is put into practice at Freie Universität.

Living Labs Strengthen Transdisciplinary Work

The promotion of Living Labs also aims to achieve closer integration of research, teaching, and administration. Here, teams from academic and non-academic fields implement research and teaching projects that demonstrate solutions to the university's real-world needs. The Multispecies Campus, for example, addressed the interactions between humans and non-human species through art, mindfulness interventions, accompanying research, and the application of principles of Animal-Aided Design. In the Climate Future Weeks project, a climate action program was designed to motivate university members to act more sustainably in their daily lives and to raise the visibility of existing sustainability initiatives.

MORE INFORMATION ON
INNOVATION MANAGEMENT

« I got involved in the FUturist jury because …

« …
climate protection must be advanced at all levels of society. The university has a responsibility to be a pioneer in this regard.»

PROF. DR. HENNING RUST
Institute of Meteorology, Department of Earth Sciences

« …
behind the projects are people who not only develop concepts but also bring them to life. Here, what often begins quietly becomes visible: commitment, creativity, courage, and the willingness to actively shape change.»

PROF. DR. VERENA BLECHINGER-TALCOTT
First Vice President of Freie Universität Berlin

« …
I am convinced that we can make FU Berlin an even more sustainable and better place, and projects like this competition play an important role in achieving that goal.»

VANESSA LÖDE
Student

INTERVIEW

Stronger through International Networking

«The alternative would be provincialization and, at best, stagnation, something surely no one wants.»

DR. HERBERT GRIESHOP
Director of International Affairs

Research is inconceivable without international cooperation. A conversation with Dr. Herbert Grieshop about the mobility associated with it.

Freie Universität Berlin has long regarded itself as an «international network university.» What is the fundamental significance of your internationalization efforts?

HERBERT GRIESHOP Internationalization is more important than ever, because through international research collaborations, exchange programs, the diversification of our student body, and internationally oriented degree programs, the university has become academically stronger, more attractive, and more open. Only in this way can we remain competitive on the global stage and continue to be an attractive destination for students (and researchers) from around the world. The alternative would be provincialization and, at best, stagnation, something surely no one wants. Nevertheless, we must also discuss how to combine international openness with our specific university identity. At the same time, internationalization is under pressure, from wars, geopolitical tensions, right-wing populism, and restrictions on academic freedom. All of these are obstacles to the internationalization process and lead to a devaluation of international cooperation. We must stand up against this. Networks such as our European university alliance Una Europa offer a well-established framework to counter this. →

What specific measures are in place at Freie Universität to make exchange more sustainable? Has the demand for mobility changed?

HG When it comes to sustainability, the Erasmus+ program is certainly a pioneer, offering additional financial incentives for «green travel.» This is significantly more administratively demanding, but it aligns with our convictions and is well-received by students across Europe. You can achieve a surprising amount with digital meetings; I myself travel significantly less today and exchange ideas much more frequently in virtual meetings with partners worldwide. At the same time, digital formats do not completely replace in-person encounters, especially when it comes to building partnerships. We are quite happy with the reduction in air travel and in the CO_2 emissions associated with it in the past few years.

Do you see potential for anchoring sustainability even more firmly as a cross-cutting issue in the international context of Freie Universität Berlin in the future?

HG In recent years, we have tried to make the topic of «Collaborative International Online Learning» more attractive by establishing a project position. The aim is to design virtual collaboration in teaching in cooperation with international partners. I believe there is still potential here; students could gain a great international experience without cohorts having to fly around the world.

In networks like Una Europa, sustainability and internationalization are explicitly brought together. What significance do such alliances have for your strategy and for specific exchange opportunities?

HG Una Europa combines internationalization and sustainability both strategically and practically. One example is the joint bachelor's program in sustainability. At the same time, such alliances create lasting structures that go beyond bilateral cooperation. Our experience has shown that the university's administrative staff are very keen to take advantage of the many professional development opportunities, and the offerings for students—courses, summer schools, and the Student Congress, to name a few—are also well received. Among researchers, however, the added value of such programs is not yet sufficiently visible across the board. One goal remains to further expand cooperation and student mobility within the alliance.

In the spring of 2026, participatory forums were held to develop the International Strategy 2030. Which topics were particularly important to the participants, and what role did sustainability and climate change play in this?

HG Sustainability was already a central theme in the International Strategy 2020. Today, geopolitical crises and the rapid transformation driven by artificial intelligence are also shaping the discussion. At the same time, sustainability and climate protection remain at least as important to many stakeholders as they were five years ago. Accordingly, we intend to continue advancing this issue with the same sense of urgency in the international context as well.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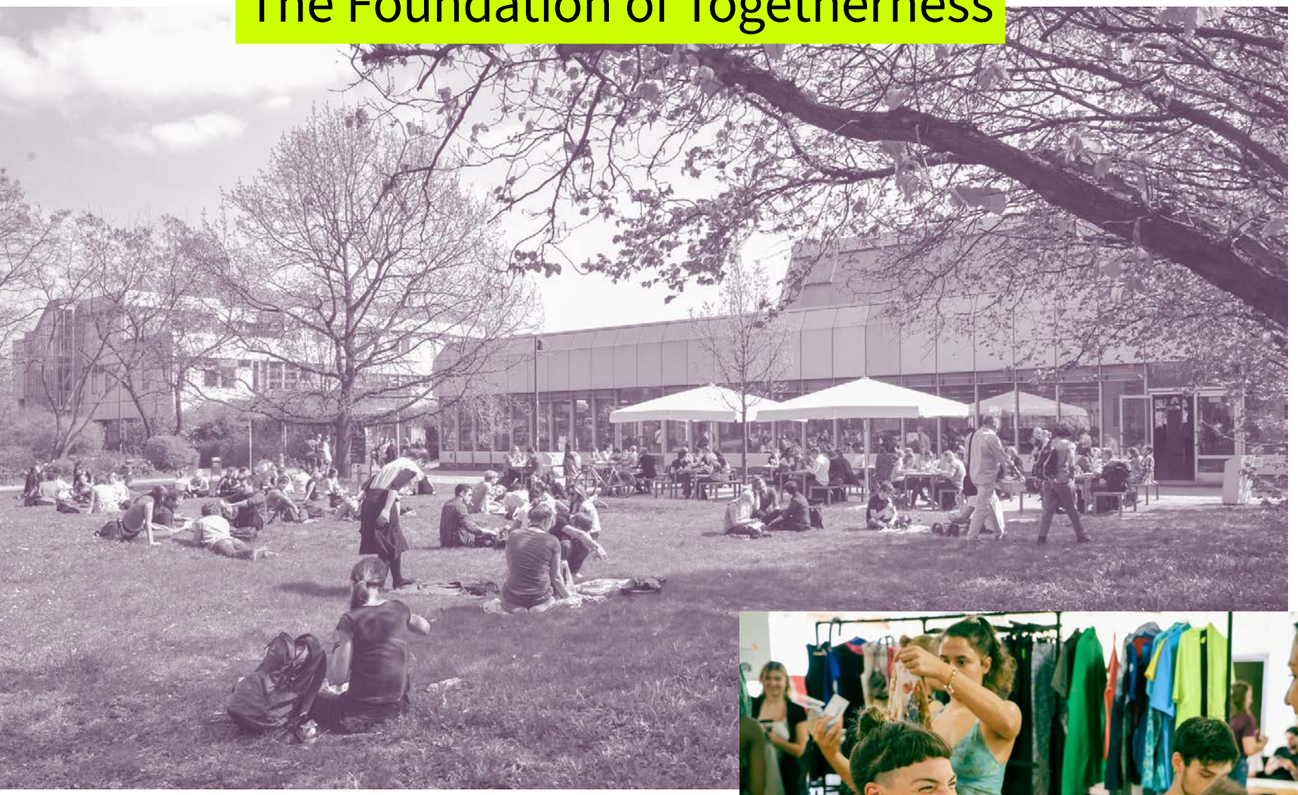
WHO WE ARE

Respect and Responsibility: The Foundation of Togetherness



More than 40,000 people with diverse affiliations, experiences, identities, and backgrounds teach, study, and work at Freie Universität. Its stated goal is to create an inclusive, non-discriminatory, and sustainable campus.

The terms Veritas, Iustitia, and Libertas — truth, justice, and freedom — define Freie Universität Berlin's self-image and aspirations. Its history and core value commit Freie Universität and its members to a culture of recognition, openness, pluralism, and respect. In this context, the university sees itself as a space where discussions and debates can and should be conducted in a factual and scientific manner within a constructive environment — respectfully and with mutual appreciation.

The Code of Conduct, published in June 2025, provides the binding framework for this. It sets forth the university's fundamental values and the rules of conduct derived from them which apply to all university members and visitors on campus. It consolidates existing obligations from statutes, regulations, and guidelines in a single, centralized document.

MORE INFORMATION ON
THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Equality, Diversity, and Anti-Discrimination

Freie Universität Berlin regards gender equality, diversity, anti-discrimination, and family-friendliness as central components of its organizational culture. The goal is to recognize and value the diversity of the university community while simultaneously breaking down individual and structural barriers that stand in the way of equal participation.

The two cross-cutting themes of equality and diversity are firmly anchored: equality at the leadership level within the Executive Board and, since 2025, through designated deans' office representatives, as well as in all areas of the university through Gender Equality Officers. Diversity is addressed within the Executive Board and through the Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Office (DIV), established in 2023: centrally via the Commission for Diversity and Anti-Discrimination and the designated Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Officer, and decentrally through diversity liaisons in all departments. Responsibilities in both areas include advising, networking, promotion, and the elimination of discrimination. A formal complaint procedure for discrimination is to be established in 2026. From 2023

↓
The Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Office supports peer-to-peer networks such as the Queer Staff Network and the BIPoC Staff Network.

41%

The share of women in tenured professorships rose from 36% in 2020 to 41% in 2025.

to early 2026, the central Gender Equality Officer represented the operational level on the Berlin University Alliance's Steering Committee on Diversity & Gender Equality. This role was subsequently assumed by the head of the DIV unit.

Based on gender mainstreaming, the university pursues the equal participation of all genders in research, teaching, administration, and academic studies. A key focus is on increasing the proportion of women at all qualification levels, particularly in tenured professorships, with the long-term goal of parity. Discriminatory and exclusionary structures are analyzed and eliminated where possible, for example, in the transition to higher qualification levels («leaky pipeline») or in fields with a traditionally low proportion of women.

Since 2024, significant steps have been taken: A central point of contact for sexual harassment, discrimination, and violence has been established; the gender equality monitoring system has been revamped; and new bylaws on equal opportunity and anti-discrimination have been adopted. Successes are evident in the university's designation as a «university with a strong commitment to equality» (2025), in funded projects for female students in STEM fields, and in the development of awareness-raising structures. The proportion of women in tenured professorships rose to 41 percent in 2025.

The areas of diversity and anti-discrimination have also been substantially expanded since 2024. The division is structured around three pillars: prevention, counseling, and complaints. These operate independently yet are interconnected, as systemic needs identified through counseling and complaints are incorporated into the development of prevention programs. This is based on a horizontal and intersectional understanding of diversity. The binding legal and organizational foundation is provided by the FU Anti-Discrimination Policy adopted in 2024, as well as the rules of procedure for the Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Office.

The university strives for a cultural shift toward a university environment with few barriers and little discrimination, as well as for the equal participation of all university members, in order to achieve structural equality of opportunity in the long term. Freie Universität aims to secure and further expand the progress achieved despite limited financial resources.

MORE INFORMATION ON GENDER EQUALITY OFFICERS

MORE INFORMATION ON DIVERSITY

University Sports

↑
2,500 runners participate in the Campus Run each year.

Sports at the university not only promote health but also strengthen community and campus life. University sports offer a wide range of activities, from traditional sports to trends like padel, thereby contributing to the quality of life for students and staff. To encourage physical activity and free daily exercise, the university provides freely available equipment as well as opportunities at campus facilities including the outdoor table tennis and fitness equipment as well as beach volleyball courts on Fabeckstraße and at the Lankwitz sports field.

The program includes health promotion, prevention, and courses on fitness, stress management, and teamwork. Complementing these are innovative formats such as active breaks, activities in libraries, and easily accessible activities for students encouraging more physical activity, well-being, and interaction in everyday university life.

Sustainability is also a key consideration: In collaboration with the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, new ideas are emerging, such as reusing advertising banners as upcycled products and privacy screens at a tennis facility as part of the federally funded GRIP program. At events, great emphasis is placed on waste reduction. For small to medium-sized events, reusable tableware is always used; for larger events, there are collection stations for returnable bottles, and caterers are selected to minimize waste production. Special reusable cups are also used for course refreshments at the Campus Run, which attracts over 2,000 runners.

VISIT THE UNIVERSITY SPORTS WEBSITE

Healthy and Inclusive University Culture

Staff Development and Health Promotion

Employees and students spend considerable time at the university. This is another reason why it is a stated goal of Freie Universität Berlin to actively promote the physical, mental, and social well-being of its members. Strengthening employees' qualifications and motivation, as well as job satisfaction and the well-being of the university community, are key components of Freie Universität's identity as an employer. The university serves as a living environment for its staff and students, and against this backdrop, it seeks to consciously leverage its impact on the health and well-being of all members of the university community to develop targeted health-promoting structures and measures.

The Welcome Service ↗ offers new employees support for transition into their new roles. In addition, a wide range of programs for professional development and health promotion are available and are being continuously expanded. The long-term goal is to establish a holistic university health management system that involves students and employees alike and more closely integrates existing programs.

Dual Career & Family Service

Freie Universität Berlin supports students and employees in balancing their careers, studies, and academic training with family responsibilities. With a family-friendly personnel policy and campus design, as well as its long-standing successful participation in the «Family-Friendly University» audit program, the university sends a clear signal in this regard.

The Dual Career & Family Service ↗ serves as the central contact and coordination point for family-related matters. Its counseling and practical assistance are aimed at both those caring for and raising children and those who have taken on the care of other family members. It provides advice on maternity leave, parental leave, and caring for other family members, and helps secure daycare spots or emergency childcare. Parent-child rooms, workshops on nutrition, stress management, and family work round out the offerings. During the summer vacation, KidsCamp at Freie Universität offers nature-based activities in addition to a sports program. New workshop formats are planned for 2026. The Dual Career Service also supports the partners of newly appointed professors in entering the Berlin job market.

Flexible work hours, remote work, and blended learning scenarios further facilitate the balance between studies, career, and family. Through these offerings, the university not only boosts motivation and job satisfaction but also promotes equal opportunity and the quality of life for all members of the university community. →

Student Health Management

The physical, mental, and social well-being of students, faculty, and staff was established as a core priority for Freie Universität Berlin as early as 2021 in the Mission Statement for Teaching and Education. The Student Health Management (SGM) program is continuously adapted to students' needs through regular data collection. The latest University Health Report (UHR-FU) was published in 2025. Compared to the results of the 2023 survey, students reported lower levels of stress and slightly less exhaustion, as well as higher study-related well-being. In contrast, the figures for symptoms of depression and anxiety disorders are higher than in 2023 and 2021. Prevention and health promotion measures to address these issues will be developed further in the coming years.

A Health Day for students, organized by the «Health During Studies» working group, took place for the first time in November 2024. At a fair featuring information booths and hands-on activities in front of Mensa II, health providers and counseling services at Freie Universität Berlin introduced themselves. Introductory courses, lectures, and workshops on various topics related to physical and mental health were offered. Student participation was high, the response was overwhelmingly positive, and there was a strong desire to repeat the event. →

VISIT THE HEALTHY CAMPUS WEBSITE (IN GERMAN)

← Student health management is continuously adjusted to the needs of the students on the basis of data collection.

↓ In 2024, the Health Day for Students was held for the first time.

75 **prospective students with a refugee background can be admitted to language courses.**

Global Responsibility: Strengthening Academic Freedom Worldwide

Against the backdrop of international crises, Freie Universität Berlin is aware of its global responsibility and supports refugee and at-risk students and scholars. With the support of the Berlin Senate, it continues to offer language courses for prospective students with refugee backgrounds. Over 150 candidates apply for these courses each year. A total of up to 75 people can be admitted to the courses so that, upon successful completion, they can continue the studies they began in their home country.

Another priority is supporting at-risk students and scholars who must flee due to conditions in their home countries or are unable to continue their academic work. Through its own Scholars at Risk Advisory Board, Freie Universität nominates individuals for funding from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Einstein Foundation, and the Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. In some cases, it also co-funds scholarships from the Scholar Rescue Fund. During the reporting period, researchers from Afghanistan, Georgia, Russia, Syria, Sudan, Türkiye, and Ukraine have worked at Freie Universität. FU Berlin is currently submitting applications to funding agencies in order to provide support additional scholars. The «Academics in Solidarity» mentoring program had to be discontinued due to the termination of funding from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. However, Freie Universität continues to network actively, including through the newly founded Scholars at Risk Network Berlin-Brandenburg which will organize an Academic Freedom Week starting in 2026 in collaboration with the Berlin University Alliance. The goal is to publicly draw attention to the plight of scholars in exile and the importance of academic freedom.

The guidelines for responsible internationalization, already outlined in 2020 in the Executive Board's strategy paper «Internationalization and Academic Freedom,» also serve as a starting point for underpinning the issue of research security at Freie Universität with concrete processes. In addition to protecting research on campus, the focus is on protecting students and researchers abroad and fostering resilient and sustainable cooperation with international partners in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment. The topic is also being advanced through the Forum on Diplomatic Resilience project within the Berlin University Alliance, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

INTERVIEW

Sustainability and Ethics in Research

Sustainable action is based on the ethics of responsibility and intergenerational justice. A conversation with Prof. Dr. Inka Bormann about sustainability and ethics in research.

Sustainability is considered one of the central societal challenges today. Why do you believe that questions of sustainability are always also ethical questions?

INKA BORMANN In my view, questions of sustainability touch on ethical issues because they are closely linked to our responsibility toward living beings of the present and future. Furthermore, questions of justice arise, such as who, when, and where people will be affected by the consequences of unsustainable development today and in the future, and how it can be justified when effective measures for greater sustainability are postponed or not taken at all.

You were a member of the Central Ethics Committee. What are the responsibilities of an ethics committee at a university, and where do these responsibilities intersect with the topic of sustainability? →

PROF. DR. INKA BORMANN
Department of Education and Psychology, member of the Central Ethics Committee of Freie Universität Berlin (2023–25)

IB The role of an ethics committee is to support researchers in conducting their studies in a way that takes fundamental ethical considerations into account. This includes, for example, preventing or minimizing harm to humans, animals, plants, or the environment. Sustainability issues are therefore very much on the agenda. If applicants plan to travel by air to collect data themselves, even though they are collaborating with local researchers, they may receive guidance from the committee members reviewing their applications as to make the data collection process more resource-efficient, that is, more compatible with ecological sustainability.

How can an ethics committee responsibly support researchers when conflicts of interest arise regarding sustainable development?

IB In such a case, an ethics committee could, through its feedback, encourage researchers to make individual aspects of the study more sustainable. Such questions are already being raised, but as far as I recall, this is not the norm. I can imagine that such recommendations would receive a rather mixed response, as they might be perceived as a restriction on academic freedom.

In your research, you deal with the topic of trust, among other things. What role does trust play in responsible science, especially when it comes to topics such as sustainability and societal transformation?

IB Research on science communication shows that science and research are perceived as trustworthy particularly when the respective goals of research and the methods of knowledge generation are made transparent, the benefits of research are explained, and it is clear where the funding for research comes from. In the international sustainability discourse, some actors go further and advocate for the so-called Fourth Mission of universities: science is considered responsible when research institutions, together with representatives from politics and business as well as civil society actors, commit to societal change toward greater sustainability. However, opinions differ on whether and how universities can or should achieve this.

Universities increasingly see themselves as places where sustainability is not only researched but also institutionally embedded. What role do governance structures, ethical guidelines, and transparent procedures play in ensuring trustworthy science?

IB Clearly, there cannot be «one» governance structure that optimally supports the institutional embedding of sustainability at universities. Nevertheless, some factors appear to be conducive to this: These include clear responsibility for sustainability processes, the recognition of sustainability as an urgent challenge to which universities can make an important contribution, a broad understanding of sustainability as a comprehensive university-wide task in teaching, research, and on campus, as well as a willingness to engage in and promote organizational learning and change. This wide range of factors makes it clear that there is no «optimal» state to be achieved, but rather that it is a journey that continues to unfold.

Sustainability Excellence

2025

German Sustainability Award
Among the three finalists in the «Schools and Universities» category

Project Award of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration «Focus on Urban Nature»
1st place for the Blooming Campus initiative

Times Higher Education Impact Ranking
1st place among German universities in the overall ranking (101st–200th out of 2,318 universities) and 50th place for «SDG 5 — Gender Equality»

2024

International Sustainable Campus Network
ISCN Award in the «Whole Systems Approach» category for the Blooming Campus initiative

German Sustainability Award
Among the top ten organizations in the «Schools and Universities» category

Times Higher Education Impact Ranking
One of the top two German universities in the overall ranking (ranked 101–200 out of 1,963 universities) and 56th in «SDG 5 — Gender Equality»

2023

German Sustainability Award
Among the top ten organizations in the «Schools and Universities» category

Berlin Nature Conservation Award
for the co-founder and long-time spokesperson of the Blooming Campus initiative

Times Higher Education Impact Ranking
Ranked 1st among German universities in the overall ranking (101st–200th out of 1,591 universities) and 24th in «SDG 13 — Climate Action»

2022

Times Higher Education Impact Ranking
One of the top two German universities in the overall ranking (ranked 201–300 out of 1,410 universities), 31st place for «SDG 13 — Climate Action»

Papieratlas University Competition «Initiative Pro Recycling Paper»
3rd place among the «Most Recycling Paper-Friendly Universities»

2021

UI GreenMetric World University Rankings
Ranked 25th out of 956 universities

Papieratlas University Competition «Initiative Pro Recycling Paper»
2nd place among the «Most Recycling Paper-Friendly Universities»

Times Higher Education Impact Ranking
One of the top three German universities in the overall ranking (101st–200th out of 1,117 universities), 26th place in «SDG 13 — Climate Action»

2020

UI GreenMetric World University Rankings
26th out of 911 universities

2019

UI GreenMetric World University Rankings
23rd out of 780 universities, top German university

2018

International Sustainable Campus Network
ISCN Award for the Schools@University on Sustainability + Climate Protection in the category «Excellence in Innovative Collaboration»

2015

International Sustainable Campus Network
ISCN Award for the sustainability initiative «Sustain It!» in the category «Excellence in Innovative Collaboration»

Berlin Climate Protection Partner Award
for outstanding projects by public institutions for «Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Campus Management at Freie Universität Berlin»

2020

Gasag Future Competition
1st place, «Architecture and Climate» category

3rd place for the Sustain It! initiative, «Education and Innovation» category

3rd place for the Botanical Garden, «Architecture and Climate» category

2010

Gasag Future Competition
1st place, «Architecture and Climate» category

2008

Berlin Climate Protection Partner Award
for outstanding public institutions for «Sustainable Energy Consumption Reduction»

2004

Awarded «Ökoprofit (Ecological Project for Integrated Environmental Technology) Business Berlin» status,
Düppel campus

2003

Berlin Climate Protection Partner Award
for outstanding public institutions for «Improving the Energy Efficiency of Freie Universität Berlin»

GOALS

Review of the Sustainability Program 2024–2026

→
By the end of 2024, the Biodiversity Working Group had already developed concrete guidelines for the Biodiversity Strategy as a solid foundation for subsequent implementation processes.

The vast majority of the measures of the Sustainability Program 2024-2026 were implemented as planned during the reporting period. With the establishment of the Climate Protection Fund in 2026, the university has sent a clear signal that climate protection and sustainability remain an integral part of the university's mission, even in times of financial adversity. However, as in other parts of the university, the budget crisis — driven by the strained financial situation of the State of Berlin — led to delays and partial staffing in the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit when filling positions, which collectively resulted in adjustments to goals and implementation deadlines.

The results are largely positive in the areas of «Communication, Networks, and Dialog» as well as «Teaching and Transformative Education:» Here, all measures were implemented as planned or are still in the process of being implemented in 2026. In the action area «Governance and Participation,» four of the six projects were realized. The adoption of sustainability-oriented business travel guidelines and the Climate Protection

Almost all of the measures of the Sustainability Program were implemented as planned during the reporting period.

Fund were only slightly delayed, taking place in April 2026 following extensive discussions in the relevant working group and the Executive Board. The implementation results are somewhat mixed in the areas of «Campus Management/Climate Neutrality» and «Resource Conservation.» Only four of the eleven individual measures can be considered already implemented or still on track for implementation. The deadlines for all other projects have been extended by at least one year. This applies, for example, to the development of a Climate Protection Program 2030, the time horizon for which now has been set at 2035. The timeframe for the planned installation of new rooftop photovoltaic systems with a total capacity of 2 megawatts-peak — in addition to the systems already installed with a total capacity of 673 kilowatts-peak — has been extended to 2030. By the end of 2025, two new systems with a total capacity of 248 kilowatts-peak were put into operation. Two additional systems with a total capacity of 307 kilowatts-peak are scheduled for completion in 2026. The expansion of drinking water fountains has been postponed until further notice due to the budget crisis. The same applies to the procurement office's goal of obtaining BME certification for sustainable procurement. It has been replaced by alternative goals, including the establishment of a Sustainable Procurement Working Group.

These schedule adjustments, due to the aforementioned cost savings, are offset by several additional measures that were not originally planned when the 2024–2026 Sustainability Program was established. For example, by the end of 2024, the Biodiversity Working Group had already developed concrete guidelines for the Biodiversity Strategy adopted in May 2024, thereby establishing a solid foundation for subsequent implementation processes. In addition, the planned measures of the FUturRad funding project were implemented more quickly than planned. Further details are provided in the following list of key activities.

Key Areas of Activity for 2024 and 2025

2026

In 2026, the Sustainability Report was published in an accessible digital format for the first time.

Strategy Development for Meeting Climate Goals

In 2024/25, the meetings of the Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection continued to focus on the implementation of the climate emergency declaration and its seven goals. Discussion focused particularly on options for designing the Climate Protection Fund and the concept of CO_2 handprint.

EMAS Validation and Environmental Statement

During the 2024–2025 reporting period, both external audits and environmental statements were successfully revalidated, ensuring that Freie Universität remains part of the relatively small group of approximately 20 EMAS-validated universities in Germany. The completion of the second three-year EMAS validation cycle, including the validation of the 2026 environmental statement, is scheduled for September 2026.

ONLINE REPORT
WEBSITE

Sustainability Report

In the fall of 2024, Freie Universität Berlin published its fourth Sustainability Report, which has been issued every two years since 2018. The report is once again based on the criteria of the German Sustainability Code (DNK) developed by the German Council for Sustainable Development. A DNK declaration of conformity was published in 2025 on the websites of the DNK and Freie Universität Berlin. The 2026 Sustainability Report will be published for the first time as a barrier-free (accessible) online report.

ONLINE REPORT
WEBSITE

3,272 university members have participated in the mobility survey in 2025.

Sustainability Days

In both 2024 and 2025, the sustainability initiative Sustain It! organized multi-day Sustainability Days in cooperation with several university seminars, featuring a variety of events and lectures. In 2024, the theme was «Real Utopias — What If the Future Turns Out Well?» In 2025, the theme was «Who Cares?» These events took place in the foyer in front of the central cafeteria and are documented on the initiative's website.

MORE ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY DAYS (IN GERMAN)

Sustainability-Oriented Ideas and Innovation Management

As part of the FUturist competitions for ideas and innovation management, five projects were selected for funding in both 2024 and 2025; these were closely supervised by the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit and presented at closing events. In addition, two Living Lab projects on the topics «Multispecies Campus — a Living Lab for Biodiversity, Creativity, and Health» and «Climate FUture Weeks: Together for a Sustainable Future» were funded and successfully completed for the first time. A third Living Lab project has been underway since 2026. All funded projects are documented on the project website.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT FUNDED PROJECTS

Sustainable Mobility

To understand the modes by which university members choose to travel (the modal split), mobility habits, and the need for optimization in the area of campus mobility, the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, in collaboration with the Health Psychology and Psychological Assessment sections of the Department of Psychology, conducted a university-wide mobility survey in May 2025, in which a total of 3,272 university members (approximately 7.3 percent of all university members) participated. The results were presented in an online event and in an article in Freie Universität's online magazine campus.leben and published on the project website. During the reporting period, the focus of mobility management was on implementing the FUturRad grant project and the associated optimization of bicycle infrastructure and mobility communication.

VISIT THE MOBILITY SURVEY WEBSITE (IN GERMAN)

60–120

interested individuals attended the Public Lecture Hall program per session.

Establishment of the Center for Sustainable Resources Berlin

In April 2025, the interdisciplinary Center for Sustainable Resources CSR|Berlin was established. It brings together research activities at Freie Universität Berlin that aim to promote the sustainable and circular use of resources and materials, as well as material synthesis. In 2025, the Center successfully secured a significant external funding project from the Werner Siemens Foundation for a new chlorine technology.

VISIT THE CSR WEBSITE

Teaching

An interdisciplinary lecture series on Biodiverse Berlin was held during the 2025/26 winter semester as part of the Public Lecture Hall program. This lecture series was regularly attended by 60 to 120 interested participants, streamed live, and also documented on Freie Universität's YouTube channel.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PUBLIC LECTURE HALL (IN GERMAN)

Public Relations

The diverse sustainability activities undertaken during the reporting period were extensively supported by press and public relations work. In addition to coverage of current research projects, events, and key figures — delivered through press releases, specialist articles, and interviews — notable highlights include a Tagesspiegel supplement on sustainability activities published in October 2025 and an Instagram campaign launched in mid-2026 that vividly communicates sustainability topics related to climate neutrality. An editorial (in German) titled «The Sustainable University» was published in the 2025/01 issue of the Ernst-Reuter-Gesellschaft's Wir magazine.

«DIE NACHHALTIGE UNIVERSITÄT» (PDF) (IN GERMAN)

Sustainability Program 2026–2028

Governance & Participation

MEASURES	DEADLINE	RESPONSIBILITY	STATUS
Technical and organizational coordination of the Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection, established by the Academic Senate in October 2023 / Technical and organizational coordination of the Teaching, Libraries, and Handprint working groups	Permanent	Advisory Committee for Sustainability & Climate Protection, coordinated by the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	ongoing
Technical and organizational coordination of the Biodiversity Working Group for the implementation of the biodiversity strategy and guidelines	Permanent	Biodiversity Working Group, coordinated by the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	ongoing
Validation of the environmental management system in accordance with EMAS (third validation cycle 2027–29, starting in September 2027)	Permanent	Entire university, coordinated by the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	ongoing
Transformation of the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit into a Central Sustainability Facility	2027	University administration, coordinated by the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	in preparation
Drafting of a position paper on CO_2 footprint and handprint	2026	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	in implementation *
Technical and organizational coordination of sustainability-oriented Idea and Innovation Management system with corresponding support structures	Permanent	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	ongoing

MEASURES	DEADLINE	RESPONSIBILITY	STATUS
Establishment of a coordination function for the Green Lab initiative in the Department of Biology, Chemistry, and Pharmacy	2025	Department of Biology, Chemistry, and Pharmacy	implemented **
Integration of the «Sustainability Goals and Principles for Business Travel» into the revised Business Travel Policy 2026	2026	Business Travel Policy: Division I — Personnel Sustainability aspects: Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	in implementation
Reduction of CO_2 emissions resulting from business travel by 20 percent in the period 2026–2030 compared to the 2018/19 baseline	2030	Whole university Evaluation: Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	in implementation
Establishment and coordination of a Climate Protection Fund to finance additional climate protection, climate adaptation, and biodiversity measures, coordinated by a Climate Protection Fund Working Group	2030	Division III, Building Management Service, Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, coordinated by Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	in implementation

* schedule adjustment / ** Implemented on a reduced basis

in preparation · in implementation · implemented · ongoing

Teaching & Transformative Education

MEASURES	DEADLINE	RESPONSIBILITY	STATUS
Technical and organizational coordination of the Sustainable Development competence area within the General Professional Skills (ABV) program (since 2018)	Permanent	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	ongoing
Introduction of service-learning formats in the Sustainable Development competence area of the ABV by 2027	2027	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	in preparation
Continuation of the educational format «Schools@ University: Sustainability + Climate Protection»	2028	Schools@University: Sustainability + Climate Protection project	ongoing
Organization of training sessions for instructors to convey the teaching and learning concept of Education for Sustainable Development	Permanent	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, DCAT, Assistant Professorship in Political Didactics at the Department of Political Science	ongoing
Conducting regular professional development programs on the topics of energy efficiency, mobility, biodiversity, procurement, AGUM, and EMAS validation for employees	Permanent	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, Center for Continuing Education	ongoing
Provision of instructors for the certificate program for new managers (starting in 2026)	2028	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, Center for Continuing Education	in implementation

MEASURES	DEADLINE	RESPONSIBILITY	STATUS
Development and implementation of a pilot continuing education seminar on climate communication	2027	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, Center for Continuing Education	in preparation
Coordination of the sustainability focus area within the European university alliance Una Europa and the Task Force for Sustainability and Climate Protection, development of pilot courses	2027	Vice President for International Affairs, Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, Division IV — International Affairs (CIC)	ongoing
Continuation of sustainability activities such as Sustainability Days, FUdsharing, UniGardening, and the Blätterlaube (Leafy Green Canopy) community garden	2028	Sustain It!	ongoing
Participation in the joint project FUBIC — All Electricity Realization funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy	January 2027	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit, Cooperation partners: WISTA Management GmbH, RWTH Aachen University, aedifion GmbH, BTB GmbH	ongoing

in preparation · in implementation · implemented · ongoing

Campus Management / Climate Neutrality

MEASURES	DEADLINE	RESPONSIBILITY	STATUS
Development of a Climate Protection Program 2035	2027	Coordination: Sustainability & Energy Management Unit Involvement: Entire University	in implementation *
Review and, if applicable, initiation of the implementation of the project «Negative CO_2 Emission Technology: Biochar»	2026	Division III — Engineering and Utilities	in implementation
Beginning in 2027, preparation of annual evaluation reports on the development of business travel-related CO_2 emissions (followed by offers of consultation with the academic departments)	2030	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	in implementation
Expansion of photovoltaic systems by an additional 2 MW (compared to the baseline in 2023)	2030	Division III — Engineering and Utilities	in implementation *
Coordination of the Energy Efficiency Working Group established in 2022 to identify and implement energy-saving and energy-efficiency measures (including waste heat utilization)	Permanent	Division III — Engineering and Utilities and Sustainability & Energy Management Unit Involvement: entire university	in implementation
New construction of the Biodiversity Building Dahlem at Königin-Luise-Straße 28-30 in accordance with the Sustainable Building Assessment System (BNB) Gold Standard	2026	Division III — Engineering and Utilities	in implementation *

MEASURES	DEADLINE	RESPONSIBILITY	STATUS
Renovation of the Chemistry Building at Takustraße 3, Construction Phase I	2027	Division III — Engineering and Utilities	in implementation
Accelerated installation of LED lighting	2030	Division III — Engineering and Utilities	in implementation
Development and implementation of a sustainable mobility concept for a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly campus (implementation of the Climate Protection through Cycling grant project)	2027	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit and Division III — Engineering and Utilities Involvement: Entire University	in implementation
Installation of 6 bicycle repair stations at the Dahlem, Düppel, and Lankwitz locations	2026	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit and Division III — Engineering and Utilities	implemented
Conversion of the FU vehicle fleet to e-mobility	2030	Division II, Unit II C — Central Procurement Division III — Engineering and Utilities (Charging Infrastructure)	ongoing

* schedule adjustment

in preparation · in implementation · implemented · ongoing

Communication, Networks, and Dialog

MEASURES	DEADLINE	RESPONSIBILITY	STATUS
Establishment of an international conference format within the context of the Una Europa university alliance	2026	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit in cooperation with Division IV: International Affairs	in implementation
Participation in the ISCN university network (including the Advisory Committee)	Permanent	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	ongoing
Publication of regular sustainability reports, SDG reports, and environmental statements in accordance with EMAS	Permanent	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	ongoing
Participation in the annual QS Sustainability Rankings	2028	Sustainability & Energy Management Unit and Academic Controlling Departments	in implementation

Conservation of resources

MEASURES	DEADLINE	RESPONSIBILITY	STATUS
Central Procurement: Establishment of a Sustainable Procurement Working Group to develop strategic and operational sustainability criteria	2027	Division II, Unit II C — Central Procurement in collaboration with functional departments and the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	in preparation
Conducting a workshop to embed sustainability criteria in the various procurement areas	2026	Division II, Unit II C — Central Procurement in collaboration with the Sustainability & Energy Management Unit	in preparation

in preparation · in implementation · implemented · ongoing

APPENDIX

Sustainability in Figures

Budget, Students, and Staff

			2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2024	2025
Annual government grant [€ million]	total		267.6	292.4	274.2	311.6	363.0	411.66	401.43
Disbursements from third-party funding [€ million]	total		36.7	46.1	106.3	126.6	117.0	143.98	134.22
Students	total		35,283	31,398	32,043	35,413	37,102	37,717	38,091
		of which, women	53%	59%	58%	59%	61%	61%	61%
	Doctoral students		2,351	2,260	3,902	4,406	3,628	3,278	3,162
	International students		5,481	4,765	6,042	7,358	7,384	8,739	8,808
Full-time staff total	total		–	4,497	4,863	5,143	5,573	5,679	5,650
		of which, women	–	53%	56%	57%	55%	57%	57%
	Non-academic staff		–	2,283	2,216	2,357	2,720	2,773	2,784
		of which, women	–	67%	67%	67%	64%	64%	64%
	Academic staff		–	2,214	2,647	2,786	2,853	2,906	2,866
		of which, women	–	35%	45%	47%	47%	50%	50%

Staff, students, relevance of sustainability for research and teaching

			2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2024	2025
Professors	total		–	433	474	548	539	540	510
		of which, women	–	20%	31%	38%	38%	42%	43%
	Professors with tenure		–	372	309	319	363	380	376
		of which, women	–	19%	25%	31%	34%	38%	40%
	Professors on fixed-term contracts		–	0	31	54	42	36	28
	Junior professors		–	30	77	106	65	46	43
	Visiting professors		–	–	57	69	69	78	63
Student employees	total		–	–	1,662	1,713	1,344	1,247	1,214
Adjunct teaching staff	total		–	1,325	1,461	1,094	894	867	858
Number of research projects	total		–	–	–	–	1,796 (2019)	–	1,415
	related to sustainability		–	–	–	–	665	–	650
Number of courses	total		–	–	–	–	4,159 (WS 2019/20)	–	3,912 (WS 2025/26)
	related to sustainability		–	–	–	–	678	–	845

Energy consumption and costs

			BASELINE	2005	2010	2015	2020	2024	2025
Energy consumption * [MWh]	total	incl. incr. in floor space	161,462 (2000/2001)	139,705	120,529	121,627	109,480	111,711	109,503
		excl. incr. in floor space	–	–	–	*117,431*	*104,562*	*101,936*	*100,895*
	Reduction from baseline	incl. incr. in floor space	–	13.5 %	25.4%	24.7%	32.2 %	30.8%	32.2%
		excl. incr. in floor space	–	–	–	*27.3 %*	*35.3%*	*36.9%*	*37.5%*
	Electricity	incl. incr. in floor space	50,222	48,059	43,716	43,472	35,276	39,063	37,069
		excl. incr. in floor space	–	–	–	*41,216*	*32,366*	*34,370*	*32,647*
	District heating	incl. incr. in floor space	73,399	63,612	55,152	53,345	46,504	45,474	45,331
		excl. incr. in floor space	–	–	–	*52,577*	*45,579*	*43,739*	*43,610*
	Natural gas	incl. incr. in floor space	23,774	19,034	19,251	24,303	27,625	27,071	26,870
		excl. incr. in floor space	–	–	–	*23,131*	*26,542*	*23,723*	*24,404*
	Heating oil	incl. incr. in floor space	14,067	9,000	2,410	507	75	104	234
		excl. incr. in floor space	–	–	–	*507*	*75*	*104*	*234*
Energy cost reduction ** [€ million]	annual, in comparison to baseline	incl. incr. in floor space	–	1.22	3.19	3.45	5.43	9.71	7.44
		excl. incr. in floor space	–	–	–	*3.97*	*6.15*	*11.79*	*8.99*
	cumulative	incl. incr. in floor space	–	2.40	14.72	32.87	53.99	84.22	91.67
		excl. incr. in floor space	–	–	–	*34.24*	*58.32*	*95.06*	*104.06*

* weather-adjusted / Energy consumption includes the electricity consumption of the dining halls and cafeterias of Studierendenwerk Berlin.
** calculated with the energy prices of the respective years

CO_2 Emissions

			BASELINE	2005	2010	2015	2020	2024	2025
CO_2 Emissions Energy Consumption * [t]	total	incl. incr. in floor space	57,194 (2000/2001)	26,160	12,951	13,075	6,887	6,575	6,853
		excl. incr. in floor space	–	–	–	*12,736*	*6,655*	*5,897*	*6,328*
	Reduction from baseline	incl. incr. in floor space	–	54.3%	77.4%	77.1%	88.0%	88.5%	88.0%
		excl. incr. in floor space	–	–	–	*77.7%*	*88.4%*	*89.7%*	*88.9%*
CO_2 Emissions Energy Consumption [kg/m²]	total		107.9	50.1	24.1	23.1	12.1	11.2	11.7
CO_2 Emissions Vehicle Fleet [t]	total		190 (2018/2019)	–	–	–	42	60	39
CO_2 Emissions Business Travel [t]	total		3,988 (2018/2019)	–	–	–	509	3,567	2,806
CO_2 Emissions Paper consumption [t]	total		68 (2018/2019)	–	–	–	35	26	30
Building area (net floorspace) [m²]	total		530,000 (2000/2001)	522,000	537,000	565,000	568,000	587,000	587,000

* Based on information from service providers and electrical service contract Electricity has been procured CO_2-free since 2010.
The reversal from 2020 is primarily the result of a significant change in the calculation method for district heating.

Paper consumption, water and waste disposal costs

			BASELINE	2005	2010	2015	2020	2024	2025
Paper consumption [t]	total		–	–	–	151.3	43.1	32.2	36.9
Water usage [m³]	total		283,009 (2004)	272,014	197,870	219,146	197,126	240,829	217,307
Water costs [€ million]	total		1.556 (2004)	1.593	1.502	1.400	1.218	1.376	1.322
Waste disposal costs* [€ million]	total		0.428 (2004)	0.454	0.348	0.339	0.310	0.644	0.578
	Residual waste		0.151	0.142	0.142	0.159	0.186	0.240	0.244
	Special waste (chemical waste, bulky waste, electronic waste, etc.)		0.236	0.275	0.203	0.180	0.127	0.404	0.334

* From 2023 the costs of disposal of solid manure from the Department of Veterinary Medicine are included.

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UNIVERSITÄT
BERLIN

2025