SET4HEI User Guide
Version September – December 2023

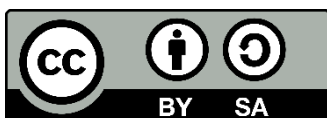# SET4HEI User Guide

(v. September – December 2023)

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AboutSET4HEI

SET4HEI (Sustainability Evaluation Tool for Higher Education Institutions) is a free, online and open resource that help you, as a leader of a higher education institution (HEI), identify areas where your institution is contributing or could contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

Launched in September 2023, the current version of SET4HEI is a "beta" or early version. This version will remain available until the end of 2023 to gather feedback that can help improve the tool. In January 2024 the final version of SET4HEI will be launched and available in Spanish, Portuguese and French, in addition to the current English version.

The SET4HEI assessments and the SET4HEI website were created by the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education (UNESCO IESALC) in collaboration with other UN agencies and experts. The platform that hosts the tool, Campus IESALC, is administered by UNESCO IESALC. More collaborators are expected to join the platform in the near future.

About this guide

This user guide provides all the information needed to understand how to use the SET4HEI self-assessments. This guide does not describe the process for the SET4HEI certification process, which will be detailed in a separate document, to be published in January 2024.

By the end of 2023, this guideline will be also available in Spanish, French and Portuguese.

Quick step-by-step guide to the self-assessments

1. Access the SET4HEI website in www.set4hei.org.

2. Click on the assessments catalogue, you will be redirected to Campus IESALC, the platform hosting the SET4HEI assessments.

3. Select the contribution to which of the 17 SDGs you want to assess, or the basic practices assessment.

4. Answer each of the questions (they are all compulsory) for each of the 4 areas (Teaching and Learning, Research, Engagement, Governance and administration).

5. Submit your results.

6. Check your (immediately available) results.

7. Download your results as PDF.

SET4HEI USER GUIDE

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SET4HEI currently comprises 18 self-assessment questionnaires, one per each of the 17 SDGs and a shorter introductory assessment on basic good practices across SDGs. They can be accessed in the SET4HEI website.

Users can choose which SDG they want to fill in separately. All assessments measure the contribution of higher education institutions to across four areas:

- Teaching and Learning
- Research
- Engagement
- Governance and administration

The indicators of each self-assessment are displayed in four separate pages coinciding with these four areas.

These areas represent the three missions of higher education institutions, plus a fourth area comprising other relevant practices, including governance, management, human resources, administration, campus management, and other non-academic services (e.g. campus restaurants, public transportation).

Introductory information

Once you enter each assessment, you will first find two information pages.

The first one provides some examples of areas where higher education institutions can have an impact on the corresponding SDG. This is intended as illustrative and will not mention all the aspects covered by the indicators within that assessment.

The second page will provide a practical summary on how to fill in the assessment from a technical point of view, but in much less detail than this user guide.

Each indicator is phrased as, either:

1. A good practice that the HEI is either implementing fully, partially or not at all. Alternatively, the full score is granted if the HEI has multiple examples of that good practice, and the partial score is used for a lower number of examples. These indicators require the user to select an option from a single-choice list, typically offering two to four options, which can be different for each indicator.

Examples:

20 Non-discrimination on the basis of gender is enforced as an explicit principle to all areas of operation according to official policy, and is enforced through an updated Gender Equality Plan.

- ○ No
- ○ Yes (only policy)
- ○ Yes (policy and implementation plan)

13 The HEI offers lifelong learning opportunities on gender equality (SDG 5) to the non-university community.

- ○ No
- ○ Yes (one lifelong learning course / program)
- ● Yes (two lifelong learning courses / programs or more)

2. A percentage. The user will select it using a slide bar.

Most indicators have an additional explanatory text providing clarification of concepts as well as examples. This text can be deployed by clicking on the question mark icon once the assessment is open.

Examples:

19 Percentage of female members of the HEI's leadership.

The HEI's leadership includes the first and second hierarchical levels, such as President, Provost and Vice-Presidents, Rector and Vice-Rectors, Vice-chancellor and pro-vice-chancellors.

45 %
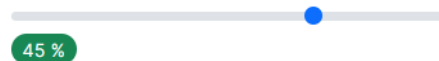
Anonymous and Registered Modes for Access

Currently, all self-assessments are only offered in anonymous mode (without registration).

Registration functionalities will be available from January 2024, allowing users to save their progress and apply for an optional certification process (which will include external validation of the assessment results, at a cost).
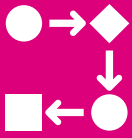
You need to provide an answer for every question to be able to continue to the next page. After you fill in the fourth section, the button 'Finish' will allow you to access the results. Before you click 'Finish' you can always return and change your answers using the buttons 'Previous' and 'Next' at the bottom of the page.

After you click 'Finish' you will no longer be able to change your answers.

Each indicator can grant a maximum of one point. The final score is expressed as a percentage of the maximum possible score for each assessment.

Most indicators require you to choose one of a short list of possible answers. In these, the answers will be always displayed from the one that provides the lowest score to the one that provides the highest.

The indicators that require a percentage as an answer will explain their own scoring system in the detailed explanation (click on the black question mark icon to display it).

Some indicators offer the option to answer '**Not applicable'**, in which case that indicator will not be considered for the calculation of the final score.

Free-text boxes

Each indicator is accompanied by a **free text box** for your own notes. The text box is completely optional and does not affect your score.

It is recommended that you use it to note down the references (url, name of document, point of contact) that justify your answer to each indicator. Noting down this information while you fill in the questionnaire can save you time when you access it again and can also be useful if you are sharing the information with colleagues, or for the certification process.

Please be mindful that from September to December 2023, as only the anonymous access is permitted, neither the answers nor the information in the text boxes is saved after you close the tab in your browser. The scores and the replies can be saved in a pdf document, but not the text box replies.

After you complete the last section, you results are shown, including the score for each one of the four areas. You will also be able to download a pdf summary of your results, including the complete list of questions with your answers.

Until 2024, the self-assessment can only be anonymous, without the possibility to register.

After you close or refresh this page, you will no longer be able to see your answers and scores, or to download the pdf summary. If you are previously registered in Campus IESALC, this anonymous assessment will not be saved or associated with your profile. The possibility of filling in the assessment as a registered user will become available in January 2024.

Global Result:

Percent: 60.57

Download results in PDF

General methodology

The SET4HEI indicators are based on a common methodology, based on the following principles:

Clear, transparent, simple.

Indicators should be self-explanatory, with the support of the additional explanatory textbox when concepts require further clarifications. The use of indicators with closed lists of available answers allows for the automatic and immediate display of the scores upon completion.

Aimed at supporting improvements, not ranking institutions.

The goal of SET4HEI is to allow every HEI to improve their sustainability impact, independently from their starting point, not to find out which one is having a bigger impact. Therefore, the scores of each user are independent from one another, with no indicator assigning scores based on the average, or the normal distribution, from all other users. This means that every institution can, in principle, reach the maximum score regardless of whether other institutions also improve theirs. The scores will never be used to inform a ranking of HEIs.

Standardized, when possible, without duplicating questions.

Many indicators share a common structure or part of their wording across several SDGs to facilitate completion, but they are not identical. Two or more indicators may emphasize different aspects of a similar good practice.

As a methodological choice, it is accepted that if one good practice can have a positive impact on several SDGs, then it is justified that it contributes to the score of several SDGs. By their very multifaceted nature, several SDGs are closely related. Some aspects of HEIs operations can contribute to several SDGs at the same time, e.g., free tuition fees can support access to higher education (SDG 4), provide opportunities for low-income students (SDG 1), and reduce discrimination by economic status (SDG 10.2).

Aimed at global relevance.

The good practices on which the indicators are based have been selected from across the world, representing countries with different levels of development, and HEIs of a wide range of size and reputation. While some good practices may be more widespread in some countries, SET4HEI indicators are designed independent of the institution size, budget, or publication metrics. Furthermore, users can choose to assess only the SDGs that they consider most relevant for their HEI.

Basic calculation

Independently from the formulation and the number of available answers, each indicator will be scored from 0 to 1 point.

Once the replies for all indicators have been selected, the scores are calculated automatically. The scores for the self-assessment are expressed as a percentage of the maximum number of points possible. Each indicator has the same weight within one SDG. Not all SDGs have the same number of indicators, but each SDG has the same weight within the 17 SDGs .

'Not applicable' replies

Some indicators can be answered as 'Not Applicable', and thus excluded from the score calculation (as if that indicator did not exist). For example, HEIs that do not do research as part of their mission can select 'Not applicable' in multiple indicators that fall outside the 'Research' section of the assessment. For those institutions, the 'Research' section can be simply disregarded and a functionality to skip it altogether will be added in the 2024 version of the tool.

'Not applicable' is typically offered as an answer when the HEI cannot fulfill the requirement of the indicator to no fault of their own, or no value would be added if they did. For example, when the good or service that the indicator is asking about is already offered by the government. In this case, HEI do not receive extra points, or are penalized for something beyond their control.

Likewise, the ´Not applicable´ option is also offered to avoid double penalization for elements that are already considered in a previous indicator. For example, if one indicator asks about whether the HEI provides a certain type of program and this is not the case, that HEI can later select 'Not applicable' if another indicator asks for further details of that program (e.g. its curricula).

Average scores are not shared and do not affect your score

The self-assessment is designed so that any institution can, potentially, reach the maximum score, since this depends exclusively on their own actions. This is, the scores do not change based on what other users have replied, as ranking-oriented methodologies often do.

The self-assessment is intended as a practical tool for improving every institution's sustainability impact. Therefore, it is designed so that most institutions can get some points, some institutions can get most points and almost none can get all points. If too many institutions are nearing the maximum score, that would be a sign that the indicators are not demanding enough, and that the bar should be raised for future editions of the questionnaire. Likewise, if too many institutions were obtaining very low scores, the methodology would be reviewed during 2023 so that the indicators recognize smaller steps in the right direction and basic enabling policies.

General recommendations based on your score

While the interpretation of your results from each SDG needs to be contextualized based on the specific situation of your HEI, there are some common recommendations that can be helpful to most HEIs within a particular assessment score range. This section provides such general recommendations in four categories.

Your institution might be at different categories for different SDGs, so recommendations from different score categories might apply to the same institution in different areas of their operations. The four categories can also provide you with an approximation of the different stages that a HEI might undergo from starting to address sustainability issues, to becoming a champion of sustainable development impact.

Tailored recommendations

If you are interested in **recommendations tailored to your institution**'s particular needs and context, or if you want to know more about the certification process, please reach out to us through our Contact form. UNESCO IESALC offers **technical cooperation services**, at a cost, aimed at maximizing HEI sustainability impact. Technical cooperation services may be requested by individual HEIs, HEIs networks and associations, governments and quality assurance agencies in any country worldwide.

Category 4 – Scores of 0-25 points (out of 100 possible)

Based on your score, your institution still has many opportunities for improvement in its contribution to this Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Your interest in undertaking this assessment is already a good sign of your commitment to a greater SDG impact. Here you can find some general recommendations for HEIs starting their sustainability journey.

- If you have not done it yet, you may be interested in undertaking the 'Basic practices across all SDGs' assessment, whose indicators relate to some of the following recommendations.

- Your HEI may benefit from first **raising awareness** amongst students and staff about the importance of this SDG, and how it can be linked to the local context. This can include initiatives such as dissemination campaigns, events, or introductory courses, helping to introduce this topic into the academic and institutional discussions.

- If your institution does not yet have the resources to open specialized education **programs** that relate to this SDG, you could begin by providing some specialized **courses** within existing programs, integrating a sustainability perspective in them, or addressing it within its **lifelong learning** courses catalogue (e.g. MOOCs).

- If your institution has a **research** mandate, you can start incentivizing its current researchers to launch research projects that relate to this SDG, gradually building in-house expertise that can later facilitate the creation of specialized PhD programs, and eventually attract funding for more permanent research lines or centers.

- Even if your institution does not yet have enough resources to maintain ambitious **engagement** initiatives, it can still promote volunteering activities within its students and staff, possibly in partnership with external organizations and networks with the necessary expertise.

- Regarding the institution's internal **management and operations**, a useful starting point is to integrate this SDG, and sustainable development more broadly, into the institution's strategy and planning documents. While needs and resources are context-specific, HEI leaders should publicly support this integration to ensure a clear mandate for downstream actions. Within these planning documents, institutions should establish clear SDG-related goals and individual responsibilities for their monitoring and implementation.

Category 3 – Score 25-50

Based on your score, your institution has already moved past the most basic good practices, and it is now able to consider more ambitious initiatives and policies. Here are some general recommendations for institutions at this stage:

- Complement the filling out of this assessment with a **wider consultation** of students and staff regarding existing sustainability initiatives that may not be widely known within the institution, as well as new ideas for improvement.

- Engaging with **students** can be particularly important, as they can be powerful advocates for new sustainability measures, maintaining these demands within the agenda of all internal stakeholders. Students can also be passionate contributors to community engagement and sustainability-related research initiatives.

- If some of the good practices already in place were launched as pilots or one-time initiatives, consider the possibility of **rolling-out** those practices throughout the institution (e.g., to other faculties or departments) or integrating them in the annual cycle of recurrent activities.

- At this point, it is possible that your HEI has already implemented, or is implementing, more straight-forward measures with clear scope and steps. However, some of the indicators in SET4HEI are phrased in broader terms, to allow for a more flexible interpretation based on each context. **Seeking real-life examples** of how other HEIs with a similar context have deployed these good practices can help achieve a higher impact. To do so, you may reach out to HEIs' associations and networks which sometimes provide peer support schemes and mutual capacity building to their members. You can also consult some of the complementary materials available in the SET4HEI website, reach out to us for more information on our capacity building services, and search for other country or region-specific resources.

Category 2 – Score 50-75

Based on your score, your HEI is at an intermediate level in its contribution to this SDG. Some general recommendations for HEIs at this stage are:

- Your HEI should start considering a more **systematic** approach to the implementation of these good practices. Moving from occasional activities and events to recurrent ones, from a limited range of SDG-relevant research initiatives, programs and courses to a wider spectrum. Based on the specific needs and resources of your institution, its leader(s) should set up a clear set of benchmarks, deciding which practices will be pursued and which ones are considered out of scope for now.

- Your HEI might be already implementing many good practices that require limited additional **budget** (e.g. changing internal policies or promoting volunteering). At this point, aim to set up a funding strategy for reaching the next level of sustainability impact. Funding strategies can include action such as applying to competitive research grants, establishing private-public partnerships, reallocating internal resources based on sustainability criteria, partnering with governments and foundations that can provide additional funding for the HEI to deliver extended services to the community or its more vulnerable students, providing professional services to external stakeholders for a fee, such as consultancies or sponsored research, etc. These additional funding sources can not only make possible new SDG-oriented initiatives and research but can also allow institutions to subsidize goods and services for low-income students and the local community, as well as sustainability-oriented investments.

- If you have reached this score in a self-assessment, you may now consider **undergoing the certification process**. An external validation of the answers that you provided to each indicator can help you identify if your interpretation of the questions was correct. The external validation can also provide you with an objective assessment of your HEI's performance, compensating some of the common limitations of self-reported information gathered from multiple offices or departments. The certification process, particularly when undertaken periodically, can create a higher internal pressure for continuous improvement, as well as providing the additional incentive of a digital badge provided by UNESCO that the HEI can use in its communication materials and positions it as a forerunner in the contribution to a specific SDG.

Score categories and general recommendations

Category 1 – Score 75-100

Congratulations! Your HEI is on a good track. However, you can always further improve its contribution to the SDGs, adopting a role as champion in this SDG. Here you can find some general recommendations based on your score:

- Consider undertaking the assessment for **other SDGs**. If you have assessed an environment-related SDG, try now a social or economic-oriented one, or vice versa. Each HEI has its areas of strength and expertise but reaching at least a basic level in all SDGs can be as important, if not more, as excelling in a few. This is particularly important when the HEI is the only one, or has a prominent place, in its local or regional community. **Leading by example**, your HEI can multiply its impact, raising the bar for other HEIs, and showing the way to other organizations beyond HEIs.

- The SET4HEI indicators are mostly based on the use or absence of specific good practices, and other **inputs** of the HEIs' operations. However, it is each HEI's responsibility to **monitor** the real **output** of these practices, the extent of their implementation, and ultimately to measure their true **impact**, as well as setting up plans for their long-term continuation.

- Sustainable practices are always at risk of being gradually sidelined whenever the leaders and professionals that oversaw their original implementation are no longer involved in their continued upholding. It is therefore crucial that these practices become **systematized** and institutionalized through official policies and regulations, long-term strategic and planning documents, the clear assignment of operational accountability and **responsibilities**, and the adoption of these ideas within the **institutional culture**.

- If you have reached this score as part of a self-assessment, you may now consider **undergoing the [certification process](). An external validation of the answers that you provided to each indicator can help you** identify if your interpretation of the questions was correct. The external validation can also provide you with an objective assessment of your HEI's performance, compensating some of the common limitations of self-reported information gathered from multiple offices or departments. The certification process, particularly when undertaken periodically, can create a higher internal pressure for continuous improvement, as well as providing the additional incentive of a digital badge provided by UNESCO that the HEI can use in its communication materials and positions it as a forerunner in the contribution to a specific SDG.

All data provided within Campus IESALC, the platform that hosts the SDG self-assessment tool, will be kept private and will never be shared with third parties.

SET4HEI assessments are only available on anonymous mode by default (without registration) at the moment.

From January 2024, registration of users will be allowed. The email provided when registering will not be used for communications with the user without their express consent. The replies to the self-assessment will never be shared with third parties either. The user retains the right to modify or delete their data within the platform at any moment. You can check the Campus IESALC privacy statement for more details.

Aggregated anonymized statistical data from all registered users, such as represented countries or average scores may be published.

For users interested in undergoing the optional paid certification process, their replies to the self-assessment will be shared with reviewers as part of the validation steps. More information about this process will be made available in the Certification Guidelines.

For any question or query regarding data privacy, please reach out to us using the Contact Form.

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