SET4HEI

SET4HEI Certification
An introduction for users

SET4HEI Certification

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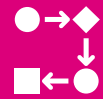+582122861020 www.iesalc.unesco.org

SET4HEI CERTIFICATION

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Standing Out From the Crowd: Sustainability as Your Competitive Edge

The world is demanding urgent action on sustainability and higher education institutions (HEIs) are uniquely positioned to lead the change.

Students, governments, and society at large are looking to HEIs to be leaders in this critical area. A strong sustainability focus is no longer just a nice-to-have, it's becoming an essential part of an HEI's public image and prestige.

> ### *What is sustainability?*
>
> For UNESCO, the concept of sustainability is broadly defined within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Agenda 2030.
>
> In this context, sustainability is related to each of the 17 SDGs and thus includes economic, social and environmental aspects.

And how can your HEI take the lead? By positioning itself as a champion for one or more SDGs, your institution can become a magnet for:

- **Impact-Driven Students:** Today's students are passionate about making a positive difference. An HEI with a strong sustainability agenda attracts students who want to align their education with their career goals to create a better future.
- **Aligned Partners:** Forward-thinking organizations share your commitment to sustainability. By showcasing your leadership in this area, you will attract partners who are eager to collaborate and contribute to a shared vision.
- **Committed Government:** Governments are actively seeking partners to tackle sustainable development challenges. Demonstrating your expertise increase your chances of becoming a key government ally in shaping a more sustainable future.

The SET4HEI Certification as a mark of excellence in sustainability

The SET4HEI certification empowers you to achieve this differentiation. It is your mark of excellence in sustainability, setting your institution apart in the competitive landscape of global higher education.

What is SET4HEI?

The SET4HEI Certification is based on SET4HEI (Sustainability Self-Evaluation Tool for Higher Education Institutions). This is a free online open resource for HEIs worldwide to map their current and potential contributions to the 17 UN SDGs. It was developed by UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education during 2023 and 2024, in partnership with a wide range of UN organizations.

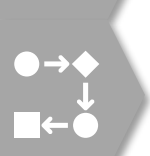You can access the SET4HEI self-assessments at any time at https://set4hei.org

The SET4HEI Certification is the way in which UNESCO and other UN Agencies recognize HEIs that excel in the contribution to some of the SDGs, positioning them as leaders in this area. The SET4HEI certification is your chance to publicly prove your commitment to the SDGs and unlock a powerful set of benefits:

- **Credibility You Can Display:** Beyond generic claims, SET4HEI's rigorous, UNESCO-coordinated assessment, validated by experts, gives you concrete proof of concrete sustainability contributions. A digital badge to embed in websites, emails and communication materials.

- **Targeted Recognition:** Earn a prestigious UNESCO digital badge for each SDG you excel in. No rankings, just a clear signal of your specific strengths for potential students, partners, and government relations.

- **Multi-Dimensional Impact:** Go beyond "green campus" initiatives. SET4HEI measures and allows you to showcase your contributions across teaching, research, engagement, and governance, showcasing your holistic approach.

- **Actionable Insights:** Receive valuable feedback alongside your badges, highlighting areas for further improvement on your sustainability journey.

SET4HEI isn't just a badge, **is your key to unlocking this potential** and a powerful differentiator. It allows you to demonstrate that sustainability is not a side project, but a core principle woven into the fabric of your institution. It validates your sustainability efforts and opens doors to a world of opportunity. Attract top talent, forge impactful partnerships, and gain government recognition - all by showcasing your true sustainability leadership with SET4HEI certification.

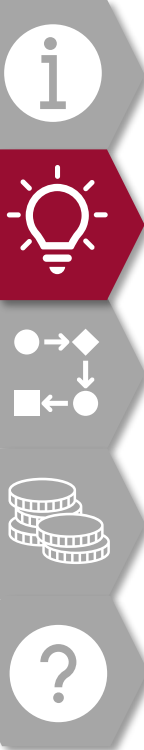# About the SET4HEI Certification

If you are wondering:

- How and how much is my HEI contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? And to which ones?

- What else could my HEI do in its support for the SDGs?

- How can my HEI make its contribution to the SDGs more visible?

- How can my HEI be recognized by UNESCO for it?

The **SET4HEI** Certification was created to answer these questions.

SET4HEI Approach

The key differentiating features of the SET4HEI assessments are:

One separate assessment (questionnaire) per each of the 17 SDGs. Each assessment receives an independent score and (potentially) a certification. You can focus on those SDGs you prioritize within your HEI.

Each assessment evaluates the contributions made through four dimensions: Teaching and learning, Research[1], Engagement, Governance and administration.

17 SDGs

Whole institution

Good practices

Independent scoring

Most indicators are phrased as a good practice that the institution is either following, partially or not. Each indicator has the same weight, and a score that will range from 0 to 1. Some indicators allow for 'Not applicable' answers, which are not considered for the final score.

Your scores are independent of those of other users. SET4HEI is not designed to produce rankings or any other relative scoring. Therefore, your score is not affected by the average of other institutions, and you can track your own progress
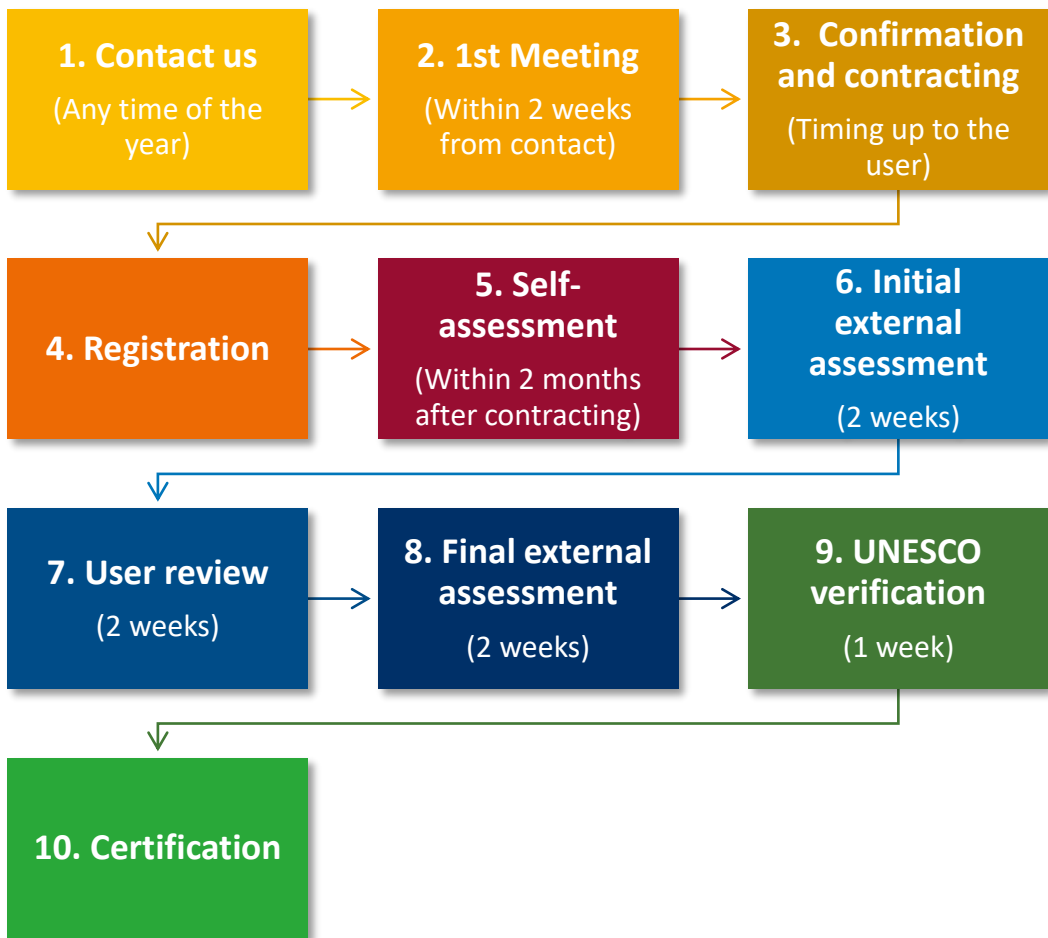
For a full description of the SET4HEI methodology, you can access the user guide.

[1]Higher education institutions that do not have research in their mandate may declare so and be allowed to skip all the research-related indicators without affecting their average score. This modality will be reflected on any resulting certification.

SET4HEI certification process

The SET4HEI certification process will follow these basic steps.

Certification process summary

1. Contact us (Any time of the year)	→	2. 1st Meeting (Within 2 weeks from contact)	→	3. Confirmation and contracting (Timing up to the user)

4. Registration	→	5. Self-assessment (Within 2 months after contracting)	→	6. Initial external assessment (2 weeks)

7. User review (2 weeks)	→	8. Final external assessment (2 weeks)	→	9. UNESCO verification (1 week)

10. Certification

1. Contact us

If you can represent your institution to undertake this certification, please fill in **this form** and indicate:

- The name of your institution.
- Your position within that institution.
- The SDGs for which you would like to undergo a certification (or for which you are considering it).
- Your availability for the first meeting.

2. First meeting

UNESCO will set up a virtual meeting with you as a representative of your HEI to answer any questions you may have and to discuss the process and timeline of the certification process.

3. Formal confirmation and contracting

After the initial meeting, you, as an HEI representative, will send UNESCO an email confirming the SDGs you want to be certified and sending proof of payment.

Once the payment has been received, UNESCO will send you a confirmation email. If your institution has specific needs for the billing process, this can be discussed separately.

4. Online registration

UNESCO will share a code with the designated representative of the institution as a unique identifier of your institution to register in the SET4HEI platform (which is hosted by Campus IESALC, administrated by UNESCO IESALC). This code must not be shared with anyone else. You will create your user and password.

Institutions are encouraged to designate a single coordinator of the assessment process, who can gather information from different units, offices or departments within the institution to reply to different indicators.

5. Self-assessment

As a registered user, you will access the assessment of the selected SDG(s) and provide your answers to each indicator.

The assessment has the same indicators as the one available without registration, but you must access it through the registered user that is linked to the unique identifier code UNESCO shared with you.

When providing your answer to each indicator, you must add evidence to support your answer – and use the free text box for any explanation required. This can be done by either (i) uploading a document using the functionality that will appear in each indicator or (ii) providing a URL link to the page within your institutional website where this information is available.

No indicator can be assessed without evidence. If the same document is valid to illustrate your answer to several indicators, please explain in the free-text box.

You can save your replies at any time (including the attached documents) and complete or change them later. Once the assessment is submitted, replies can no longer be changed.

6. Initial external assessment

Your submitted replies and evidence for all assessment indicators will be evaluated by three external peer reviewers. These reviewers are selected, trained and coordinated by UNESCO.

The reviewers will individually assess if the evidence provided justifies your reply, and then consolidate their feedback by providing a common reply to each indicator. The user will then receive this feedback and questions for further clarifications through the platform.

The review and certification process takes place fully remotely, through the UNESCO platform, and no in-site visits are expected.

7. User review

Once the initial assessment is submitted, the user will then have the chance to provide further clarifications to the reviewers, upload new evidence and / or change their replies.

8. Final external assessment

The reviewers will provide a final assessment of the updated replies, evidence or clarifications. If they consider that the evidence still does not support your reply, they will select the more appropriate option.

9. UNESCO Verification

UNESCO will conduct an additional quality check on the reviewers' final assessment and will analyze the evaluation. A final meeting will be held with the university to hand in the evaluation report, including the final results along with feedback and recommendations for improvement on the SDGs evaluated.
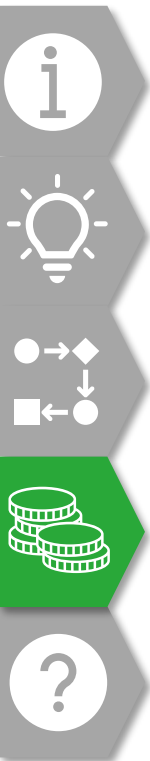
10. Certification award

If the score is above 60% of the total possible points for that SDG, you will receive a certification and a digital badge. The certification will indicate the name of the institution, the evaluated SDG, the date, the score obtained, and a unique identifier code, with an associated URL and QR code. This code and the digital badge allow anyone to verify the validity of the certification.

For those HEIs that reach a score of over 85% of the total possible points for an SDG, a special recognition of 'excellence' will be awarded for that SDG.

SET4HEI certification contracting

UNESCO IESALC, as a UNESCO institute, is a non-for-profit international organization that operates in a cost-recovery basis. To maintain SET4HEI as a self-funded initiative, the cost of the review process must be transferred to the certified institutions. To be inclusive and facilitate the access of those public or private non-for-profit HEIs in lower-income countries, the contractual terms will vary based on the World Bank income group classification of the country where the main campus is located.

Investment for individual institutions

The minimum number of SDGs to be certified is 3 and the maximum number is 17.

Cost for the external evaluation of 3 SDGs of your choice:

Low-income countries: 500 USD

Lower-middle income countries: 3.000 USD

Upper-middle income countries: 6.000 USD

High-income countries: 9.000 USD

If you are a for-profit HEI, the cost will be 9.000 USD independently of the HEI location.

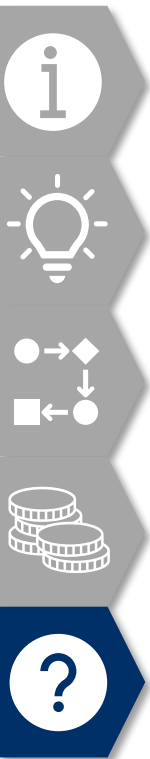These are final costs. No VAT or other charges will be added.

Group investment

A government authority, or HEIs associations, groups or alliances, may be interested in funding or coordinating the certification process for a large group of HEIs.

In such cases, a group contract, as well as other complementary services, may be negotiated individually with UNESCO. Please fill in the **Interest Form** and we will contact you directly.

Frequently asked questions

When can I apply for the certification? Is there a fixed deadline?

Your institution can apply to the certification process at any time of the year.

How long is a certification valid?

Each certification has a validity of three years.

On which version of SET4HEI will my certification be based?

To improve the methodology and based on new feedback, some indicators may be adjusted over time. This will take place a maximum of once per year. Your certification will therefore refer to the year in which it was awarded.

Does the certification apply only to a whole institution, or can it be applied, a campus?

The SET4HEI certification is designed to evaluate a wide range of activities across the whole institution. However, some campuses of large institutions that operate with a high degree of autonomy may want to be certified independently. If this is your case, feel free to reach out to us and we can set up a virtual meeting to discuss your case.

Who is in charge of SET4HEI?

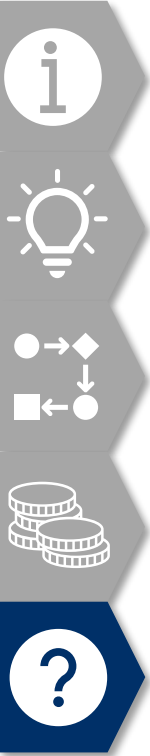The UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education

For more information visit https://set4hei.org/about-unesco-iesalc/

In which language(s) is SET4HEI available?

SET4HEI is available in English and Spanish, with French expected to be available during 2024. If you are interested in having SET4HEI in other languages, let us know about it.

Can I apply to be a reviewer?

If you have expertise in the evaluation/certifications of higher education institutions, you can apply to be a reviewer in one or several of the SDGs.

Please complete the dedicated form anytime to enter or reviewers´ pool and to be consider for future evaluations.

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