

Sustainability policy

Goals and measures for the sustainable development of the Helmholtz Association

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Introduction

The research conducted by the Helmholtz Association contributes towards the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. This engagement¹ sends a clear signal that the association and its centres are focused on sustainable development in economic, social and ecological terms.

Climate change and the loss of biodiversity represent particularly pressing challenges for society and have an impact on almost all areas of life. In fulfilling its mission to use cutting-edge research to address the urgent issues facing society, science and industry, the Helmholtz Association reflects on how it can help solve problems related to climate change and biodiversity in all its areas of research. The centres are also constantly pushing ahead with their own sustainable development, taking into account their research needs. The Helmholtz Association is committed to putting in place a sound framework of policies and leveraging opportunities to facilitate research into sustainability that is itself conducted in a sustainable way. Our actions should align with the Paris Climate Agreement and national sustainability goals so as to protect the livelihoods of future generations, as is our stated mission. The Helmholtz Association is committed to serving as a role model for public institutions, as highlighted in the German Federal Climate Protection Act, and undertakes to take climate protection targets into account in its planning and decision making.

To make the diverse and complex topic of sustainability a tangible part of its work, the Helmholtz centres have defined sustainable development goals and measures, following the guidelines set out in the Sustainability Management for Non-University Research Organisations (LeNa) report². These specify the key functional areas for the sustainable development of research centres: Organisational Management; Research; Human Resources; Buildings and Infrastructure; and Support Processes.

Roles and responsibilities

Sustainability management at the Helmholtz Association and its centres takes different roles and responsibilities into account. Specific sustainability goals and measures, for example those related to the responsible use of resources, can usually only be addressed by the individual centres as part of their strategic goals or organisational structures. The Association therefore agrees on a general policy, which forms the basis for the centres to define and implement more concrete goals and measures. The different roles are set out in a responsibility matrix.

¹ <https://www.helmholtz.de/en/about-us/our-values/sustainability/>

² <https://www.nachhaltig-forschen.de/startseite/>

The Association sets out the general conditions for acting sustainably, in dialogue with policy-makers and donors.

Objectives and measures – derived from the Helmholtz Association’s commitment to sustainable development

Implementing organisational leadership in an integrated way

(LeNa area: Organisational Management)

In order to ensure long-term scientific success, the Helmholtz Association relies on a value-oriented and effective organisational and management culture that clearly defines roles and processes, fosters a proactive approach and encourages employees to be creative and innovative. The Helmholtz centres comply with the basic principles of sound and responsible organisational management³ and promote an inclusive workplace culture, including through participatory organisational development and the creation of an enabling environment.

The centres

- develop an internal, centre-specific sustainability strategy, which they use as the basis for their sustainability management systems.
- strengthen mutual understanding by fostering exchange between science and administration and practising transparent governance with the involvement of all employees.
- ensure a common understanding of leadership by defining leadership guidelines and tools and putting them into practice.
- promote exchange and cooperation in their sustainability activities within the Helmholtz Association in order to create synergies.
- jointly consolidate their internal and external communication on sustainability issues, identify their stakeholders and feed their interests into the dialogue.
- establish specific sustainability reporting in line with recognised standards. The centre progress reports for sponsors also constitute detailed overviews of the sustainability activities being implemented in the five LeNa functional areas.
- work together to improve the legal and financial framework for the implementation of the sustainability goals, thereby enabling sustainable action for the centre itself and the Helmholtz Association as a whole.

Reflecting on research topics and processes and bringing the findings to bear in a socially responsible manner

(LeNa area: Research)

The Helmholtz Association and its centres create a working environment that offers opportunities for innovation. They observe the principles of good scientific practice and promote skills that

³ https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Monatsberichte/2020/10/Inhalte/Kapitel-3-Analysen/3-3-grundsaeetze-guter-unternehmens-und-aktiver-beteiligungsfuehrung-pdf.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=6

engender a comprehensive and socially responsible approach to research processes. Exchanging knowledge with society, politics and business is an important component in this.

The centres

- take measures to ensure compliance with good scientific practice. They appoint ombudspersons for this purpose.
- enable doctoral candidates and post-doctoral students to participate in advanced training courses that focus on responsible research.
- are continuously increasing their open-access publications and setting themselves goals in this area.
- adopt internal guidelines based on the Helmholtz Guidelines for Research Data Management, founded upon the FAIR principles⁴. They are developing the infrastructure needed to implement the guidelines.
- implement a framework for discussion on research into social responsibility based on the Sustainability Guide (LeNa)⁵ in order to evaluate their research activities.
- consolidate research topics related to sustainability within the framework of programme-oriented funding. Where appropriate, innovative technologies developed within the framework of the programme are tested for demonstration purposes in pilot projects.
- harness the potential for digitalisation to make processes more efficient and, if necessary, more climate-friendly. The digitalisation strategies of the community and the centres set out the framework to achieve this.

Offering appealing working environments and introducing sustainable HR management

(LeNa area: HR)

The Helmholtz Association offers attractive job opportunities within a dynamic environment. It is crucial for us to attract qualified employees at all levels and deploy them according to their skills. This requires professional HR management. Our activities include supporting staff in their career development, dealing responsibly with temporary employment contracts, ensuring equal opportunities and the appreciation of diversity, creating healthy working conditions and developing skills for future-forward, responsible action.

The centres

- develop plans for strengthening diversity and inclusiveness. In research and administration, they seek to strike a balance in matters relating to diversity and equal opportunities.
- develop specific and flexible ways of working to reduce energy consumption, use of materials and carbon emissions.
- support managers as role models who can enhance the establishment of a sustainable, value-oriented work culture.
- protect and promote the health and safety of employees. They offer company integration and health management services, respond to changes in the world of work brought about

⁴ <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>

⁵ <https://www.nachhaltig-forschen.de/lena-2013-2016/handlungsfelder/forschung/forschen-in-gesellschaftlicher-verantwortung/>

by digital development and strive to support staff performance and satisfaction by adapting working conditions to their needs.

Constructing and operating research infrastructure in a resource-efficient manner

(LeNa area: Buildings and Infrastructure)

Superb research infrastructure is a hallmark of the Helmholtz Association. We attach great importance to the principles of sustainable development when planning, constructing and running buildings and research facilities. We seek to provide an attractive laboratory environment and appealing workplaces in research, administration and operations that meet demand. This calls for a comprehensive approach that addresses technical and functional requirements, user satisfaction, energy and resource efficiency, and cost-effectiveness.

The centres

- are drawing up ambitious plans that include a timeline for achieving the status of greenhouse gas-neutral research facilities. To that end, they are setting goals and measures as part of site-specific climate protection plans.
- develop climate-friendly energy solutions that help reduce the energy consumption of buildings and systems or facilitate independent, greenhouse gas-free energy production without jeopardising research activities. Where appropriate, these are supported by energy management systems that comply with ISO 50001 or corresponding audit systems.
- will develop and upgrade buildings and infrastructure sustainably, taking account of environmental aspects and the needs of the changing world of work.
- determine their carbon footprint while also improving the quality of environmental performance indicators.
- are mindful of resource efficiency, life cycles and integration into integrated infrastructure development when procuring, developing and updating information technology.
- harness the potential of digitalisation for more efficient recording and control of media consumption.

Shaping support processes in a responsible way

(LeNa area: Support Processes)

At the Helmholtz Association, we want all processes that support research and centre operations to be resource-efficient and responsible and to integrate the different aspects of sustainability in areas such as procurement, staff mobility needs and the organisation of research conferences. The association is also committed to establishing the requisite legal framework for grants.

The centres

- cut back on domestic flights where possible and scrutinise the need for international business travel. They develop a suitable framework for this purpose. They draw up travel plans for necessary business trips, taking sustainability aspects into account. Any resulting greenhouse gas emissions must be offset.
- identify and harness digitalisation potential in infrastructure and administration.
- establish a sustainable purchasing process that takes account of economic, environmental and social considerations, including the life cycle of goods and equipment. New legal conditions are implemented proactively in tendering, selection and award processes, and when selecting companies and products.
- advocate sustainable commuting to the workplace.
- engage in sustainable event management; they are increasingly using digital and hybrid event formats.

The Helmholtz Association aims to ensure excellence in research, sustainable development and climate protection. Sustainable action is not only a social obligation, it is also an opportunity to ensure the long-term success and attractiveness of the individual centres and the Helmholtz Association as a whole.