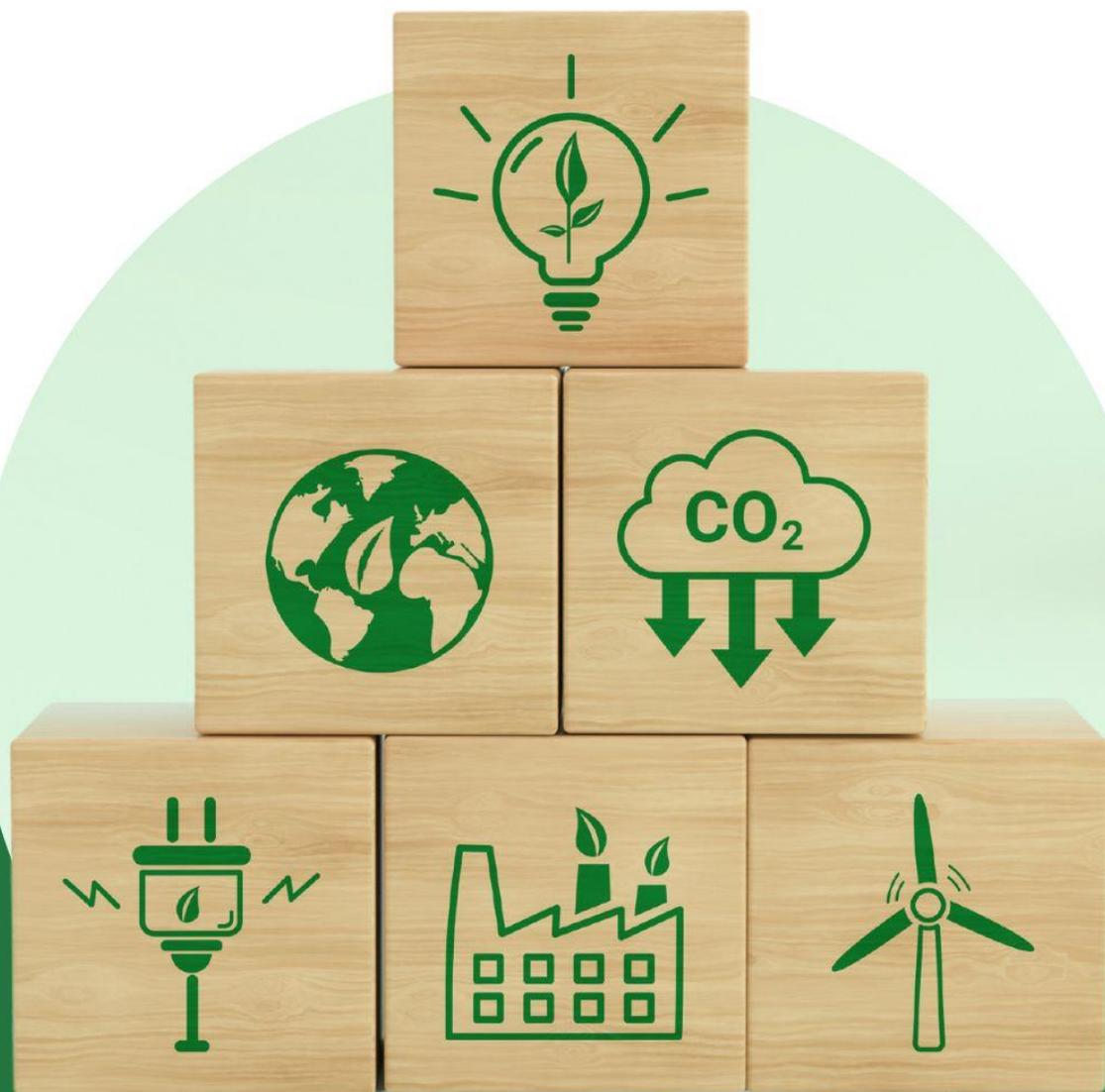


Statement from UNICA



# Climate and Environmental Emergency

OCTOBER 2022



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October 2022

*UNICA is an institutional Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe. It was founded in 1990, and it is currently made up of 56 universities from 41 capital cities of Europe, combining over 150.000 university staff and 1.500,000 students.*

### I. Introduction

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In 2022, UNICA and the European University Association joined the initiative launched in November 2021 by CESAER, ISCN, Science Europe and the University of Strathclyde of a [Call for a collective global action](#) to help tackle climate change by reducing and transitioning to Net-Zero emissions.

Universities are forward-looking institutions, uniquely placed to support society address global challenges. Through the development of academic research and innovation, the education of future citizens and leaders, collaboration with policymakers and industry, universities can play a key role in reaching a sustainable future.

Without immediate action, adapting to the impacts of the climate and environmental emergency in the future, significantly caused by human activity, will be increasingly difficult. Extreme weather patterns will threaten biodiversity and food production and security, rising sea levels will lead to flooding and displacement, with all these impacts being felt globally across local communities, and being unprecedented in scale.

The 27<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, taking place in November 2022, continues international efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, building resilience and capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

UNICA recognises Europe's historical responsibility for climate change due to the volume of greenhouse gases released from industry and fossil fuels over the last 170 years. Climate justice needs to be central to the transition to a carbon neutral society, ensuring a better and fairer society, addressing social inequalities caused or increased by the climate and environmental emergency. <sup>[OBJ]</sup>

UNICA supports the efforts of the United Nations (UN), to keep global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, as stated in the Paris Agreement and calls on its Member universities to recognise the climate and environmental emergency.

## II. A long-standing commitment

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**This call-to-action builds on UNICA's long-standing commitment to sustainable development.**

1. UNICA is committed to build on the **specificity of its member universities**, which have the unique privilege of being located in **capital cities**. This gives the ability and the responsibility to influence European and government policies on the crucial challenges affecting our societies and our planet. Research on climate-related issues and solutions to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 can influence local authorities and shape policies in the direction of a green transition. UNICA supports its members by fostering the sharing of experiences and cooperation among Higher Education Institutions and governments and/or universities' initiatives in the city.
2. The [UNICA Green & SDGs Working Group](#) is the Network's platform that focuses on Sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The Working Group was established in 2011 on the initiative of the participants of the UNICA Student Conference 2010 in Rome, under the name UNICA Green Academic Footprint. Initially, the platform focused mainly on the discussion and exchange of practices related to the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies at universities. Recently, the group started widening its activities to meet the comprehensive and holistic sustainable development agenda set by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
3. A [UNICA Green & SDGs pledge](#) was developed with UNICA members to reiterate that environmental sustainability was core to the mission of universities, highlighting commitments around partnerships and embedding environmental sustainability into practice.
4. The updated [UNICA missions, visions and values](#), approved by the UNICA General Assembly 2022 (Dublin, 30 June 2022), integrated "Sustainable development" among the core values and principles of the Network<sup>1</sup>.
5. UNICA has supported/supports **European wide projects** such as:
  - the Horizon 2020 [SAVES2 project](#), which promoted sustainable energy behaviours among over 250,000 university students in seven countries, with a special attention dedicated to fuel poverty and practical ways of reducing students' exposure to this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> "We consider universities to be privileged pit stops in the route of knowledge and innovation fluxes, with the potential to become facilitators of sustainable development by enabling the scientific, collaborative, and entrepreneurial mindset that leads to solutions for common concerns of societies today, while minding the needs of future generations".

- the Erasmus + project “[Mindfulness Practices for Students in Society](#)” (2021-2024), which aims at promoting soft skill competencies and compassionate behaviour at Higher Education Institutions to accelerate social and climate transition.
  - the Erasmus + project “[Climate Teaching Impact on Climate Engagement – A European Open Badge Passport for Climate](#)” (2022-2025), which aims at evaluating the impact of eco-pedagogy towards individual and collective engagement through the implementation of European Open Badges Passport for Climate and Planet.
6. UNICA is committed to foster the **engagement of student communities** from its members, namely through the organization of the UNICA Student Conferences, which provide UNICA students with the opportunity to voice their opinions and recommendations to the Network and to other European stakeholders. One of the Student Fora of the UNICA Student Conference 2021 focused on “More sustainable societies. The role of universities”, and resulted in the recommendations integrated in the [UNICA Student Declaration 2021](#), urging universities to tackle the urgent challenge of the climate crisis and contribute to the co-creation of impactful solutions.
  7. UNICA has established **cooperation with other European and international organizations and stakeholders** to promote joint activities, issue joint statements, and maximize the impact of its members’ action to respond to the climate change crisis.

### III. Call to action

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UNICA calls on its network of universities to take significant action to reduce their negative climate and environmental impacts, and harness their academic research and communities to support society and policymakers make the transition to a carbon neutral society and address social inequalities such as energy poverty. This action includes:

1. Acknowledge the interconnection of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and integrate sustainability at the core of the institution’s strategy, culture and across all aspects of the university.
2. Share, promote and collaborate across academic research, learning and teaching, operations and partnership initiatives on climate and sustainability across the network and beyond, also by fostering cooperation with the Global South.
3. Empower university communities take action, by providing learning and professional development opportunities on climate and sustainability, embedding this in both the student and staff experience.
4. Identify and report negative climate and environmental impacts, implementing measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote circular economy thinking and reuse, and safeguard local biodiversity on campus.
5. Support local communities, municipalities and national governments in the transition to a carbon neutral society through knowledge exchange and impact opportunities, easing access to academic expertise and innovation.

6. Share, promote and collaborate across academic research, learning and teaching, operations and partnership initiatives on climate and sustainability across the network.

Aligned with the 1.5°C ambitions of the UN and the European Climate Law, many UNICA member universities have ambitious reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions, carbon neutral commitments and declarations on the climate and environmental emergency. In this regard, a first series of UNICA Climate Action Roundtables in 2021 allowed universities to share experiences and support partner universities to accelerate climate action.

UNICA will work with its Steering Committee and Secretariat to review its operations and identify opportunities to embed sustainability across all of its actions and policies.

UNICA will work with its member universities to develop resources to address the climate and environmental emergency, and evaluate their own progress. This will support the network to collectively grow its level of ambition and action.

UNICA also recognises that universities across its network are at different stages of addressing the climate and environmental emergency, with each operating in its own local and national context, with a variety of unique academic expertise and levers to positively impact society and the environment.

UNICA considers the cultural, structural and geographical variety of the Network as an added value, and confirms its commitment to act as a forum for the advancement, integration and cooperation of its Member Universities towards sustainable development.

