

# SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY:

Reduce our footprint,  
increase our handprint,  
and create a heartprint







# 1. INTRODUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

The United Nations Brundtland Commission has defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>1</sup> Individuals, organizations, communities, and society must come together to foster sustainability in all of its facets to not only protect our planet and all the creatures living on it but also to ensure that it remains worth living on.

Business schools in general and ESMT in particular must play their part — as a beacon for research and teaching, as a facilitator for best practices exchange, and as a hub for outreach and action. In research, we must promote and foster the cooperation between social and natural scientists, non-profits, government, and civil society, for example. In the classroom, we must follow our mission and develop entrepreneurial leaders who think globally and act responsibly. As an organization, we must decrease our carbon footprint and increase our positive impact, while also inspiring others to do the same.

## ESMT Berlin will foster sustainability by:



reducing our **footprint**, our **negative impact** on the environment,



increasing our **handprint**, our **positive impact** on the environment and society, and



creating a **heartprint**, transformational impact that inspires the entire ESMT community.

We have assessed the situation regarding sustainability at ESMT in 2022 by gathering metrics; surveying students, faculty, and staff; and engaging in the ABIS, the Academy of Business in Society Sustainability Assessment. The results have been collected into this strategy and action plan with a time-line and measurable goals. Please see “assessment and external analysis” below for more information.

Through this assessment, we have identified environmental, social, and governmental (ESG) issues that matter most to ESMT’s stakeholders, including students, executive education participants, and employees. These issues are most important to secure our long-term business success. Completing this with the external assessment of the ABIS, we could better understand our impact and choose our priorities.

ESMT has a solid foundation of activities that foster sustainability, including the Sustainable Business Roundtable (SBRT), the Net Impact chapter, the FUTURE Institute for

1. United Nations Academic Impact. "Sustainability." [www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability](https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability) (accessed November 23, 2022).

Sustainable Transformation, sustainability ambassadors, sustainability-focused professorships, and sustainability-based courses in the curriculum. This paper will describe these activities and show how they are a starting point for even more. Within the ASPIRE strategy, launched in 2021, we are rethinking our role as a business school. Sustainability plays an important role in this, as demonstrated by its premier placement as the first letter of ASPIRE: **Advance** sustainability through education and research.

## Assessment and external analysis

In spring of 2022, we conducted a survey of current faculty, staff, and students to better understand the overarching sustainability priorities of the school. We received 200 completed surveys, with 108 employees and 92 students taking part.

### The survey results defined five priorities:

1. **Introduce a holistic approach to emissions reduction**, accounting for greenhouse gas emissions caused directly by ESMT and along the school's supply chains, more renewable energy, more sustainable travel (public transport, trains, and cycling), and increased remote work opportunities.
2. **Save and create resources** (water, energy for heating, solar power, local and regional procurement instead of long journeys and expensive packaging). Reduce waste (paper, plastic, building materials, etc.). Offer more meat-free alternatives in our restaurant and catering of programs and events.
3. **Integrate sustainability in the classroom and promote it**. Educate all (degree students, executive education participants, personnel) on sustainability.
4. **Explicitly fund and host research** on sustainable forms of business.
5. **Increase diversity** (gender, nationality) among ESMT top management.

ESMT also engaged in the ABIS Sustainability Assessment, a management model designed to integrate sustainability in higher education institutions. Based on the EFQM<sup>2</sup> quality management model, it takes a learning and development approach by creating a feedback loop between the management enablers of the institutions' progress in sustainability and the perceived sustainability performances by various stakeholders of the institution. ESMT Berlin and ABIS contacted 45 potential respondents, from which 20 participated and fully completed the questionnaire: 12 internal stakeholders (staff, management) and eight external stakeholders (students, alumni).

Based on the results of the questionnaire, ESMT has an overall score of 2, which corresponds to the second learning and development stage "Developing". The second stage shows that ESMT implements localized and repeatable sustainability initiatives with some coordination. The focus of sustainability implementation is mostly internally oriented. ESMT has relatively high scores in sustainability leadership direction and strategic orientation, and it will move to the next stage once there is more attention for organizing, planning, and implementation.

The ABIS Sustainability Assessment concludes that ESMT has taken important steps to implement sustainability across the institution. The leadership increasingly sets the sustainability agenda and initiates the sustainability uptake. Sustainability is part of the strategy and aligned values and initiatives are under development. In this stage, there is room for improvement at the coordinating and planning level. The recommendation is to adopt a "plan, do, check, act" logic and to integrate it into the management planning and control cycle, including defining performance indicators for sustainability.

ABIS advises ESMT to link the performance indicators to the relevance of impact, differentiated by stakeholder groups. Implementing such logic in the planning cycle for innovations and improvements in educational programs and research is also under consideration. ABIS also advises a more planned and coordinated approach integrating sustainability goals into the HR systems: recruiting, selection, job descriptions and evaluations, as well as faculty development.

---

2. EFQM - originally the abbreviation for European Foundation for Quality Management

## Priorities and timeline

Within this strategy proposal, we will outline priorities for ESMT and define the timeframe of their respective implementation: one year (by the end of 2023) or three years (by the end of 2025). ♦

“ESMT has relatively high scores in sustainability leadership direction and strategic orientation, and it will move to the next stage once there is more attention for organizing, planning, and implementation.”





## 2. REDUCE THE FOOTPRINT – MINIMIZE OUR NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY

---

As a business school, we know that we emit carbon, use natural resources, and create waste via our operations. As these all negatively affect the environment, we are committed to minimizing them. We can only teach our students and executives about the importance of sustainability if we ourselves are fully committed to it.



## Reduce emissions

The key negative impact we have on the environment and society is through our greenhouse gas emissions. We are now tracking our scope 1, scope 2, and scope 3 emissions. The goal of the carbon accounting is to first diagnose the problem and then accurately define our emissions. Subsequently, we will work towards the larger goal of carbon neutrality. For this, we have defined the following priority objectives:



1. Track, report, and reduce our carbon footprint. We will continuously track our carbon footprint information and share it in 2023 in our first sustainability report. We will thus measure our carbon footprint and use these measures to define annual carbon reduction targets leading towards the bigger goal of carbon neutrality. Sustainability reporting will be conducted annually thereafter. Understanding the carbon footprint of our IT operations and identifying ways to reduce it is a priority for the upcoming three years.



2. Define goals to reduce the scope 3 emissions caused by employee and student travel. Such initiatives would include raising awareness, joining the academic initiative FlyingLess, increasing flexibility for remote work, and supporting and providing guidelines for environmentally friendly commuting and business travel. It would also include improvements to campus, such as easier parking for bicycles and a charger for electric cars.



3. Define goals to reduce scope 3 emissions resulting from catering and our restaurant and café providers on campus, including a reduction of meat-based meals on the restaurant menu. This is a priority for the upcoming three years.

## Conserve energy

We have critically reviewed every aspect of our campus operations to identify where we can reduce our emissions and conserve energy. The most significant challenge is that our main campus building, known as the Learning Center, is under historic preservation, which limits the possibilities of introducing innovative energy efficiency measures and generating renewable energy. However, we are investing actively in reducing our energy consumption on the main campus by introducing solar panels on the roof (to be realized in 2023).

1. In 2023, we will focus on implementing a solar power plant on top of the Learning Center to produce solar energy. Approximately 820 solar panels will produce 15–20% ( $>300 \text{ kW}_p$ ) of the school's consumption.
2. We will identify and implement further ways of conserving our energy on campus. We will examine refrigeration, air conditioning, and lighting systems to make them more energy efficient. Additional energy conservation efforts will include heating temperature reduction and reminders to switch off unused electrical devices. This is a priority for the next year.
3. We will use sustainability as a guiding principle in the renovation of the new wing of the Learning Center and in a reconstruction plan for the administrative building. These are priorities for the upcoming three years.

## Reduce waste

The third priority is reducing waste. Recycling is a standard practice on campus. However, additional reductions in waste can be achieved, especially in the classroom, the restaurant, and with the catering of seminars and events. We plan to continue our educational outreach, which would include information sessions for students explaining the practice of recycling. The digitalization of our work is an additional lever. Our library assures access to electronic materials. Faculty are actively discouraged from providing printouts of materials for students.

However, we see room for improvement, so will focus on the following goals:

1. Keep track of waste produced and report it annually. We plan to issue the first sustainability report containing this information in 2023.
2. In 2023, we will increase the availability of recycling bins in the Learning Center and the administration building and promote their use. This will include precise instructions on recycling.
3. Raise awareness about the waste created and how it can be minimized in teaching, daily activities, and events. This is a priority for the upcoming three years.

“Understanding the carbon footprint of our IT operations and identifying ways to reduce it is a priority for the upcoming three years.”





### 3. INCREASE THE HANDPRINT – MAXIMIZE OUR POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY

Our mission is to create and impart new knowledge to advance business and society and develop entrepreneurial leaders who think globally and act responsibly. We strongly believe in the positive impact of education and research.



#### Embed sustainability in curriculum

Business and society must be transformed to meet climate goals and foster sustainability in all aspects of our lives. Education plays a crucial role. Students should

learn about sustainability and ESG topics, enabling them to make responsible decisions in their organizations and daily lives. Executive education participants should also be confronted with new sustainability knowledge. Sustainability is already a key component of the degree program curriculum, with specific courses dedicated to

sustainability topics and sustainability embedded in other courses. We will extend our offer with a unique value proposition of embedding sustainability in the curriculum.

1. In 2023, we will finalize and deliver to various students our innovative course “Sustainability in Business.” The course will provide sustainability foundations (e.g., key definitions, frameworks, business cases for sustainability) as well as an understanding of sustainability across all functional areas of a company (e.g., finance, accounting, operations, human resources, marketing and sales, and research and development). The course will be delivered in the full-time, part-time, global online, and Telekom MBA programs (from 2023), in executive education (from 2023), and in the master in management (MIM) program (starting in 2024). We will also explore how to include this course in the PhD program.
2. In 2023, we will incorporate ESG topics into the executive MBA program. We will design and deliver new courses, for example, “Operational Sustainability in a Circular Economy” and “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” (starting with the 2023 cohort) and further develop courses and electives that have already been implemented, for example, “Global Economy and Politics” and “Sustainable Energy Future.”
3. We will also offer a new course, “Sustainability Analytics,” starting in 2024 as a part of the Master in Analytics and Artificial Intelligence program.
4. Starting in 2024, the “Vali Sustainability Bootcamp” will be part of the core curriculum in the Master in Innovation and Entrepreneurship program.
5. In 2023, we will offer additional executive education programs and training on sustainability for senior management and employees and across functional areas.
6. In the next three years, we will develop further courses on different aspects of sustainability and integrate aspects of sustainability into all core courses, highlighting its role in different subjects. We will clearly communicate course content and create additional materials on sustainability, including practitioner videos and teaching cases.

## Create more experiential learning opportunities

Our students need and are interested in lessons on sustainability in practice. There are already different opportunities in student clubs and student projects. We will continue to innovate around the experiential learning opportunities in sustainability, allowing our students to apply their skills to transition away from “business as usual” to a sustainable business mindset.

Our social impact projects will remain the key tool for “learning by doing” on sustainability. Social impact projects





have been conducted by our MIM students since the program's start. In 2023, we will offer a social impact project in the full-time MBA program.

We will create more synergies and focus on sustainability in different departments (e.g., career services, international office), institutes (e.g., FUTURE Institute for Sustainable Transformation, Institute for Deep Tech Innovation), and centers and hubs (e.g., Vali Berlin) to extend the sustainability offerings in student career events, master thesis opportunities, and events (e.g., Berlin Global Dialogue, Vali Sustainable Ideation Bootcamp). This is a priority for the next three years.



## Increase sustainability research

Apart from offering business education, we can and should make an impact through research, which should play an even bigger role in solving environmental, social, and economic challenges.



1. In 2023, we plan to raise funds for new research and teaching positions in sustainability. These will join the current professorships that focus on sustainability: the Deutsche Bank professorship in sustainable finance and the Deutsche Post DHL Group professorship in sustainable accounting.



2. In the next three years, we would like to establish a research fund for the school-wide projects related to sustainability, influencing policy, and creating a positive societal impact. This would increase research and engagement in sustainability among our faculty and students, as well as in the activities of our centers and institutes.



3. In the next three years, we would like to extend our collaborations with universities and businesses worldwide to cooperate on action-oriented and research-based sustainability projects. Through our participation in the ABIS, for example, we can pursue more joint funding opportunities. Through our FUTURE Institute network of companies and natural scientists, we can pursue more action and research opportunities to sustainably transform the economy.

**“Business and society must be transformed to meet climate goals and foster sustainability in all aspects of our lives.”**

## 4. CREATE A HEARTPRINT – PROMOTE OUR OUTREACH AND IMPACT ACTIVITIES

Sustainability at ESMT is more than minimizing our negative effects and maximizing our positive impact; it is also creating a heartprint with our activities.

As an international business school with faculty, staff, students, alumni, executive participants, and business partners around the world, we reach beyond our campus in Berlin. The heartprint should inspire our community to enable **sustainable transformation** within their organizations and in society.

We aligned the creation of our heartprint – our outreach and impact activities – with three of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: #4 Quality Education, #5 Gender Equality, and #13 Climate Action. Additionally, ESMT is firmly committed to upholding the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) through our research, teaching, and student and stakeholder engagement. More information may be found in our [PRME Sharing Information on Progress Report 2022](#).

### Quality education

Social impact projects at ESMT offer students the opportunity to serve as economic or management consultants for an organization with specific social objectives. These projects focus on the welfare of stakeholders that the client organization serves. Students experience first-hand how their knowledge and actions can positively influence society, an experience that will have a lasting impact on their careers.

ESMT fosters organizational transformation through executive education as well as with activities of the FUTURE Institute for Sustainable Transformation, which works to

advance sustainable transformation across all business functional areas. The Sustainable Business Roundtable (SBRT), FUTURE's lighthouse project, is a peer-to-peer learning network that brings together leaders from companies to learn from each other cross-functionally.





## Gender equality

A priority that crystalized when surveying ESMT faculty, staff, and students on sustainability was the importance of diversity and gender equality. ESMT has developed a gender equality plan as part of the EQUAL4EUROPE research project. The plan, which will be implemented by the end of 2025, promotes gender equality among staff in academic careers and administration, as well as among students. Please see the [gender quality plan](#) and the accompanying [press release](#) for the details.

ESMT strives to provide a diverse, equitable, and inclusive (DEI) working and learning environment. In 2019, we joined Germany's largest network of companies and organizations committed to DEI by signing the "Charta der Vielfalt" (Diversity Charter). Our faculty, staff, and students are thus committed to nurturing a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community that enables personal transformation through learning and development; creating a culture that welcomes a wide variety of perspectives and promotes thoughtful and respectful engagement; valuing the unique perspectives of all in our diverse community; and addressing systemic barriers to fulfilling our commitment.



In 2022, ESMT implemented a policy restricting all-male panels. The school also established the advisory committee as an expert body reporting to the management committee. While the management committee shows no gender diversity, this new body comprises two men and six women. ESMT will continue to diversify its governing bodies, aiming for at least 30 percent women on the board of trustees and international advisory council by 2025.

## Climate action

In addition to the climate-related activities to reduce our footprint described above, ESMT will build upon its engagement to promote climate action. Net Impact is a global community of students, professionals, and citizens in over 40 countries from various sectors committed to sustainability and social impact. The Net Impact ESMT Berlin chapter leads projects that incorporate environmental and social impact. It hosts the annual TEDx event at ESMT, which has a sustainability focus, and executes additional community outreach events.

Members of Net Impact are also sustainability ambassadors, a student and employee initiative set up in 2020 to transform ESMT into a more sustainable and environmentally friendly campus. They spearheaded the construction of a greenhouse on the back lawn of ESMT and are working to improve waste management, reduce paper consumption, and measure the carbon footprint of ESMT using Plan A carbon accounting software. These are important steps along ESMT's sustainability path. The Net Impact chapter will continue to support the sustainability efforts, bringing in new ideas and increasing the internal reach.

“The heartprint should inspire our community to enable **sustainable transformation** within their organizations and in society.”

# 5. EMBED THE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY WITHIN ESMT

To lead sustainability-related initiatives at ESMT and to implement, control, and further develop its sustainability strategy, we will establish the Sustainability Taskforce.

Specific enablers who would oversee one or more aspects regarding sustainability at ESMT would include:

- CFO with the responsibility of reducing the footprint (including identifying and controlling targets) and ensuring sustainable construction at ESMT
- Dean of faculty and research to encourage faculty research in sustainability and to develop faculty recruitment with a focus on sustainability
- Dean of programs to increase educational outreach and initiate (executive education) programs
- Executive director of FUTURE Institute for Sustainable Transformation to lead measurement and reporting (including target tracking) and initiate action-oriented research and executive education with partners
- Directors of MBA and master programs to recommend and implement curriculum changes
- Director of external engagement to coordinate important networks (e.g., ABIS, GNAM, PRME), to stay abreast of rankings and accreditation requirements, and to engage alumni
- Director of communications to lead outreach and engagement efforts

The Sustainability Taskforce will prepare workshops to gain buy-in and support of the implementation of the sustainability strategy at all levels of the organization. We will establish accountability with a biannual report to the management committee; an annual report for internal stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students; and an executive summary for publication on the ESMT website and distribution among external stakeholders, including alumni.

The strategy and action plan will be implemented by December 31, 2023, at which time it will be evaluated and adjusted to changes and needs.







**Authors:**

**MOLLY IHLBROCK and JOANNA RADEKE**

**ESMT Berlin**

ESMT European School of Management and Technology GmbH  
Schlossplatz 1, 10178 Berlin, Germany

Phone: +49 30 212 31 0

[info@esmt.org](mailto:info@esmt.org) • [www.esmt.berlin](http://www.esmt.berlin)