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UNIVERSITIES ADVANCING SDGs THROUGH MENTAL AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

The document explores how universities are responding to global challenges like war, displacement, and health crises by aligning their strategies with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 3 (Health), SDG 4 (Education), and SDG 16 (Justice). It highlights major gaps in mental health care, trauma-informed teaching, and support for displaced individuals. While education is often prioritized, health-related goals are frequently overlooked. The report calls for more integrated, measurable strategies and showcases examples of universities working toward more inclusive and sustainable recovery efforts.

Key words: *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 16, Polish universities, Mental health, Trauma-informed pedagogy, Inclusive education, Teacher resilience, Strategic planning, Social responsibility*

Problem Statement. Universities are increasingly encouraged to align their missions and visions with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Recent conflicts, health crises, and population displacement have placed significant pressure on universities to address complex social challenges.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. The psychological and pedagogical rehabilitation of individuals affected by military aggression has become a key

area of concern. Displaced individuals—including children, educators, and adults—face fragmented systems of care, limited access to mental health support, and educational barriers. The report notes that these individuals “often face disjointed support systems, limited access to mental health care, and barriers to re-entering educational environments.” Musculoskeletal and mental health disorders add to the burden, exposing gaps in interdisciplinary care and long waiting times for services.

The article by Budzanowska-Drzewiecka et al. (2023) [1], who conducted a content analysis of Polish university strategic documents to evaluate how Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education), are reflected in mission and vision statements, noted that “health-related goals are often missing or only briefly mentioned,” while education goals are “linked to digital transformation, inclusion, and innovation” explores how Polish universities integrate Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their mission and vision statements, with a focus on SDG 3 and SDG 4. The authors found a strong imbalance between these two goals. While SDG 4 is often presented in detail, SDG 3 is either missing or only briefly mentioned. Education goals are linked to digital transformation, inclusion, and academic innovation, while health-related goals are usually treated as secondary or external to the core university mission.

Studies like Malinowska et al. (2024) [2], who developed a comprehensive strategic planning framework based on data from 103 Polish universities to guide SDG integration by promoting specific, measurable, and transparent institutional goals, emphasized the importance of “ethical leadership, robust corporate governance, and a culture of integrity” in driving sustainable innovation and long-term success. emphasize the need for measurable and transparent strategies to guide universities in their alignment with the SDGs. Global examples from universities in Toronto, Auckland, Galway, and Ghana show how SDG integration can lead to improved health, education, and sustainability outcomes [3, 4, 5]. These institutions serve as models for how Polish universities can use SDG-based metrics to track progress and promote long-term impact.

A study from Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University [6] shows that future teachers in Poland and Ukraine must develop resilience, critical thinking, and digital

skills to support war-affected children. According to the study, “this conclusion was derived from a questionnaire that was received by Ukrainian and Polish students (prospective teachers) with pedagogical experience dealing with temporarily displaced persons due to the war at present.” The study emphasized the need for “developing teacher resilience to prevent burnout” and recognized “communication problems, homesickness, adaptation to new environments” as major challenges. The research also identifies challenges such as homesickness, emotional trauma, and communication issues among displaced students. Preparing educators through media literacy, trauma-sensitive teaching, and emotional self-care is essential for post-conflict recovery.

Despite increasing awareness of trauma-informed pedagogy and integrated rehabilitation, universities still lack coordinated strategies and institutional frameworks to respond effectively. Institutions can play a leading role in closing this gap through socially driven research, innovative education, and stronger community engagement. This would allow them to support inclusive systems that address social equity and long-term recovery.

Purpose of the article

The article aims to study how universities promote SDGs through psychological and educational support.

Presentation of the research material

The principle of “leaving no one behind,” embedded in the SDGs, demands inclusive responses for marginalized populations such as refugees, people with disabilities, and those in poverty. Poland, which has received more than 1.5 million Ukrainian refugees since 2022, faces high demands on its healthcare and education systems. Most of these refugees are women and children, who require targeted mental health, psychosocial, and educational interventions.

Universities should adopt a multi-level institutional model that links micro, meso, and macro strategies. This would ensure a better response to social disruptions and workforce shortages. For example, delays in rehabilitation services in countries like the UK have caused long-term harm, underlining the need for integrated care and local support systems.

This imbalance presents a risk to long-term development. The article argues that

student success depends not only on academic instruction but also on mental and physical well-being. Health goals influence student retention, learning outcomes, and staff productivity. However, universities often avoid integrating these elements into strategic planning because education goals are easier to measure, promote, and receive funding for. As a result, student support related to health is usually limited to general terms like "safe environment" or "support services," without clear targets or indicators.

The authors based their research on qualitative content analysis of mission and vision statements from Polish public universities. They identified a pattern: urban universities refer more often to SDGs, especially SDG 4 and SDG 9 (Innovation and Infrastructure), while regional institutions mention fewer goals. SDG 3 was often absent or mentioned only under general student care. The research highlights the need for universities to revise their strategies, especially while developing post-pandemic plans and preparing for the 2030 SDG deadline. Including measurable goals under SDG 3—such as mental health programs, wellness education, and support for vulnerable students—would create a more balanced approach.

The University of Warsaw's strategy (2023) presents a positive example. It shows stronger attention to both SDG 3 and SDG 4. The university connects digital access, inclusive practices, and health services into its broader development plan. This reflects a growing awareness of the importance of student mental health, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The updated strategy was developed using surveys, policy analysis, and stakeholder input. It aims to support academic performance while also addressing student well-being.

The strategy targets specific groups, such as international students, first-generation students, and individuals with disabilities. It also reflects the university's goal of becoming a more socially responsible institution. Despite these efforts, the strategy still lacks clear timelines or measurable targets for health-related actions. Yet, it serves as a model for other universities in Poland and across the European Union.

Reflections from a recent academic conference further support these findings. The conference emphasized that "higher education institutions should actively support community recovery, not just offer academic instruction," and focused on how universities

can address the needs of trauma survivors, displaced individuals, and students requiring psychological or physical rehabilitation. Experts from Poland and other countries shared real-world examples from conflict zones, refugee programs, and rehabilitation services. The discussions emphasized that higher education institutions must go beyond academic instruction. They should become safe, inclusive, and trauma-informed spaces that support both education and healing.

These reflections are especially relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which disrupted access to education and mental health support across Europe. It was observed that there is a “growing need for developing teacher resilience to prevent burnout,” especially when dealing with “temporarily displaced persons due to the war.” Speakers called for universities to play an active role in recovery by developing programs that integrate health and learning. The need for staff training, better infrastructure, and mental health services was also highlighted. Although many universities lack resources, the conference showed that collaboration between educators, psychologists, and community organizations can lead to meaningful change.

Conclusions and perspectives for further research. Together, these analyses suggest that integrating SDG 3 with SDG 4 and SDG 16 is essential. Universities that include education, health, and justice in their core missions can better support students, respond to crises, and promote inclusive, sustainable futures. The next step in the research could be a survey of participants in the teaching process.

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STRATEGIC IMBALANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: ADDRESSING THE MISSING FOCUS ON STUDENT WELL-BEING

The document explores how Polish universities address Sustainable Development Goals, with a focus on SDG 3 (Health) and SDG 4 (Education). It reveals a strong emphasis on education while health-related goals remain underdeveloped in strategic documents. The research highlights gaps in mental health support, lack of measurable well-being targets, and minimal integration of trauma-informed practices. The article calls for more balanced, data-driven strategies that recognize student well-being as essential to academic success. It also presents examples of institutional efforts to connect education and health within inclusive university models.

Key words: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG 3, SDG 4, Polish universities, Mental health, Higher education strategy, Student well-being, Strategic planning, Trauma support, Inclusive development

Problem Statement

Polish universities are encouraged to align their strategies with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). While education goals are clearly emphasized in vision and mission statements, health-related goals are often vague or missing. Most strategies focus on digital access, inclusion, and academic outcomes, but