

Your Path to a Positive Footprint



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Life is about making an impact.

Sustainability is not – nor has it ever been – an easy path. Real change requires countless efforts, inspiration and motivation to drive the paradigm shift we urgently need to prevent the worst outcomes. Caring for future generations and sparking inspiration is not only the responsibility of those living today, but of those who hope for a healthy planet. The impact we should have as human beings is one of care – looking after each other and our environment, strengthening social bonds, and fostering a thriving community ecosystem for all.

Today's environmental and social problems are, above all, structural. This means that not all change can be achieved through individual action alone. Still, that should not discourage you or make you give up – especially when it comes to engaging with governments and organisations that play a crucial role in leading the change towards a more sustainable future.

With this guide, the University of Coimbra hopes to inspire new ideas and perspectives on your daily habits, both academic and personal, helping you answer the question: “Which everyday actions can I change to lead a greener, more sustainable life?”.

This guide provides practical examples of behavioural changes that can help you adopt more environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices in your daily routine, both on and off campus. There are many simple actions and choices you can take to minimise your negative impact on the planet and maximise your positive impact.

The time to act is now! The key is to start somewhere – better late than never. Begin with what feels easiest and closest to your reality, and remember: everyone's reality is different. You don't need to overhaul your entire lifestyle all at once to lead a more sustainable life. In fact, some resistance to change is perfectly natural, so allow yourself time to gradually adapt to new habits and routines.

Enjoy the read – and make a positive impact!

1.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

1972
United Nations
Conference on the
Human Environment

1987
United Nations
Brundtland Report,
Our Common Future

1992
Adoption of
Agenda 21

2000
Launch of the
Millennium
Development Goals

2002
World Summit
on Sustainable
Development

2015
Launch of the 2030
Agenda and the
17 Sustainable
Development Goals

The concept of sustainable development dates back to the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, a milestone in raising global awareness of environmental issues. It was the first time the international community formally came together to discuss the relationship between development and the environment, ultimately leading to the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme.

In 1987, the concept of sustainable development was formally defined in the United Nations Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the *Earth Summit*, marked another crucial milestone, resulting in the adoption of Agenda 21, an ambitious global action plan for sustainable development.

In 2000, at the Millennium Summit, the United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – a set of eight international development targets designed to address the world’s most pressing challenges, including extreme poverty, education, gender equality, health, and environmental sustainability.

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, resulted in a new Plan of Implementation. The MDGs were subsequently reviewed in 2005, 2008, and 2010.

With the end of the MDGs deadline in 2015, the UN launched the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, setting out the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the document *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Within the framework of this new agenda, UN Member States committed to a universal and urgent call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure

peace and prosperity, creating a world where everyone can live with dignity and opportunity. More specifically, the document is structured around five pillars of sustainable development – People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships – and seeks to balance the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. The 17 SDGs, together with their 169 targets, represent an urgent global call to action for all countries. Above all, they aim to ensure humanity's survival and outline a global roadmap towards a sustainable future for all.

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2. THE UNIVERSITY OF COIMBRA AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Committed to building a different future, the University of Coimbra (UC) faces numerous challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With its significant contributions and wide-reaching impact, UC is well placed to drive behavioural shifts and to strengthen civic awareness and engagement in the pursuit of a more sustainable and inclusive future.

In line with its commitment to sustainable development, UC has developed a specific strategic framework integrating the 5Ps and their interconnections. This dynamic yet consistently balanced model ensures that progress in one of the Ps supports progress in the others. A distinctive feature of the model is its emphasis on the 'P' of 'People', recognising that commitment to sustainable development can only succeed if it is implemented with and for people.





The University of Coimbra has maintained a leading position in sustainability and social responsibility, establishing itself as the most sustainable higher education institution in Portugal and consistently ranking among the top institutions worldwide, according to the results of the annual *Times Higher Education Impact Rankings*. This ranking aims to measure the overall success of higher education institutions in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and comprise a total of 18 categories – one for each SDG and one overall.

The guide **Your Path to a Positive Footprint** aims to promote a culture of responsibility and social awareness within the academic community by engaging and mobilising its members, as part of UC's commitment to sustainable development. Its primary objective is to raise awareness of current sustainability challenges, which are crucial for addressing and mitigating the climate and environmental changes already evident in our society, as well as issues of social injustice and inequality.

It presents a series of suggestions and individual actions that can be adopted in everyday life and contribute to the five pillars of the 2030 Agenda, known as the 5Ps – People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships. UC incorporates these within its sustainable development framework, embracing a holistic approach to sustainability.

This is a joint effort by the University of Coimbra's, through its Office for Sustainable Development, and the organisation *Solve - Engineering Consulting*, within the context of the UCarbon project, carried out in partnership with *jeKnowledge* and the Coimbra Students' Union (*Associação Académica de Coimbra - AAC*).

Learn more about UC's contribution to Sustainable Development [here](#), where you can also consult the annual Sustainability Reports.

3. WHY SHOULD YOU ADOPT MORE SUSTAINABLE HABITS?

The causes, consequences, and mitigation of environmental impacts – such as climate change, water pollution, and waste production – are widely debated in the public sphere, given their direct impact on people's quality of life.

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The consequences occur in the medium and long term. They affect people's access to essential natural resources, such as water and food, and impact the health of individuals and communities. For example, climate change is driven by the intensification of a natural process known as the greenhouse effect: the emission of greenhouse gases from our daily activities increases their concentration in the atmosphere, and as a result, more heat is trapped, leading to a rise in the Earth's average temperature. This warming disrupts natural systems, triggering phenomena such as heatwaves, floods, and droughts, which affect food production and water supply, and increase the risk of wildfires.

As the scientific community recognises human activity as the root cause of this problem, its solution also depends on human action. In this crucial endeavour, it is not only international organisations (such as the UN) that must show commitment – governments, businesses, institutions, and individuals must also be willing to change their behaviours in pursuit of a more sustainable world. Although individual effort may seem like just a drop in the ocean, we are all social beings with different roles, and through our actions, we have the power to influence others in many different contexts. Most importantly, we must stand together in this fight.

This is why the transition to sustainable development is so important. If we do not integrate environmental protection and conservation into our development systems and ensure that these systems are socially inclusive, we risk depleting our natural resources.

Join UC in driving the sustainable change we all need!

4.

HOW CAN YOU BE MORE SUSTAINABLE?

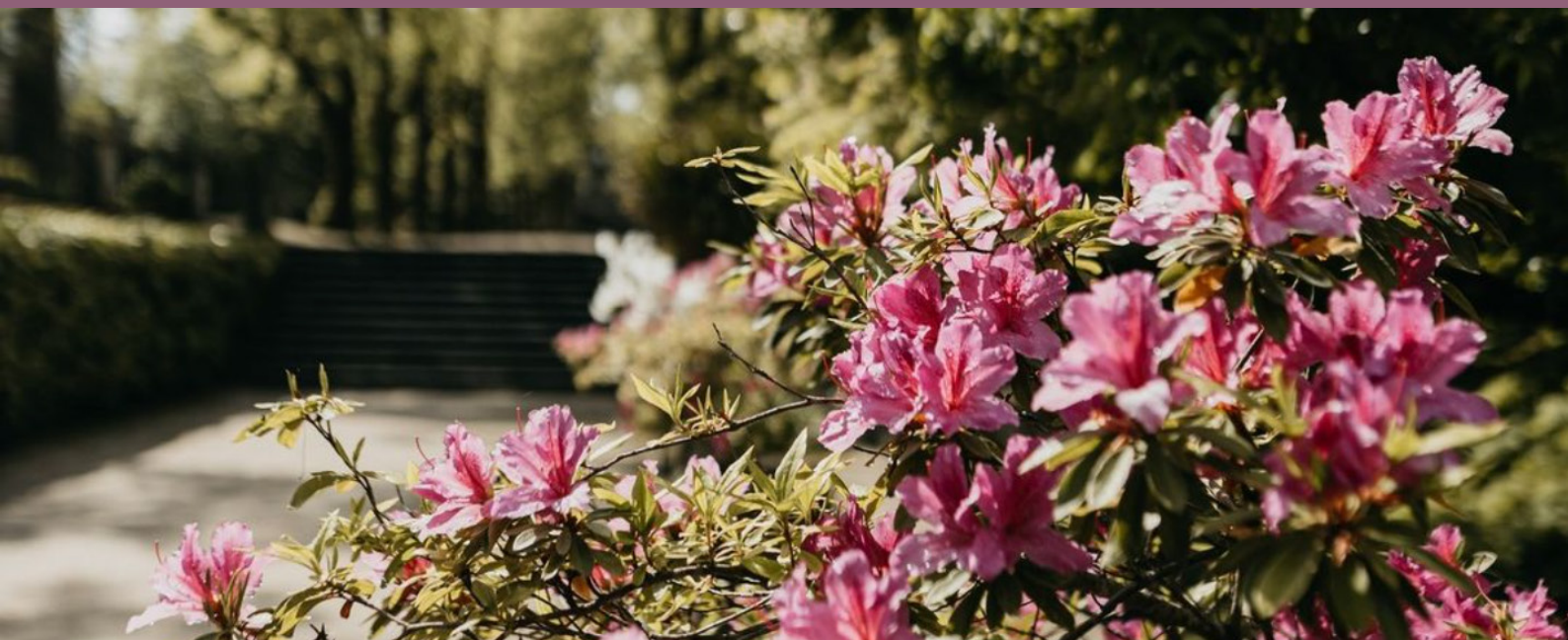
Even small daily actions can have a lasting impact on both the environment and society. These changes in attitudes and behaviours often take little effort.

This guide brings together a range of suggestions for individual practices that you can adopt in your day-to-day life to help build a more sustainable and inclusive university, society, and planet.

Before you start:

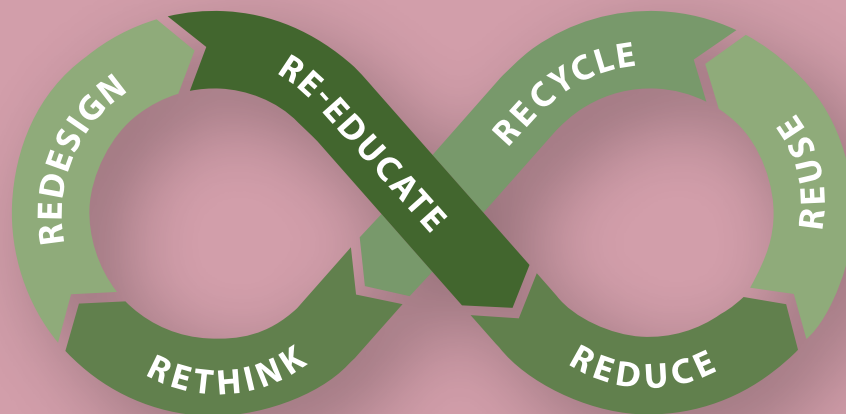
Guides full of tips and advice can sometimes be overwhelming. Remember that these are just suggestions, though, so there's no need to adopt them all at once!

Take your time, consider what you can realistically change, and give yourself time to adjust to new habits. Every change is a positive step, so start with what feels easiest and most appropriate for you.



5. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In a world of finite resources and ecosystems, it is crucial to encourage the adoption of environmentally sustainable policies. Embracing a sustainable mindset at UC allows us to think globally and act locally, making this a shared responsibility. To achieve this, we must all adopt a circular economy strategy based on the 6Rs, shifting from waste to resource valorisation.





Reduce your consumption

Reducing has always been a cornerstone of environmental policies. It's not just about producing less waste but also about cutting down on what you buy and use. By limiting your resource consumption to the essentials, you reduce your environmental footprint and save money. Reducing can be as simple as finding alternatives: for example, before turning on the heater, try wearing warmer clothes or using blankets.



Reuse products

When buying something, consider whether it can be reused. Reusing products helps reduce waste and unnecessary consumption. It's also a chance to get creative and discover new uses for things! Search online, you'll find countless ideas and suggestions.



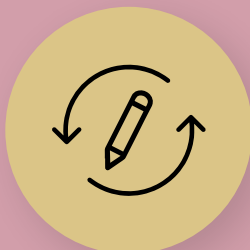
Recycle what you can't reuse

You should minimise waste as much as possible. Materials such as paper, plastic, metal and glass can be recycled into new products. However, you should only opt for recycling when no other options, such as reuse, are available. Click [here](#) to make your recycling more efficient and sustainable.



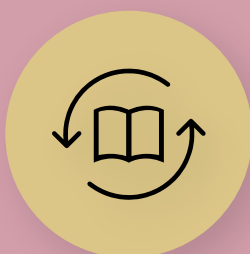
Rethink your habits

As mentioned earlier, overconsumption contributes to environmental degradation. From a sustainable development standpoint, it's important to reconsider your habits and choices. For example, opt for durable products that you can use fully. While these items might cost more up-front, they save you money in the long run and benefit the environment.



Redesign the future

In a linear economy, natural resources are extracted to produce items that ultimately become waste. Sustainable development requires a different approach: the circular economy. This model focuses on extending product lifecycles, reducing raw material consumption, and minimising emissions and waste. Reshaping our future on this planet depends on all of us – including you.



Re-educate yourself and others

Stay informed and update your knowledge to contribute actively to the transition towards a circular economy. At the UC, you have access to publications, initiatives, and events related to sustainable development. Thus, you can share what you learn to raise awareness of the problems we face as a society and inspire others to follow your lead. Take the first step and become a role model!

One of the core goals of sustainable development is human development. Environmental issues are closely interconnected with economic and social matters, meaning that promoting sustainable development goes beyond environmental preservation. It is also necessary to consider and foster people's economic and social well-being, as well as peace, justice, and strong institutions. To achieve this, everyone should adopt practices grounded in the promotion of human rights, the fight against inequality and corruption, and the appreciation of individual development potential, expectations, and specificities. For further ethical principles and general duties, consult the [UC Code of Ethics, Conduct and Integrity](#).



Act ethically

It is important to acknowledge your social responsibility and to exercise it through active citizenship. Ethical conduct means respecting the law and upholding constitutional principles, while acting with integrity, honesty, rigour, and competence. In your interactions with others, let justice, objectivity, impartiality, exemption, and transparency guide your actions. Stay committed to the honest and responsible pursuit of knowledge and to the ongoing improvement of organisational excellence.



Respect and protect others

This means respecting human dignity and fostering a positive environment in all interpersonal relationships – one that upholds equality and rejects any form of discrimination. It also involves recognising the value of both individual and collective diversity, encouraging participation and constructive dialogue, supporting personal growth, and promoting inclusion. Caring for your own well-being is important, but so is looking after the well-being of those around you!



Prevent and combat violence

Refraining from acts of coercion or physical or psychological violence is not enough. You must actively oppose and condemn all forms of violence, including discrimination, intimidation, humiliation, coercion and harassment. Whenever possible, offer support to individuals whose physical, psychological or moral integrity is at risk, and report such situations.



Cooperate

Embrace cooperation, synergy and teamwork. Involve others in the shift towards sustainable development by teaming up with people, groups or organisations that focus on these issues. You can promote inclusive public policies by joining organisations that defend human rights, or get involved in initiatives to revitalise parks, gardens and rundown urban spaces. This will strengthen your ability to think collectively, build networks and work collaboratively. Although implementing sustainability measures often starts at an individual level, lasting and meaningful change depends on collective action. Only together can we achieve effective global change.

6. GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The University of Coimbra is committed to providing a safe and supportive working and learning environment that fosters health and well-being to our community. This commitment is underpinned by a risk management system and a comprehensive work health and safety policy. Among the various programmes in place is [Healthy Campus](#), which promotes healthy and active lifestyles in line with the World Health Organization's guidelines. The initiative covers a broad range of areas, including sport and physical activity, nutrition, disease prevention, mental and social health, risk behaviour prevention, and environmental, sustainability, and social responsibility.





Stay active

Physical activity is vital, and, as such, the University of Coimbra provides a wide range of activities and programmes, as well as sports facilities and dedicated spaces. The [UC+Active](#) programme lets you try out different sports and physical activities until you find the one that suits you best. If you prefer to exercise independently, the Autonomous Activity Programme offers a variety of physical activity plans, including walking and running routes or workout routines. Additionally, you can take part in [University Sports](#) [Portuguese content only], organised by Coimbra Students' Union (AAC). This gives you the opportunity to continue your sporting journey and even compete at national or international level, representing UC. Always remember: "A healthy mind in a healthy body."

Explore all available options [here](#).

Look after your mental health

To ensure nothing stops you from reaching your full potential, UC places a high priority on the [mental health](#) of our community [Portuguese content only]. The university's health services provide the most appropriate support for anyone seeking help, tailored to their specific needs. You can also learn anxiety reduction and concentration improvement techniques, among others, through the UC [Wellbeing Centre](#) [Portuguese content only], which aims to improve the quality of life, focus, and resilience of the academic community. Additionally, [SOS Estudante](#) [Portuguese content only] is a confidential and anonymous emotional support and suicide prevention helpline.

Make healthy eating choices

Your diet plays a key role in both your physical and mental health. Aim for balanced meals that include a variety of unprocessed foods. At UC, the [SASUC Food Units](#) [Portuguese content only] offer a wide selection of high-quality options for the university community. If you need guidance on improving your eating habits, a nutritionist can help. If you're interested in learning to cook and exploring the culinary arts, check out the Gastronomy Section of the Coimbra Students' Union (AAC).





Get enough sleep

Quality sleep is essential for restoring and regulating your metabolism. Exposure to blue light from electronic devices before bedtime can disrupt your ability to fall asleep. Try reducing screen time in the evening or activating night mode on your devices. You can also install apps that adjust light exposure throughout the day.

Have regular check-ups

Book a routine medical appointment at least once a year, even if you are not experiencing any symptoms. Find out more about the [medical services](#) available to the UC community through SASUC.

Keep your vaccination record up to date

Due to widespread vaccination, smallpox and polio have been eliminated from Europe, and many previously common diseases have become rare. Getting vaccinated protects you from serious illness and helps prevent the spread of diseases among your family, friends, classmates, work colleagues and the wider community. Stay informed about your upcoming vaccinations and check if you need any before travelling!

7. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION

It is important to understand that the University's intense daily activity – from commuting by members of the academic community to the consumption of energy and water – has environmental impacts. Therefore, measures must be implemented to raise awareness within the academic community and contribute to a sustainable future for all.

→ 7.1 *CAMPUSES*

Through their core missions of education, research, innovation and societal engagement, universities have immense potential to help mitigate and prevent environmental impacts. New sustainable products and ways of living often originate from higher education institutions, which play a vital role in raising awareness and fostering a culture of sustainability.





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All of this activity takes place within a vast [infrastructure of buildings](#), including faculties, departments, cafeterias, residences, libraries, museums, theatres, stadiums and green spaces, spread throughout the city of Coimbra and beyond.

The academic community that uses these spaces and spends most of their days there holds the greatest responsibility for using them sustainably. There are several steps you can take to ensure these important University and city facilities are used in the best possible way.

Participate in courses and research projects in environmental fields

The University of Coimbra offers an [Ecoliteracy](#) course unit where you can learn about various environmental and ecological issues, including sustainable agriculture, biodiversity loss, and ocean protection. This course is also part of the [Master's degree in Biological Resources, Territorial Development and Sustainability](#), provided by the Department of Life Sciences. Discover more UC courses related to SDG 13 and other Sustainable Development Goals [here](#).

Furthermore, conducting research across all areas of sustainability is paramount to developing new alternatives and technologies that can be applied in both daily life and industrial contexts. Get involved in research and innovation projects!

Promote and participate in awareness campaigns

Informative and visual campaigns on the responsible use of campus spaces can help change usage habits and improve the University's sustainability performance indicators. Share your initiatives with the Office for Sustainable Development (GDS.UC) via the 'Contributions' section on our [website](#).

You can also use peer pressure in a good way by gently correcting and advising your friends. For example, if someone drops litter, speak up! Encourage them to hold on to their waste until they find the nearest suitable bin, or to recycle it if it is recyclable.





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Attend events on sustainability-related topics

Conferences and other events that highlight the importance of sustainable habits and how to adopt them are crucial for members of the academic community. If you spend much of your day on campus, think about how you can contribute to its sustainability. More than that, these events will give you valuable information that you can apply at home, in your city, and on the Planet!

Engage in extracurricular activities

UC and AAC have groups focused on environmental education, conservation, and sustainable development projects. The [Ecological Group](#) [Portuguese content only] is a great option for those who want to discuss and act locally on environmental issues. Solve Consulting offers an opportunity for those seeking a more professional experience with a focus on sustainable projects. These topics can also be explored through [entrepreneurship](#) and [volunteering](#) [Portuguese content only] opportunities available at [Student Hub](#).

Keep the good habits you have at home

Don't change your (good) habits just because you're away from home: turn off lights when you leave a room, open the curtains, avoid wasting water, and recycle! You'll find more helpful tips and behaviours to adopt throughout this guide.

Keep track of UC's environmental indicators

Learn about key indicators such as index of leftovers, water consumption, and energy usage, and discover how your actions can help improve them. These data support UC's efforts to develop efficiently and are available for consultation on the [UC Sustainability Reports](#).

Learn about new technologies

Stay up to date with new technologies and try to learn more about how to use them in your daily life, both personally and professionally. In particular, discover more about sustainable technologies.





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→ 7.2 STUDENT RESIDENCES

UC has 13 residences, which are home to many students during their time at university. It is essential to adopt sustainable habits in daily life, such as reducing waste. Below are a few suggestions on how you can improve your practices and help make the university a more sustainable place. Remember that if you don't live in a residence, you can still adopt these habits at home!

Take shorter showers and adjust the water temperature

Showers are one of the most water-intensive everyday activities, so try to keep them short and only turn on the tap when necessary. Whenever possible, collect the water that runs while you wait for it to heat up – you can use it later for cooking, cleaning, or watering plants.

Use LED light bulbs

Replace all light bulbs with LED ones, if possible, as they consume 80% less energy than traditional bulbs. Open the curtains whenever you can to make the most of natural light.

Wait until you have a full load of laundry

When using the SASUC [laundry facilities](#) [Portuguese content only], make sure that you have enough clothes to fill the washing machine. Use cold water whenever possible to reduce energy use, and hot water only if absolutely necessary, as high temperatures can cause clothes to shrink.

Choose eco-friendly cleaning and hygiene products

Use biodegradable products that can be easily processed within wastewater systems. Lemon, vinegar and baking soda are cheap, biodegradable cleaning agents that are highly effective. Using them increases the chances of reusing wastewater. Alternatively, consider detergents from [ECOXperience](#), a Portuguese start-up incubated at the University of Coimbra and part of the Mistolin Group, which transforms used cooking oil into ecological, 100% biodegradable detergents that have a low environmental impact.



© Fulvio Ciccolo

Choose plastic-free products

High-quality solid shampoos and soaps are now available in plastic-free packaging. In Coimbra, you can find shops that sell detergents in bulk – just bring your own reusable container. Avoid beauty and cleaning products containing microplastics, as these are not filtered out during water treatment and eventually end up in the ocean. Products such as scrubs, creams, soaps and even lip balms often contain plastic particles. You'll usually find this information on the ingredients list.

Never pour cooking oil down the drain!

Sewage treatment systems cannot filter oil out of water, so pouring cooking oil down the drain is the same as dumping it into a river. Collect your used oil and recycle it. Coimbra City Council runs a collection scheme – find your nearest oil collection bin [here](#) [Portuguese content only].

Sort your waste

Use the selective collection containers in each residence to separate your waste correctly.

Buy electronics with energy-efficiency labels

The energy labelling system was revised and updated in 2021. These labels provide information about a product's energy efficiency, helping you make informed choices about which product to buy. You can find out what the new labels mean [here](#).

Regulate the use of air conditioning and heating

Adjust the temperature depending on the season and try to [insulate](#) [Portuguese content only] your space to reduce the need for these appliances. In warmer weather, opening a window may be sufficient to improve air circulation and fix the problem.

Share

Whenever possible, share items you don't regularly use with others who might need them. Likewise, if you only need something occasionally, try borrowing it from someone who already owns one. This way, you can avoid several people in the same household buying the same product for occasional use. If you're moving out and have items such as blankets or small appliances that you won't be taking with you, there are plenty of places where you can donate them. Student Hub also organises regular collection drives for this purpose.

Deposit your waste where it can be reused

There are several projects that collect waste such as paper, broken umbrellas and bottle corks for reuse. You can help by setting up collection points in your residence for these and other materials – just get in touch with the relevant projects and encourage your flatmates to join in, too! You can also contact the AAC Ecological Group!





© Austin Kehmeier

7.3 CONSUMABLES

Many of the world's environmental problems stem from the overexploitation of natural resources to produce goods and materials, which are often used for a short time and quickly discarded. To counter this trend, we must adopt strategies that promote the sustainable use of consumable materials.

Share and borrow

The [AAC student groups](#) [Portuguese content only] have repositories of study resources from previous academic years where you can leave your notes and resources for fellow students to use.

Reduce plastic and packaging

Plastic has a devastating environmental impact and contributes significantly to climate change. Portugal has pledged to recycle 55% of plastic packaging waste and 60% of aluminium packaging waste by 2030. However, remember that reducing comes before recycling. Opt for reusable water bottles, shopping bags, and ink cartridges. If you already have plastic bottles or bags, reuse them as much as possible to reduce their environmental impact and avoid buying new ones.

Borrow books

The UC libraries offer an extensive collection of books spanning a wide range of subjects. So, before buying a book, check if it is available to borrow – you'll save money and help make better use of shared resources.

Reuse coffee capsules!

If you have a coffee machine at home, reusable coffee capsules are now widely available. If you're not using them yet, you probably have plenty of used capsules that can be recycled. In Coimbra, there are several drop-off points, including branded collection points and those found in large supermarkets.



© Roxanne Desgagnés

→ 7.4 EMISSIONS

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are the leading contributor to climate change. Almost everything we produce and consume generates emissions at some stage, whether during manufacture or disposal. Transport also plays a major role in these emissions, so, to reduce them effectively, we need to rethink not only what we consume, but also how we travel.

Buy local products

Choosing local products supports the local economy and helps cut emissions related to transport. Look out for Portuguese products, especially those with the “*Portugal Sou Eu*” [label](#). In Coimbra, you can support the local economy by shopping at places like the D. Pedro V Municipal Market, or by just enjoying a stroll through the city’s historic districts, *Alta* and *Baixa* (downtown).

Recycle

Recycling keeps materials out of landfill where they would release greenhouse gases as they decompose reinserting them into the market instead. It also reduces the need for new raw materials, which helps lower emissions throughout production.

Change your diet

Raising livestock requires large areas of pasture, often leading to deforestation and loss of carbon-absorbing forests. Initiatives like “Meatless Monday” offer an easy way to start reducing your impact. You could also challenge yourself to try vegetarian meals when eating out, for instance at SASUC dining halls.

Choose greener transport

Use public transport, cycle, or ride electric scooters, or simply walk around beautiful Coimbra whenever possible. Sharing lifts helps distribute emissions among passengers, reducing the footprint per passenger. If you don't have a bike, you can borrow one temporarily through [UCicletas](#), the UC bike-sharing initiative.

Support sustainable shops

Support and buy from stores that prioritise sustainability and social responsibility, and that care about the environmental impact of their products.

Shop second-hand

Second-hand and resale shops give high-quality items a second life instead of sending them to landfill. Donate or sell the clothes or other items that you no longer need.

© Olivia Hutcherson

→ 7.5 ENERGY

Energy is one of the most widely used and important resources, but its production, especially through fossil fuels burning, is also a leading source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Reducing the environmental impact of energy use requires new solutions, as well as reducing waste and overall consumption of this resource. While the University of Coimbra is investing in increasing its use of renewable energy sources, individual actions are just as important.

Use natural light and switch off lights

At UC, open windows to use natural daylight rather than electric lights. In warm weather, opening windows for fresh air can reduce the need for air conditioning.

If you do have to use lights, always turn them off when leaving a room – and if you spot an empty room with lights on, switch them off too.

Turn off equipment when not in use

Before leaving a room, make sure that any devices such as projectors, heaters or air conditioners are switched off. Do not leave electronics in standby mode, as even computers in sleep mode consume power. Switch off any device you are not using. Even when devices are switched off, their chargers still consume electricity if they are left plugged in. At home, use plug sockets with a switch-off function.

Use your battery power wisely

Keep your phone and other gadgets running on battery power as long as possible before recharging. This saves energy and helps extend battery lifespan. Only plug in chargers when necessary.

Invest in renewable energy sources

There are many renewable options available: solar photovoltaic, solar thermal, wind turbines, biomass, and more. Choose energy providers that use renewable sources. At the UC Faculty of Economics, you can even charge your phone and other devices using solar power at the [smart bench](#).





© Vitor Murta

→ 7.6 BIODIVERSITY

Urban areas are home to important dynamics, offering close access to jobs, shops, services, and more. However, as densely populated and industrialised environments, they are also where green spaces are most needed – whether for leisure, recreation, or physical and mental well-being. Green spaces provide a wide range of ecological benefits for cities:

- **Improve air quality:** tree leaves help absorb polluting gases and trap dust, while consuming CO₂ and releasing oxygen during daylight hours.
- **Help manage rainwater:** the soil in green areas is more permeable, making it easier to absorb rainwater and reduce surface runoff.
- **Make cities more appealing:** green spaces bring life, colour, texture, movement and even fragrance to urban settings, in contrast to the more lifeless materials typical of city landscapes.
- **Regulate the local climate:** plants reflect, absorb, and transmit radiation. Through photosynthesis, they also store solar energy, helping to moderate temperatures and improve thermal comfort.
- **Reduce noise pollution:** through the deflection and refraction caused by their branches and shrubs, trees are able to soften the intensity of sound waves from urban noise.

- **Boost people's satisfaction:** green spaces stimulate human sensitivity.

Coimbra is home to many parks and gardens, including the [Botanic Garden](#) – a living museum managed by the University of Coimbra. Covering around 12 hectares and linking the upper and lower parts of the city, the garden features a wide variety of plant collections, some centuries old, offering a glimpse into ecosystems from across the globe. This green space is not only used for research into conservation but is also open to the public for leisure and learning.

Explore the wonders of nature! Explore the [green spaces of the University and the city of Coimbra](#) [Portuguese content only], and [nature tourism](#) experiences. Venture into nature!

How can you make a difference?

Take care of green spaces

Even without tools or specialised knowledge, there are simple ways you can help protect the environment. Avoid leaving litter behind, don't pick or damage native plants, stay off flowerbeds and foliage, and never climb trees. Whenever you visit green spaces, but especially in warmer months, take extra care to prevent fires. If you'd like to do more, you can join clean-up events in public areas such as parks, streets, or even beaches.

Support tree planting

Start with your local area. If you can, plant trees near your home, join local planting events, or contribute financially. Want to go further? You can even organise your own activities with local organisations or land-owners.





© Henrique Patrício

Create your own initiatives, projects or studies

Biodiversity and its conservation are gaining increasing attention. Encouraging awareness and developing sustainable solutions within the academic community is more important than ever.

Volunteer for biodiversity

As a UC student, you can [volunteer](#) [Portuguese content only] at the Botanic Garden and help with day-to-day maintenance. You can also support the fight against invasive species by joining activities run by INVASORAS.PT Lab, part of UC's Centre for Functional Ecology.

Explore the biodiversity around you

The [Exploratório - Centro de Ciência Viva](#) (Coimbra science centre) [Portuguese content only] - hosts the *Pedalada de Ciência* (Science Ride) initiative, inviting participants to explore the *Parque Verde do Mondego* on foot or by bike, discovering both its natural and built heritage. The Botanic Garden also offers guided tours and events, which are great opportunities to get to know the space, whether formally or informally.

Adopt a plant

The [UC.Plantas](#) [Portuguese content only] initiative invites UC first-year students to adopt and care for a native Portuguese plant during their first academic year. Already have plants at home but unsure how to care for them? The Botanic Garden's *Consultório Botânico* (Plant Clinic) can help with species identification, ecological insights, and practical tips.

→ 7.7 FOOD

The 2030 Agenda highlights key food-related goals: eradicating hunger, reducing food waste, improving nutrition, ensuring food security, and supporting sustainable agriculture. By making informed choices in your daily life, you can support sustainable development and help achieve these goals.

Don't bite off more than you can chew

Food production involves vast amounts of water, energy, and greenhouse gas emissions. When you waste food, you're also wasting these precious resources. When eating in UC's canteens, make sure to only ask for what you intend to eat and adjust your portion to your needs.

You can also order surplus meals from restaurants, hotels and supermarkets at reduced prices through the [Too Good To Go](#) app, a project that helps combat food waste.





© Sérgio Brito

Plan your meals

Think ahead about what you're going to cook. Planning helps reduce waste, especially of fresh produce like fruit and vegetables, and also saves you money.

Support local producers and shops

Buying from local producers helps reduce emissions linked to transport and supports the local economy. D. Pedro V Market and *Mercadinhos da Margem Esquerda* are some of the local markets where you can shop in Coimbra. Look out for ethical and sustainable product labels like Fairtrade, B Corp or Rainforest Alliance, among others.

Don't judge fruit and veggies by their looks

A lot of perfectly good fruit and vegetables are left at supermarket shelves simply because of their size, shape or colour. By buying these "imperfect" but healthy items from local markets or shops, you help combat food waste and save money too!

Cut down on meat

Intensive meat production, especially beef production, has a significant environmental impact. Try to reduce your consumption of animal

products. At [SASUC's](#) canteens [Portuguese content only], you'll find a wide selection of meals, including daily vegetarian options. A more varied diet is better for your health and helps reduce your carbon footprint. Check out weekly menus [here](#).

Donate a meal

Using the SASUC Go app's UC Share feature, you can donate one or more meals to UC students who rely on social support. Sharing a meal feels good and can make a real difference!





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→ 7.8 WASTE

All human activity generates waste. The amount and type of waste produced depends on how much we consume and our lifestyle. Waste is one of today's major environmental challenges. Although there are alternatives to landfill, it all starts with our individual choices, such as sorting waste. While recycling is part of a more sustainable system, reducing the amount of waste we produce in the first place, through changes in consumption habits, is even more important. Secondly, you can give items a second life through reuse. The University of Coimbra provides containers for waste sorting, including electrical and electronic waste, across its campuses.

Only buy what you need

We live in a world of excessive consumption. Think twice before buying something: do you really need it? A simple tip to avoid unnecessary purchases is to write a shopping list. Many of our buying decisions are based on habit rather than need. Write down what you need, compare prices and brands in advance, and decide what to buy before you get to the shop.

Avoid products with plastic packaging

While plastic is a durable material and most products come packaged in it, it is slow to degrade. Although there are recycling options, large quantities of plastic are still being produced to meet consumption needs. Bulk shops are a great way to avoid packaging altogether.

Reuse and reduce paper use

Only print what is really necessary and reuse printed sheets whenever you can. Once you're done, make sure to place paper waste in the correct bin so it can be recycled.

Repair before replacing

Don't throw something out just because it's damaged – try to repair it first. Clothes, laptops, phones and home appliances are often easily fixable. Look for repair services in Coimbra to give your belongings a second life.





© Yuliia Barabash

Ditch single-use products

Choose reusable items like metal bottles, mugs or cloth bags. Many shops offer innovative products that encourage reuse. If you must use disposable items such as plastic bottles or bags, try to reuse them as much as possible.

Ditch plastic bottles for good

Invest in a reusable [bottle](#) or [cup](#) and get into the habit of drinking tap water – it's safe, free, and available at the many water fountains across the UC.

Use ashtrays

Say no to smoking! It's best not to smoke, but if you do, don't drop cigarette butts or ash on the ground! Use nearby ashtrays or carry a portable ashtray, which you can get from the AAC Ecological Group.

Sort your waste properly

Always separate your waste into the correct recycling categories. Collection containers at UC campuses are labelled for plastic and metal, glass, paper and cardboard, and general waste. You can find the locations of the nearest collection points in the city on the [ERSUC](#) website or [here](#) [both links include Portuguese content only]. For electronic and electrical waste, see the section 'Electrical and Electronic Equipment'.

You can take any unused or expired medicines and their packaging to your local [pharmacy](#) [Portuguese content only], where they will be collected and disposed of safely, helping protect the environment and public health.

Start composting

Recycling organic waste helps reduce the amount of rubbish sent to landfill while promoting the production of natural fertiliser (compost) and biogas (a renewable source of energy).

In Coimbra, the City Council is piloting an organic waste collection system in selected areas as part of a “[Zero Waste](#)” [Portuguese content only] awareness campaign. This includes the distribution of composting bins and containers, both for home use and shared spaces, making it easier to separate and dispose of food scraps from meal prep and leftovers.





© Simon Kadula

→ 7.9 ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT

The increasing production and use of electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) has led to higher levels of pollution, particularly if these items are not disposed of properly once they are no longer in use. The impact on the environment can be gradually reduced if you dispose of them and use them correctly. In a university setting, where many devices are used in classrooms, laboratories and even at home, it is essential to understand how to use, reuse and properly recycle EEE.

Think before you buy

Electronics contain rare and sometimes toxic metals that can have a significant environmental impact when discarded. The social cost is also high, as many of these devices are produced in poor working conditions. So, before buying a new device, ask yourself if you really need it.

Use your devices responsibly

While all equipment has a limited lifespan, you can help extend it by using and maintaining it properly. Turn devices off when not in use, avoid charging your phone overnight and carry out regular maintenance and cleaning.

Give your electronics a second life

If a device no longer meets your needs, consider repurposing it, selling it second-hand or lending it to someone who could make use of it. When buying a replacement, go for a refurbished or second-hand model if possible – these are usually cheaper and work just as well.

Dispose of batteries and electronics properly

If you can't reuse a device, dispose of it safely either at UC or at designated city points. Batteries and electrical appliances contain hazardous substances, but they also contain many reusable materials. WEEE (Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment) points are the right place to drop them off and are available throughout the university.





→ 7.10 TRANSPORT

The transport sector plays a vital role in everyday life by moving people and goods. However, it is also one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. In recent decades, urban sprawl and the decentralisation of services have increased the need for mobility. However, you can help reduce the environmental impact of transport by making a few key changes.

- **Getting Around in Coimbra**

Choose public transport to get to campus

Using public transport helps reduce your carbon footprint, save money, reduce noise pollution and improve air quality. Coimbra's public transport system, [SMTUC](#) offers a wide range of options. All UC campuses are served by bus routes: lines 5, 6, 33, 36, 44, 103 and 244 go to Campus 1; lines 34, 34T and 38 to Campus 2; and lines 6, 27, 35, 36, 36T and 37 to Campus 3. The SMTUC app, available for [Android](#) and [iOS](#) gives real-time information on the nearest bus stops, schedules, routes, arrival times and vehicle locations. You can also set up notifications for bus arrivals and access in-

formation on fares, ticket outlets, parking metres and car parks. Another useful tool to help you choose the best route is the [Move-me](#) app. You can also find relevant information on the [UC website](#).

Share lifts with colleagues

Consider carpooling with colleagues who take the same route as you. This will reduce traffic, emissions and your travel costs.

If you drive, make sure your car is properly maintained

Checking things like tyre pressure and wheel alignment regularly can help you reduce fuel consumption and cut down on emissions.





© Karine Paniza

Get around town on foot, by scooter or bike

There are plenty of scooters available in Coimbra – a quick and eco-friendly way to get around the city. The University of Coimbra also runs a temporary bike loan scheme, [UCi-cletas](#), to encourage healthier and more sustainable travel. And if you live near campus, why not walk? It's great for your health and saves you money too!

Plan your route

Apps like [Google Maps](#), [Waze](#) and [Moovit](#) can help you calculate the best routes taking into account traffic and travel time. To avoid getting stuck in traffic, plan your route and departure time in advance. Planning ahead means fewer stops and starts, less stress, and lower fuel consumption.

- **For long trips**

At the University of Coimbra, internationalisation is regarded as a mission pillar and a key element in delivering high-quality higher education. UC is committed to embed-

ding a truly international outlook in everyday academic life and encouraging cultural exchange within the community.

When travelling abroad, make informed decisions and consider their environmental impact. There are a few eco-friendly guidelines you can follow.

Pick greener ways to travel

Trains, buses and ferries are often better for the planet than flying. However, if you need to fly, go for airlines with carbon offset options and skip the paper ticket by using a digital boarding pass!

Pack a sustainable travel kit

Reduce your carbon footprint while travelling by taking reusable items with you, such as a reusable shopping bag, a thermos flask, a cutlery set, cloth napkins, a reusable cup and a reusable snack container.





© Vadym Alyekseyenko

Explore Portugal... sustainably

Portugal is a beautiful country with diverse landscapes, ranging from beaches and forests to historic towns and natural parks. With a length of just over 560 km, every destination is easily accessible. Wherever possible, opt for public transport: the national [bus](#) and [rail](#) networks, and services such as [FlixBus](#). Coimbra's train station is called "Coimbra-B".

→ 7.11 WATER AND WASTEWATER

Water is essential to all life on Earth and one of our most valuable resources, yet its availability is increasingly being affected by climate change. This is why it is so important to avoid wasting water and to increase our capacity to reuse it. After water is used for everyday tasks, it becomes mixed with impurities and is then referred to as wastewater. Most of it isn't reused. But it has huge potential to be.

Turn off the tap when not in use

When brushing your teeth or washing your hands, only turn on the tap for as long as necessary. Letting the water run when it is not needed leads to waste. Always make sure that the tap is fully closed and not dripping. The same applies when washing dishes or showering. Many taps at UC have timers to help reduce consumption.

Watch out for leaks

Fix any leaking taps at home, as even a small drip can waste over 11,000 litres of water each year! You can use a water meter to detect hidden leaks and compare your monthly bills. To prevent leaks, keep plumbing in good condition by regularly clearing septic tanks, grease traps, and drainage systems.

Collect rainwater

Rainwater can be used for cleaning or watering plants. It helps reduce your reliance on tap water and best of all, it's free!

Support research into water and wastewater treatment

As part of its commitment to SDGs, UC supports research into new ways of treating and reusing water and wastewater, as well as solutions for reusing this resource. Get involved in projects related to this area.





© Ivan Bandura

Prevent water pollution

It's easier than you think: don't pour oil, grease or other toxic substances such as medicines down the drain, and don't use the toilet as a bin. Avoid flushing items like certain types of paper, packaging or synthetic materials. Use eco-friendly cleaning products (made with biodegradable ingredients) and choose paints, insect repellents and other chemicals that are less harmful to the environment.

Protect water systems

Do not dispose of waste in lakes, rivers, streams, seas or oceans. This includes not leaving rubbish in coastal or riverside areas, as wind or rising water levels can cause this waste to end up in water systems. Want to do more? Join or even organise a clean-up near where you live! The Coimbra region has several [river beaches](#), and Figueira da Foz, a seaside town just 40 km from Coimbra and home to a UC campus, has several [beaches](#) [Portuguese content only].

8. CITIZENSHIP, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

The University of Coimbra is committed to building a fairer, more inclusive and diverse academic community that promotes respect for differences, equal opportunities and social participation. It is crucial that our academic community engages in upholding the principles of sustainable development, and, by being a part of it, that you embrace active citizenship as an integral part of this endeavour. Here are some suggestions that you can adopt in your daily life.

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© Arnaud Jaegers

Speak up

Take part in campaigns and petitions that advocate fairer social policies, such as reducing economic inequality and protecting peace and human rights. You can contribute to these initiatives through the [AAC Human Rights section](#) [Portuguese content only]. You can also share relevant content online, join peaceful demonstrations or report misconduct confidentially or anonymously through the UC [in-house whistleblowing channel](#).

Vote

Another powerful way to make your voice heard is to exercise your civic rights and duty: use your vote.

Become a peer tutor

If you consider yourself an expert in a specific subject, offer help to your classmates for free. It's a great way to support inclusion and integration, promote academic success and help reduce drop-out rates. You can even sign up for UC's [Step by Step](#) [Portuguese content only] tutoring programme.

Share knowledge

Share your textbooks, notes and study materials with classmates or upload them to your course repository. Your resources might be just what someone else needs to succeed in their studies!

Communicate with respect

Use inclusive language and respect people's pronouns, or opt for gender-neutral wording where possible. Learn to recognise and avoid microaggressions – hostile or offensive statement or attitude towards some characteristic of the identity of the person listening, usually an insensitive comment, question or assumption that, even if unintentional, may be biased or discriminatory.

Help make online spaces safer

Building a safe, respectful and tolerant environment online is just as important. Think carefully about how your messages might be received to avoid misunderstandings and offences. Whilst it can be easy to forget with the anonymity that the Internet allows, remember that there's always a person on the other side of the screen, so be kind and respectful, and avoid impulsive reactions.





© Tobias Tullius

Protect Privacy

You can find out more about protecting your personal data from the UC's Data Protection Officer [recommendations](#) [Portuguese content only]. Always respect other people's privacy and never forward messages, share information or post photos without their permission.

Choose consciously

Support businesses that are not only environmentally sustainable, but that also respect labour rights and human rights. Your purchasing power can make a difference – opt for companies that align with ethical and fair practices.

Say no to negative discrimination

Avoid generalisations and stereotypes based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. Respect each person's individuality and avoid making assumptions based on appearance, background or choices. Be mindful of differences and open to the importance of learning about other cultures. Avoid making ethnic-racial judgements or generalisations and remain open to valuing the particularities and contributions of each culture.

Promote gender equality

There are many simple ways to support gender equality on a daily basis between women and men, and across sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sexual characteristics. Publicise mechanisms for work-life balance, challenge gender stereotypes – recognising and avoiding assumptions about people's abilities, interests or behaviour based on their gender –, promote and support balanced participation in group discussions and projects, and help ensure all voices are heard are some examples of what can be done daily. UC has an [Equality, Equity and Diversity Plan](#) that sets out concrete actions to fight inequality and promote inclusion.

Celebrate diversity

Talk to new people – at the cafeteria, on the bus, or in the classroom (but not during classes...) – and let them share their perspectives. Learning from different life experiences can broaden your worldview. Respect the right to be different and be open-minded.





Volunteer

Contribute to the SDGs by [volunteering](#) [Portuguese content only] your time to a good cause. Not sure where to start? [Student Hub](#) can help you find who needs you most!

Take part in mobility programmes

Engage in projects that promote international cooperation. Erasmus+ is a great starting point, but there's more. For example, did you know that UC is a part of [EC2U - European Campus of City-Universities](#)? And are you aware of the many active international cooperation protocols that you can resort to? Find out more on the [International Relations unit](#) website.

Stay informed

Keep learning about social issues that affect us today – from poverty and food systems to public health and human rights. Learning is a life-long journey!

Build your financial literacy

Learn to manage your money wisely by making informed choices. For good money management and organisation make a personal budget, turn your dreams into goals and deadlines, save to invest or donate and try not to spend more than you earn.

Donate food wisely

When donating food, consider its nutritional value and the well-being of the recipients. Prioritise healthy products for vulnerable groups and with different dietary needs, such as children, the elderly, and pregnant women.

Practice teamwork

Being able to collaborate, communicate and build synergies is essential in both academic and professional life. Get involved in activities or training opportunities that help you develop and improve strong teamwork skills.



9. YOUR FUTURE IS OUR COMMITMENT

At the University of Coimbra, we are committed to building a sustainable and inclusive future. We recognise our responsibility to drive sustainable development, to lead by example, and inspire positive change within the academic community. Each of us has the power to mitigate our environmental impacts, support more vulnerable communities, and foster meaningful cooperation by sharing knowledge and experiences.

People are at the heart of the University of Coimbra. That's why lasting change in behaviours, attitudes and actions depends on how engaged and aware we are as a community. The suggestions in this guide are here to help you play your part in this transformation. By taking action, you'll be helping us move forward together towards a society that is more aware of its impact.

Find out more about UC's commitment to sustainable development [here](#).



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