

Received: 1 Mar 2024

Accepted: 29 Jul 2024

Published: 7 Oct 2024

Declaration of Interests

Iva Grabarić Andonovski is currently Vice President of EASE, and Mary Hodgson is the Secretary of EASE. The other authors have no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Vicky Gardner (Wiley) for her insightful comments during the development of the survey and Tihana Rubić (University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences) for her help in conducting the workshop.

Data Sharing

The data underpinning the analysis reported in this paper are deposited at the "Data repository - Zenodo" at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13132673>.

Original Article

Sustainable Development Goals in academic publishing: impacts of SDG Publishers Compact and EASE Environmental Manifesto

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Citation

Lad N, Grabarić Andonovski I, Compton D, Wixon J, Hodgson M. Sustainable Development Goals in academic publishing: impacts of SDG Publishers Compact and EASE Environmental Manifesto. *Eur Sci Ed.* 2024;50:e122090.

<https://doi.org/10.3897/ese.2024.e122090>



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Abstract

Background: To enlist publishers and journals in promoting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations and the International Publishers Association (IPA) launched the SDG Publishers Compact in 2020, and the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) published its Environmental Manifesto, a set of recommendations for journal editors on how to contribute to reducing a journal's carbon footprint. It is important to monitor the impact of these initiatives on journal policies for developing future recommendations.

Objectives: The EASE and the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) SDG Publishers Compact Fellows developed a survey to assess the progress made by signatories to the SDG Publishers Compact, detect obstacles that prevent other publishers or journals from signing the compact, assess awareness and implementation of the EASE Environmental Manifesto, and identify other initiatives that promote SDGs.

Methods: A multi-stakeholder group was formed, which included editors and both commercial and non-profit publishers, to design questions suited to journals and organizations at different stages of sustainability action. The survey was designed using SurveyMonkey, introduced in an online workshop, distributed through mailing lists to more than 2000 addresses, and promoted on social networks, and a total of 79 responses were collected and discussed.

Results: Most respondents were representatives of smaller journals based in Europe. The majority were aware of the SDGs, but only half were aware of the SDG Publishers Compact, and only 17 (22%) were signatories to the Compact. Lack of awareness was the major reason for not joining the initiative, followed by lack of time or resources. Respondents focused mostly on quality education, and the majority were acting to achieve at least one SDG. Signatories to the compact mostly have a written environmental policy, have appointed an environmental officer, and are acquiring content related to the SDGs and promoting related activities. Non-signatories are also acting to minimize their environmental impact but have not considered the SDGs in their workflows. Both groups mainly do not have a dedicated budget to achieve the SDGs and have not completed a baseline of their activities. Activities undertaken to reach the SDGs had the most effect on community awareness. Half the respondents were members of EASE and were taking actions aligned with the Environmental Manifesto, mostly towards reducing their journal's carbon footprint, and 25% are following other initiatives aimed at achieving the SDGs as well.

Conclusions: The survey showed that editors of small academic journals were not aware of the SDG Publishers Compact, although most of them are acting to achieve at least one SDG. Signatories to the Compact are implementing SDGs into their workflows and practices, which shows the importance of the initiative. Greater efforts should be undertaken to make the editors of smaller journals aware of the Compact, encourage them to become its signatories, and provide them with more resources and metrics for monitoring their activities.

Keywords:

EASE Environmental Manifesto, journal editors, publishers, SDG Publishers Compact, Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched at the United Nations Summit in 2015¹ with the aim to secure equal rights, end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure the well-being of all people. With 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to reach, the agenda initiated a wide range of activities that could be undertaken by each country, institution, or individual.

The International Publishers Association (IPA) recognized the importance of the initiative and, in 2020, with UN Publications, launched the SDG Publishers Compact,² a set of 10 commitments (Table 1) that publishers, publishing associations, and journal editors could undertake to help achieve the SDGs by 2030. In line with this, the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) published the Environmental Sustainability and Scientific Publishing: A Manifesto (EASE Manifesto) in 2021,³ a set of recommendations for journal

editors to help them reduce their environmental footprint.

To determine the impact of these publishing industry initiatives and to be able to fulfill Commitment No. 3, it is important to monitor and report on progress, which could help to identify best practices and reveal blocks to progress for which new resources and support are needed. The EASE and the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) SDG Publishers Compact Fellows⁴ recognized this need and started a joint initiative to design and conduct a survey of editors, publishers, and those involved in scholarly communication to discover how they (or their organizations) are contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. The absence of such a progress report was also highlighted in a Scholarly Kitchen blog post in late July 2022.⁵ The EASE/HESI survey was launched in October 2022,⁶ with the overall goal to assess publishers' or journals' awareness and usage of the SDG Publishers Compact and

Table 1. Ten Commitments of the SDG Publishers Compact²

	Commitment
1	Committing to the SDGs: stating sustainability policies and targets on our website, including adherence to this compact; incorporating the SDGs and their targets as appropriate
2	Actively promoting and acquiring content that advocates for themes represented by the SDGs, such as equality, sustainability, justice, and safeguarding and strengthening the environment
3	Annually reporting on progress towards achieving the SDGs, sharing data and contributing to benchmarking activities, helping to share best practices, and identifying gaps that still need to be addressed
4	Nominating a person who will promote SDG progress, acting as a point of contact, and coordinating the SDG themes throughout the organization
5	Raising awareness and promoting the SDGs among staff to increase awareness of SDG-related policies and goals and encouraging projects that will help achieve the SDGs by 2030
6	Raising awareness and promoting the SDGs among suppliers, advocating for SDGs, and collaborating on areas that need innovative actions and solutions
7	Becoming an advocate to customers and stakeholders by promoting and actively communicating the SDG agenda through marketing, websites, promotions, and projects
8	Collaborating across cities, countries, and continents with other signatories and organizations to develop, localize, and scale projects that will advance progress on the SDGs individually or through their publishing
9	Dedicating budget and other resources towards accelerating progress for SDG-dedicated projects and promoting SDG principles
10	Taking action on at least one SDG

the EASE Manifesto, as well as to identify the challenges and facilitators for incorporating the 10 commitments of the SDG Publishers Compact.

The first annual IPA SDG Publishers Compact survey⁷ was released at the same time, with the aim of assessing the progress made by the signatories. The EASE/HESI survey, however, had several goals: (1) to discover the progress institutions or journals that are signatories to the SDG Publishers Compact have made towards the 10 commitments; (2) for those who are not yet signatories, to identify their future plans and any obstacles they have encountered to becoming signatories; and (3) to ascertain other sustainability initiatives that participants endorse, primarily the EASE Manifesto.³

Therefore, the aim of our study was to gather data on the activities related to the environment and sustainability being undertaken in the editing and publishing community and to identify the areas for which more resources and support are needed to drive progress.

Methods

A survey was developed using SurveyMonkey, comprising 18 questions plus an option to provide contact details for those who wanted to receive feedback about the survey (see Supplementary file), with an estimated completion time of 10 minutes. As our purpose was to understand the progress made, actions taken, and challenges experienced by institutions or journals, participants were not expected to respond as individuals; therefore, no questions were asked about the age, gender, career stage, or role of a participant, in accordance with the data minimization principle set in Article 5 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).⁸ In any case, such personal data were neither necessary nor relevant to our purpose.

Before launching the survey, a 1-hour workshop was held (on October 12, 2022) to explain the aim of the survey, to check if all 112 participants in the workshop had interpreted the survey questions correctly, and to revise them as required. Only minor revisions were required, and these made the questions clearer and easier to understand. An invitation to join the workshop was emailed to members of EASE (a total of 688, almost 80% of whom were from Europe), members of sister societies and regional chapters, 988 SDG Publishers Compact Fellows and their virtual community members, and 285 signatories to the compact. Additionally, the survey was promoted widely through SDG Publishers Compact Fellows and EASE social media (LinkedIn, X, and Facebook, with several thousand followers in total).

The survey was launched after the workshop and ran from October 25 to December 1, 2022. The questionnaire was sent to all the contacts from the above-mentioned mailing lists using MailChimp, and repeated reminders were posted on social media and also published in the EASE newsletter.

Results

A total of 79 responses were received (if we assume that the majority of the respondents had participated in the workshop; about 70% of workshop participants completed the survey). Only about 40, or roughly half of respondents completed the latter part (questions 11-18) of the survey, which limits the possibility for valid statistical analysis (the number of institutions or journals responding is mentioned in each of the findings).

The first 4 questions were designed to determine the profile of the participants, as shown in Table 2. Of the 79 respondents, 53 (67%) completed the questionnaire on behalf of their journal; 19 (24%), on behalf of their institution; and the remaining 7 (9%) chose the

Table 2. Characteristics of survey participants

Feature or Parameter	Number	Percentage
Answering on behalf of		
Journal	53	67
Institution	19	24
Other	7	9
Location		
Europe	63	80
North America	4	5
Asia/Asia-Pacific	3	4
Africa	1	1
South America	8	10
Number of employees (size)		
0-49 (small)	52	66
50-249 (medium)	12	15
250+ (large)	15	19

option “Other” and represented independent contractors, providers of editorial services, independent freelance editors, and so on. Because various organizations and journals are involved in the work of EASE and HESI, this survey covered a diverse array of participants, from large global publishing houses, societies, universities, and industry associations to individual independent journals in a range of subject areas. Most of the participants or the headquarters of their offices were based in Europe, likely due to the fact that half of the respondents were EASE members.

As for the size of the journal or institution, the survey covered mostly smaller journals or publishers, representing societies, universities, and institutions.

Questions 5 and 6 aimed at determining the level of participants’ awareness of the SDGs and of the compact (Figure 1). Most (62, or 78%) of the respondents were aware of the SDGs, whereas 17 (22%) were not. Of those who were aware, 42 (68%) belonged to small institutions or journals. Also, of the 79 participants, 42 (53%) were aware of the compact and, of these, 26 represented smaller institutions or journals.

Questions 7 and 8 asked whether the participant’s institution or journal was a signatory to the compact and, if not, whether it intended to become one. Of the respondents, 17 were signatories, 8 of which were smaller institutions or journals and 8 were larger organizations. Of the 62 respondents who were not signatories, 44 (71%) were smaller organizations, 46 (74%) were journals, and only 10 (7 of which were smaller institutions or journals) said that their institution or journal intends to be a signatory (Figure 1).

Those who answered “No” or “Maybe” to the question on their intention to become a signatory were asked, in Question 9, to state what obstacles prevented them from doing

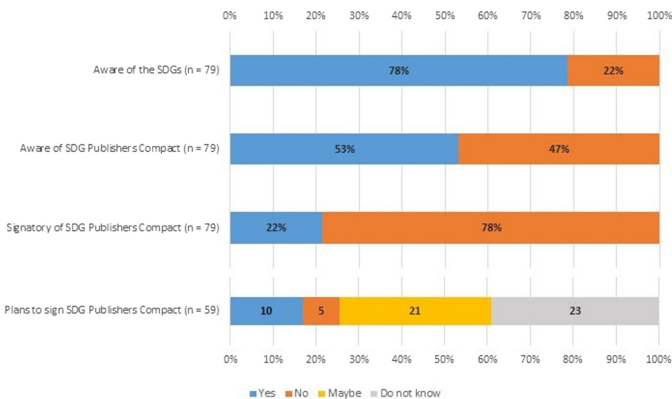


Figure 1. Extent of awareness of the SDGs and of the SDG Publishers Compact and current or future status as a signatory to the Compact.

so and to choose all applicable options. It can be seen from the results presented in Figure 2 that the main obstacle was lack of awareness, followed by the lack of time or resources.

These results are particularly relevant because the IPA SDG Publishers Compact survey⁷ was limited only to the signatories, 70% of them being publishers, whereas the present survey mostly included participants who were either not signatories (78%) or were not currently planning to become signatories; therefore, the present survey identified the most important obstacles that prevented the participants from joining the initiative.

Question 10 aimed to identify the SDGs that the institutions or journals were most focused on, and the results from the 68 participants who responded are shown in Table 3. It is evident that most of the publishers or journals were focused on SDG 4 (Quality education), followed by SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), and SDG 13 (Climate action). The top priority accorded to SDG 4 reflects the most commonly referenced SDG implemented at universities.⁹

When the participants of this survey were asked to provide examples of activities they had undertaken related to the above SDGs, the 19 responses from institutions or journals

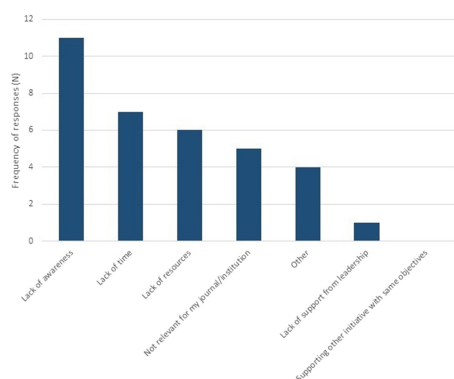


Figure 2. Main obstacles preventing non-signatories from signing the SDG Publishers Compact (n = 34).

Table 3. Distribution of the focus of institutions or journals (n = 68) on individual SDGs (multiple answers considered, and the most commonly chosen SDG was given the top rank)

Sustainable Development Goal	Number of Institutions or Journals	Rank by Response Frequency
1: No poverty	8	12
2: Zero hunger	8	12
3: Good health and well-being	25	3
4: Quality education	38	1
5: Gender equality	27	2
6: Clean water and sanitation	16	7
7: Affordable and clean energy	13	9
8: Decent work and economic growth	7	13
9: Industry, innovation, and infrastructure	18	6
10: Reduced inequalities	22	4
11: Sustainable cities and communities	13	9
12: Responsible consumption and production	16	7
13: Climate action	20	5
14: Life below water	8	12
15: Life on land	14	8
16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions	10	10
17: Partnerships for the goals	18	6
None of the above	9	11

included the following: offering diamond open access (no APCs, or article-processing charges); increasing access for the poor and minorities or for low- or middle-income countries; commissioning, publishing, and promoting content related to the SDGs; activities related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI); reducing energy consumption and setting net-zero goals; organizing webinars and courses; and reducing the number of printed copies of journals. Some respondents also

elaborated on the responses separately for each SDG:

“Sustainable Development Goal 2: Promoting sustainable food production and responsible use of genetic resources; Sustainable Development Goal 3: Providing information for developing efficient pharmaceuticals and vaccines, helping practitioners fight diseases such as COVID-19; Sustainable Development Goal 4: Providing valuable tools for higher education, helping young researchers and science editors to develop relevant skills, promoting open access, good editorial practices, and the highest research and ethical standards; Sustainable Development Goal 5: Providing equal publishing opportunities to both genders, promoting gender balance in the office and editorial board; Sustainable Development Goal 9: Enabling the exchange of information among scientists and between researchers and practitioners, providing research data and information on the latest developments in the field; Sustainable Development Goal 12: Promoting responsible consumption of resources, waste reduction, recycling, and reuse; Sustainable Development Goal 13: Promoting environmental sustainability in alignment with the EASE Manifesto.”

It is evident from these answers that journal editors and publishers are finding different ways of promoting the SDGs, predominantly by drawing up editorial policies that reduce inequalities, providing research information and tools for higher education, and publishing content that promotes quality education, good health, sustainability, and environmental awareness.

Approximately 45% of respondents answered Question 11, which was about the extent to which the respondent's institution or journal

had incorporated the 10 commitments (listed in Table 1) of the SDG Publishers Compact² into its policies, procedures, and activities.

As might be expected, this question revealed marked differences between the progress of the signatories and non-signatories (Figure 3). Because the respondents were fewer, it is hard to arrive at a clear conclusion; however, the most implemented commitment overall was No. 10 – taking action on at least one SDG – with 17 respondents having completely or considerably implemented this work.

Of the 14 signatories who responded to some or all parts of Question 11, 80% have completely or considerably kept not only this commitment but also four more, namely No. 1 (70%), No. 2 (55%), No. 4 (60%), and No. 5 (60%) (Figure 3; the commitments are listed in Table 1). On the other hand, only a third report annually on progress (No. 3) or have a dedicated budget (No. 9), and even fewer have raised awareness among suppliers (No. 6). The survey by IPA of the signatories to the Compact⁷ showed similar results for commitments No. 4 (68%) and No. 2 (53%); however, 72% of the respondents in that survey had a dedicated budget (No. 9), which is the main difference between that survey and the present survey.

The commitments most commonly not kept or minimally implemented by the 30 non-signatories who responded to some or all parts of Question 11 were Nos. 4, 3, 1, 9, 6, 7, and 8: the respondents did not have the relevant sustainability policies and procedures, nor dedicated staff or budget for that, and did little to raise awareness of the SDGs or to collaborate with other publishers (Figure 3).

In the IPA survey,⁷ 52% of the respondents said that they report on their commitment to the SDGs and progress publicly (Commitment No. 3) every year; 68% had appointed a lead person, and 25% more were aiming to do so

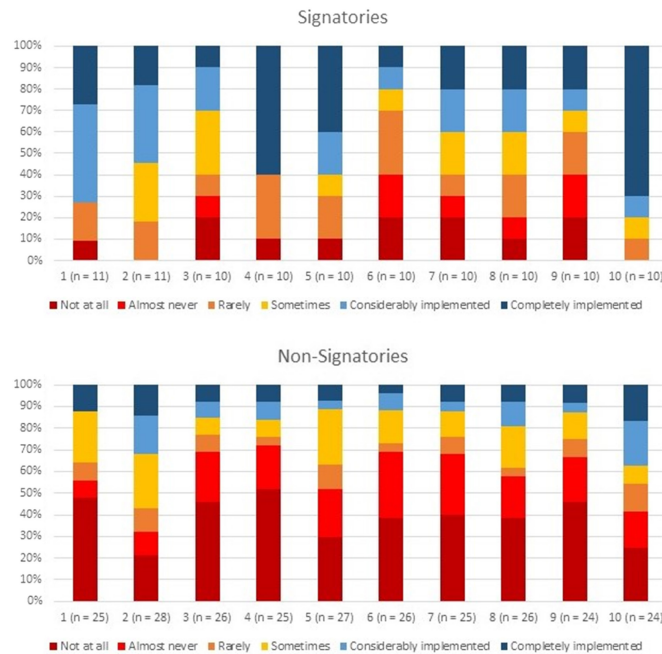


Figure 3. The extent to which the 10 commitments were kept by signatories to the SDG Publishers Compact (top) and non-signatories (bottom) as reflected in the institutional or journal policies, procedures, and activities. Each bar corresponds to 1 commitment, and all 10 are listed in Table 1. The total number of respondents ranged from 34 to 39.

in the next 12 months (Commitment No. 4); and 77% had communicated their commitment to their customers or members (Commitment No. 7). We can see that most of the participants in our survey, who mainly (66%) represented smaller journals or publishers, were either not aware or were struggling to find a way to implement the SDGs through institutional policies and procedures and promote them among all stakeholders. As for the collaboration with other signatories, organizations, or publishers, only half the participants in the IPA survey responded positively, and our survey confirms that this percentage was even lower for small academic journals (Figure 3).

Questions 12 and 13 looked at how institutions or journals were tracking progress. Only 7 of 42 respondents (17%) had completed a baseline analysis of their activities (as a starting point) in relation to the SDGs: 5 of those respondents were signatories; 33 said

that they had not undertaken such an analysis, and 2 had done so only in part (data not shown). The year in which the 5 signatories had undertaken that analysis varied from 2017 to 2023, and one was just about to undertake that analysis. Institutions or journals were asked about the indicators or metrics used for measuring the effectiveness of their policies and procedures. Only 8 participants (19%) responded. The responses included rankings, downloads, submission volume, citations, website analytics, EDI with respect to members, committees, and leadership, usage or time spent on article collection, and tracking the carbon footprint of their operations.

The respondents were asked about the impact of the compact or of any other SDG-related activities (Question 14); 41 participants (52%) responded to this question (Figure 4). As expected, half of those who responded were unaware of the impacts. The most beneficial impact was on community awareness,

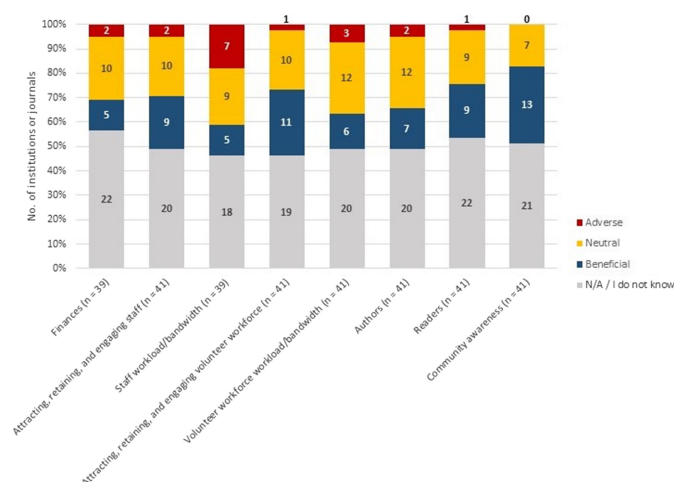


Figure 4. The impact of undertaking SDG Publishers Compact or similar activities or initiatives on journals or publishers.

followed by attracting, retaining, and engaging a volunteer workforce. Seven respondents mentioned an adverse impact on staff workload or bandwidth (the capacity to handle the workload). Space was also provided to the respondents to add comments. Some said they do not have specific activities targeted at the SDGs or indicators, and one made an interesting comment: “SDG projects have costs, and these are adverse, but sometimes the benefits may be positive. Effect on staff is difficult to gauge as we had many staff leaving after COVID-19, and SDGs were not relevant to this turnover.”

In contrast to the IPA survey,⁷ the present survey sought to ascertain the impact of other initiatives, such as the EASE Environmental Manifesto.³ Therefore, Questions 15-17 related to EASE membership, activities aligned with the EASE Manifesto, and any other similar initiatives of which the respondents were aware.

Of the 48 respondents, 27 (56%) who answered this part of the survey were members of EASE, 20 of whom were aware of the EASE Manifesto, and 7 other non-members were also aware of the Manifesto (data not shown). Journals or institutions were asked (Question 17) about the extent to which they had

undertaken the activities proposed in the EASE Manifesto (Figure 5). Of about 45 who answered this question, most (31, or 67%) had “completely or considerably implemented” recycling at their offices and 30 had “completely or considerably implemented” the idea of facilitating working from home. Over 50% of the respondents had considered the implications of print versus digital publication and had acted to reduce the carbon footprint of the printing and distribution of their journals.

Just less than half (19) of the respondents chose the option “Not at all” when asked whether they had an environmental policy or appointed a dedicated environmental officer to champion the cause within the workforce—which is, understandably, more difficult for smaller organizations with limited staff. The respondents were also asked to list any other activities they had undertaken, and 5 of them listed the following activities.

1. Reducing print, distributing materials electronically, reducing travel and in-person meetings, reducing heating or cooling
2. Focusing on limiting the environmental impact of travel and working with vendor partners

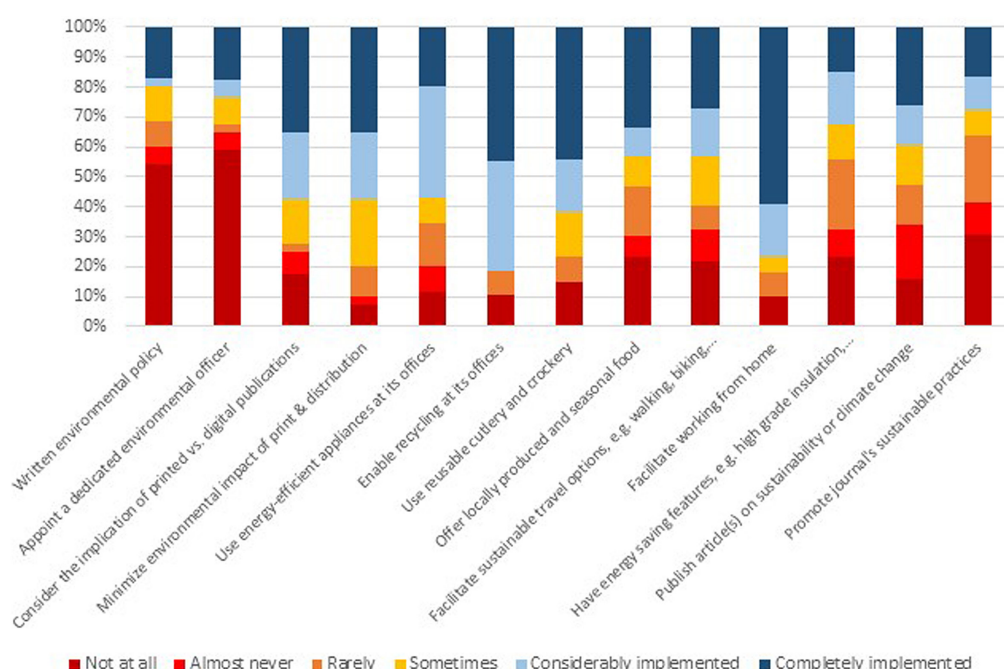


Figure 5. The extent to which activities suggested in the EASE Manifesto were undertaken by journals or institutions (the number of respondents for each suggested activity was either 45 or 46).

3. Drawing up climate action plans to reduce emissions to net zero.
4. Providing charging points for electric vehicles
5. Minimizing travel for conferences and meetings by offering hybrid and online options, and replacing all written communication sent by post with digital communication sent through emails.

Of the 48 who answered Question 18, 12 said that their journal or institution is involved in other initiatives to support the SDGs related to the environment and sustainability. Among these initiatives were Publishing Declares,¹⁰ a sustainability pledge aimed at climate action and launched by the Publishers Association in 2021, endorsed by 197 signatories from the UK book and journal publishing industry so far; carbon net zero in line with the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi)¹¹ that brings together companies with a clearly defined path to reduce emissions in line with the Paris Agreement goals; Carbon Neutral,¹² travelling less

frequently to attend conferences and using rail travel more than air travel, reminding workers of recycling, setting aside days for working from home, and printing only the necessary papers.

Discussion

This survey aimed to discover the progress that signatories to the SDG Publishers Compact² have made, to find out obstacles that prevent non-signatories from joining the initiative, and to identify what other sustainability initiatives participants endorse, including the EASE Environmental Sustainability and Scientific Publishing: a Manifesto.³ The respondents were mainly editors of small academic journals that were not signatories to the Compact, which sets this survey apart from the IPA survey⁷ conducted at the same time, which involved respondents who were all signatories to the compact and mostly publishers—a distinction that provides a good basis for comparison. This was one of the main advantages of

the survey, in that it detected problems at the level of small journals or publishers, who command limited resources and thus have to struggle to take on the commitments listed in the SDG Publishers Compact². The latter part of the survey (questions 11-18) received 45% responses and hence it was difficult to provide a thorough analysis and arrive at generalizable results.

The results point out a lack of awareness of the Compact among small academic journals (except for the signatories to the Compact). A reason for concern is that even though the UN has put a great deal of effort into promoting the SDGs and has developed a set of recommendations on how to achieve the goals, many journal editors or publishers are not aware of those goals or recommendations. Despite such lack of awareness, the respondents appeared to be aligned with the SDGs to some extent and are taking steps in their own capacity.

Editors and publishers of small journals recognize their role in raising the quality of education and reducing inequalities, which is highly commendable, and are therefore mostly focused on those SDGs. The survey by IPA showed a slightly different focus of publishers, mostly pointing at climate action.

Most of the respondents who were signatories to the Compact are acting to achieve at least one SDG. They have also published sustainability policies and targets, actively promote and acquire content related to the SDGs, and have nominated a person who promotes the SDGs, monitor progress and raise awareness, and promote the SDGs among staff. These results are similar to those of the IPA survey,⁷ which showed that besides seeking to achieve at least one goal, publishers are actively acquiring content related to the SDGs and have nominated a person for promoting the SDGs and monitoring progress to the same extent.

Non-signatories are also acting to achieve at least one SDG and to acquire and promote content related to the SDGs to some extent; however, they struggle to find the required resources and to appoint a person who will implement the sustainability policies, promote the SDGs, and monitor progress. Only a small percentage of both signatories and non-signatories have a dedicated budget. More effort needs to be made to allocate resources, support journal editors, and facilitate the implementation of the 10 commitments (listed in Table 1). A higher level of collaboration among small academic journals should be encouraged, and this is something to work on more in the near future.

The majority of the respondents did not use a formal method, indicators, or metrics for reporting or documenting their actions, probably because of a lack of staff and bandwidth for taking those extra steps. Recommending useful metrics is crucial, as is developing tools to monitor progress.

Most of the survey participants (75%) who were members of EASE were aware of the EASE Manifesto; this large share shows that this initiative is well promoted among the members. As expected, they tend to engage in easier activities such as recycling, not printing, working from home, or traveling less, but they do not draw up policies or appoint a dedicated environmental officer.

Some of the survey participants (25%) responded that they are involved in other initiatives¹⁰⁻¹² that are also relevant to reach the SDGs. It should be pointed out that many resources are available from the HESI SDG Publishers Compact Fellows,¹³ with examples of actions by publishers and journals shown on the IPA SDG Dashboard¹⁴ that were not mentioned by the participants in the survey. Guidance is also available in the STM SDG Sustainability Roadmap,^{15,16} which suggests

concrete steps that all publishers – regardless of their size or available resources – can undertake to achieve the SDGs. Along with IPA, the International Association of Scientific, Technical, and Medical Publishers (STM), and EASE, the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP) is also raising awareness, taking action, and providing resources, as reported in The Scholarly Kitchen blog post in February 2023.¹⁷ In the environmental sustainability space, there are several publishing industry initiatives^{18–20} and wider standards^{21,22} that publishers and journals can take advantage of. According to Höller and co-workers,²³ scientists and staff in universities are mostly motivated towards sustainability by personal motivation; however, staff of journals and publishers are equally motivated by incentives and policies of the employers, as are journals to act sustainably by government incentives or policies. The results of the present study may also reflect policies at the publisher or national level; for example, recycling is mandatory in the European Union, and most of the participants in the survey were from Europe, which is why a tendency to engage in this activity may possibly be the result of government policies that promote environmental awareness and sustainability. Working from home is also being implemented widely and could be related to the COVID-19 pandemic, since many people worked from home during the pandemic, and some institutions or publishers are still promoting that option as a way of reducing costs for heat, electricity, and the internet. It can be concluded that incentives and policies at the publishers' or, even more, at the national level, could be crucial for reaching the SDGs.

As for the other stakeholders, academic libraries also play an important role in promoting SDGs. According to the reports,^{24,25} such libraries are mainly focused on SDG 4

(Quality education), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, justice, and strong institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals) and can be particularly relevant to organizing information into “green” or “environmental” collections, which is of interest to the journals and publishers as well.

Likewise, in the EDI space, several industry initiatives and committees^{22,26,27} provide guidance to support action. The Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communication (C4DISC) has launched The Focused Toolkit for Journal Editors and Publishers: Building EDI, and Accessibility in Editorial Roles and Peer Review,²² which encourages editors and publishers to create a more inclusive work environment, increase diversity, create equal opportunities, use bias-free language, and follow more equitable peer review models.

Embracing the principles of open access can also stimulate progress towards the SDGs by reducing inequalities (SDG 10), providing quality education (SDG 4), and, more specifically, by fostering innovation and enabling access to research that promotes, for example, clean energy solutions (SDG 7) or clean water (SDG 6) or provides ways to combat diseases and secure good health and well-being in alignment with SDG 3.²⁸

According to some authors,^{23,29} the sustainability factor could be used for ranking journals or as a tool for authors to choose among journals. Data on the SDGs are already included in Scopus and used as a tool for the Times Higher Education's Impact Rankings.²⁹ Development of an indicator that shows the journal's alignment with the SDGs could guide scientists to sustainable publishers or journals.

One of the limitations of our study could be the absence of personal details, such as sex, gender, and age, of the participants since

these details were not collected during the survey. We complied with Article 5 of the General Data Protection Regulation⁸ on data minimization and presumed that these variables would have no influence upon actions related to the SDGs or upon the progress of institutions or journals. Another limitation is the small sample size and the fact that only about half the respondents answered the latter part of the survey, a limitation that prevents us from drawing valid conclusions based on proper statistical analysis and data generalization. Nevertheless, the results are particularly relevant to identifying actions by the editors and publishers of small journals, who are usually hampered by the lack of resources; these actions could be useful in preparing future guidelines.

The present survey thus managed to identify the extent of awareness among participants in the survey, activities undertaken, and challenges faced by small academic journals related to the SDGs. The survey revealed a marked difference between the progress made by signatories to the compact and that made by non-signatories. Although the progress made by the signatories could be explained by the fact that half of the respondents who signed the Compact were larger publishers and organizations promoting the SDGs in their policies and practices, we would also argue that signing the Compact is in itself a driver of progress and helps to focus the efforts of an organization or a journal on the 10 commitments (Table 1). The results of the survey point out that although journal editors and publishers are taking some actions in their own capacities, including those recommended in the EASE Environmental Sustainability and Scientific Publishing: A Manifesto, greater awareness of the SDGs is needed, especially among non-signatories to the compact. Small academic publishers, as well as large

ones, need to develop their environmental and sustainability policies, allocate a budget, and appoint a person to work towards attaining the SDGs. Also, the results show a strong need to develop metrics for monitoring the impact of SDG-related activities and progress. All stakeholders in scholarly communication should join in the efforts to reach the SDGs. Therefore, we encourage any publishers, publishing associations, or journals (regardless of their size) that have not yet signed the Compact to consider taking this positive step towards supporting the SDGs.

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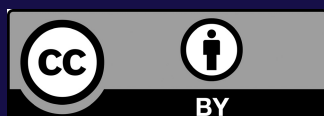
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