

WU Competence Center Sustainability Transformation & Responsibility (STaR)

**From One Academic Year to the Next:
Reflections & Outlook**



Vienna University of Economics and Business

Building EA, 1.034 Welthandelsplatz 1

1020 Vienna, Austria

Website: <https://www.wu.ac.at/en/star>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/wustarcenter>

Dear Friends of STaR,

We are pleased to share with you our key highlights from the **2024–2025** academic year, along with our plans for **2025–2026**.

At STaR, we are committed to supporting WU's societal responsibility as a driver of sustainable transformations. We do so by:

- *Bundling knowledge across different disciplines and disseminating it in a variety of formats, making WU's research on sustainability more accessible to a broader public*
- *Serving as a liaison between the WU community (faculty, staff, students, and alumni—including executive MBAs) and its external stakeholders (international sustainability networks, intergovernmental organizations, businesses, and the public)*
- *Supporting sustainability curricula development and Theses Writing for Impact*
- *Carrying out Third Mission projects*

It has been a dynamic and productive year for all these activities. We are especially grateful to our affiliated WU faculty members who have participated in our various projects and events as co-hosts, speakers, panelists, or scientific advisors. To name just a few examples: **Franziska Weder** led an expert session on sustainability communication at our Green LEAP initiative. **Jesús Crespo Cuaresma** was a panelist at the event “Can We Save the Planet With More Growth?,” and will join us again for the upcoming WU Matters WU Talks in November. **Michael Müller-Camen** and his team are contributing their expertise to the STaR Sustainable Work Lab project.

We are also delighted to share some impact updates from our core team. **Sigrid Stagl** was recognized as *Researcher of the Year* by the Austrian Club of Journalists for Education and Science, for her commitment to climate protection and communicating science to the public. **Milda Žilinskaitė** was invited to provide input to the report of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights and contributed public dissemination articles through the *World Economic Forum*, *The World Bank*, and *The Conversation*. The **RCE Vienna** team, headed by **Christian Rammel** and deputy-head **Marie-Sophie Attems**, attracted EU funding for Third Mission projects such as INSIGHT (ongoing), and The UrbanShift, The Green Skills Challenge, and Green LEAP (all completed). All of this work is explicitly focused on bridging gaps between knowledge, practice, and education, reflecting STaR's mission at WU.

Our thematic reach is broad—encompassing the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainable development as defined within the UN SDG framework. Our **collective body of publications** reflects this breadth. We also strive to maintain a balance between environmentally and socially oriented topics when planning our events.

We hope you enjoy reading this brochure!



Sigrid Stagl



Milda Žilinskaitė



Christian Rammel



Marie-Sophie Attems

Our mission:

to support WU's societal responsibility as a driver of sustainable transformations

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[Involvement for All](#)
[Sustainability Reports](#)
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[STaR Team](#)
[STaR Faculty](#)
[Members](#)
[RCE Vienna](#)

STAR SDG-HUB
[STaR SDG Videos](#)
[STaR Sustainable Work Lab](#)
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[Inside Impact Podcast](#)
[STaR intro to ESGs](#)



STaR

Center for
Sustainability Transformation
and Responsibility

THIRD MISSION
[RCE Vienna](#)
[TM Projects](#)

FOR STUDENTS
[BA/MA Theses](#)
[Studying Sustainability](#)
[Fun facts](#)

STAR RESOURCES
[STaR Research](#)
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[Archive](#)
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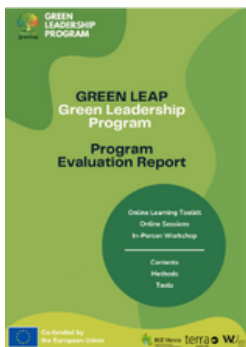
Looking back (2024-2025): STaR Faculty Member Engagement

Over the past academic year, we teamed up with our affiliated [Faculty Members](#) from various departments to promote the broader dissemination of their research beyond academia through diverse forms of public engagement. Here are a few highlights.

Research Handbook Launch. *Sustainable Project Management*, edited by Gilbert Silvius and STaR Faculty Member **Martina Huemann**. Opening notes were provided by Sigrid Stagl (STaR), Gernot Sauer (Wiener Stadtwerke) and Max Panaro (MAIRE). For more information about the book's contents, click [here](#).



Podium discussion. "Natural Disasters – Who is Going to Pay?" Organized by WU's Law Departments in collaboration with *Die Presse*. Among the panelists was STaR Faculty Member **Stefan Perner**, together with Thomas Hlatky (Grazer Wechelseitige), Christian Prantner (AK Wien), Franz Sinabell (Wifo/Vienna University), and Gerlind Weber (BOKU University). Event description (in German) can be found [here](#).



Free training for SMEs and startups across Europe. Led by STaR RCE Vienna colleagues Marie-Sophie Attems and Adam Greene, the Green LEAP project tackled issues such as greenwashing and the effective, responsible communication of sustainability. STaR Faculty Member **Franziska Weder** was one of the experts who led individual online sessions. The program report is available for download on the [STaR website](#).

Panel discussion "Can We Save the Planet With More Growth?" Co-organized by WU's SEEP students, Degrowth Vienna, and STaR. STaR Faculty Member **Jesús Crespo Cuaresma** participated as an invited panelist, along with Colleen Schneider (WU), Elisabeth Götze (Member of Parliament, The Greens), Anke Schaffartzik (CEU), and Logan Strenchock (CEU). The event recording is available on [STaR Event Video Archive](#)



Martina Huemann



Stefan Perner



Franziska Weder



Jesús Crespo Cuaresma

Looking back (2024-2025): STaR Faculty Member Engagement

We'd also like to draw attention to the following topic-specific external engagements by affiliated **STaR Faculty Members**, with international reach:

- [WU Privacy & Sustainable Computing Lab](#): **Sarah Spiekermann-Hoff** is a Cofounder of this initiative
- The [World Poverty Clock](#) by the [World Data Lab](#): **Jesús Crespo Cuaresma** is a Principal Advisor, Data Science
- [SoundslikeSustainability](#): **Franziska Weder** runs this Youtube channel



We are grateful to **Bernadette Kamleitner**, Vice-Rector for Research and Third Mission and STaR Faculty Member, for bringing together WU's vibrant sustainability research community at one of the first WU Research Encounters in 2024.

The [WU Research Encounters](#) program features a series of 8-minute flash talks by scholars from across WU's departments. Each talk explores a different aspect of research on a selected topic, highlighting the breadth of scholarship at WU. The goal is to share insights and identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration.



Sarah Spiekermann-Hoff



Jesús Crespo Cuaresma



Franziska Weder



Bernadette Kamleitner

Looking back (2024-2025): STaR Events

In addition to cross-campus initiatives involving STaR Affiliated Faculty members, in academic year 2024-2025, we (co)organized and (co)hosted several **larger-scale events** that aligned with our mission to support WU's societal responsibility as a driver of sustainable transformations. To make these events possible, we **collaborated** with other **academic units and faculty at WU**, **partner universities** in Austria and abroad, as well as major **business school accreditation** and membership bodies (AACSB & EFMD), thus reducing costs and expanding our international reach.

Business Schools & Migration: The Elephant in the Room (December 3, 2024)

Business Schools & Migration: The Elephant in the Room

December 3, 2024



Rachel Cowburn-Walden
Unilever

Aurret van Heerden
Equiception

Chris Forde
University of Leeds

Eileen McAuliffe
AACSB International

Edgar Meyer
University of Birmingham

Piet Naudé
EFMD

Webinar co-hosted by Migration, Business & Society, Centre for International Business at the University of Leeds (CIBUL), and Competence Center for Sustainability Transformation & Responsibility (STaR) at Vienna University of Economics and Business.

This global webinar, organized in collaboration with the Centre for International Business at the University of Leeds and the Migration, Business & Society initiative, had 280 registered attendees. Rachel Cowburn-Walden (Unilever) and Aurret van Heerden (Equiception) discussed current migration challenges—including climate mobilities—in global value chains. Edgar Meyer (University of Birmingham) addressed immigration policy changes in UK. Eileen McAuliffe (AACSB) and Piet Naudé (EFMD) provided perspectives from the world's two leading business school accreditation bodies.

WU Matters WU Talks: Destroying Nature to Save It (January 15, 2025)

This in-person event, in collaboration with the Department of Socioeconomics, attracted over 300 participants. The keynote by Clive L. Spash, Chair of Public Policy & Governance at the Institute for Spatial and Social-Ecological Transformations, addressed the economic fallacies of the green transition. This was followed by a panel discussion with Ursula Bittner (Greenpeace), Jutta Kill (World Rainforest Movement), Vincent Liegey (Cargonomia), and Christina Plank (BOKU University).



Looking back (2024-2025): STaR Events

Lecture Series by Vienna Animal Studies Group (VAS)

(March-June 2025)

VAS is an interdisciplinary, cross-institutional group that includes scholars from WU and other Austrian universities, dedicated to advancing animal studies through research, engaging blog posts, and thought-provoking publications. We collaborated on their lecture series focusing on SDG14, SDG15, and SDG11. The audience size varied from 30 to 70 participants. WU speakers included Doris Schneeberger and Claudia Hirtenfelder.



Urban Shift Summit

(June 26, 2025)



This final Summit marked the conclusion of RCE Vienna's three-year Erasmus+ initiative and celebrated the achievements of the student-led start-ups. It brought together academic and industry partners from five European countries to support students in developing practical, transdisciplinary solutions to urban sustainability challenges. The final event featured an exhibition of developed prototypes, presentations by Urban Shift alumni, and a panel discussion on sustainable entrepreneurship as a challenge-based learning tool for transdisciplinary groups.

Looking back (2024-2025): STaR For Students & STaR Resources

SDG4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” is at the core of STaR’s mission as a university-based Competence Center. As in previous years, our core team remained actively involved in developing WU’s **sustainability curricula** and personally contributed to **teaching across various programs**, including SEEP and EMBA.

Our signature course is the [Sustainability Challenge](#), run by RCE Vienna—an innovative, cross-disciplinary, and cross-institutional program that includes Service Learning and Start-up tracks.



As with our research dissemination efforts, we have sought synergies and maintained collaborations with various academic and administrative units at WU to ensure continuous support for students. These include:

Volunteering@WU, the **International Office**, **WU Executive Academy**, **SEEP/CEMS/SIMC** Master’s programs, **Program Management and Teaching & Learning Support**, and the **Innovation Office**.



In addition:

- STaR remains a point of contact at WU for both individual students interested in sustainability and Master's clubs focused on sustainability and responsibility. We offer a unique resource: an annually updated list of 170+ potential thesis supervisors at WU for sustainability-related topics. The list can be downloaded here: [BA/MA Theses: Writing for Impact](#)
- We post on our website and LinkedIn **interviews with students** who have successfully completed their theses on sustainable development topics. This promotes the efforts of both students and their supervisors.
- Other STaR pages that are particularly relevant for students include [Involvement for All](#), [STaR SDG-Hub](#), and [STaR Resource Library](#).



Competence Center
for Sustainability
Transformation and
Responsibility

2025-2026
Looking Ahead



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We look forward to the upcoming academic year and to continuing to serve as **WU's go-to platform** for sustainability research communication, curricula development, and outreach.

As outlined in our Target Agreements with WU's Rectorate for 2024–2027, our activities will align with the following **two pathways**:

Fostering the reputation and relationships we have already established by maintaining our core activities at the highest quality level

Initiating and carrying out larger projects that align with the STaR mission and contribute to WU's internationalization efforts.

Our view is that sustaining our core strengths is just as important as breaking new ground.

- **Supporting** STaR Faculty Members and other WU faculty working on sustainability-related topics. We conducted interviews with many of our affiliated members and will continue to do so in order to deepen our understanding of their needs and how their work within their departments enriches STaR's activities—and vice versa
- **Connecting** these faculty to potential theses supervisees and to external stakeholders looking for expert speakers and academic collaborators
- **Collaborating** with other organizational units at WU: International Office, Program Management and Teaching & Learning Support, Executive Academy, Innovation Office, Volunteering@WU, and other Competence Centers
- **Liaising** with Master's clubs and responding to individual student and alumni inquiries
- **Representing** WU at Austrian (CCCA), European (Copernicus), and global (NBS, GBSN) sustainability networks
- **Assisting** WU in its accreditation efforts (AACSB, EQUIS, and AMBA)

- **Engaging** in the development of new sustainability-oriented curricula and content
- **Expanding** external STaR stakeholder network: identifying new contacts and collaboration opportunities
- **Securing** funding and support for new Third Mission projects

Looking ahead: STaR Sustainable Work Lab

The **Sustainable Work Lab** project aims to target 7 key SDGs, directly related to the future workplace. It is both an update and a continuation of the STaR SDG Video Project (2020-2024) and, more broadly, our offer of learning materials through the [STaR SDG Hub](#) and [STaR Resource Library](#).

Our aim is to create a go-to hub for showcasing WU's latest research on the future of sustainable work, creating visibility and accessibility in one unified platform.

We are currently in the content production phase. Our key collaborators include STaR Faculty Member **Michael Müller-Camen** and his team, as well as **Lars Maydell**—Executive Coach and Managing Partner at MAYDELL Advice—who also serves as a lecturer and coordinator of the Coaching Program at the WU Executive Academy. The project is led by **Kateřina Krebsová**, a CEMS alumna & STaR Fellow.

Expected completion date: Winter 2026.



Michael Müller-Camen



Brian Matthews



Stefanie Neubauer



Lars Maydell



Kateřina Krebsová

Looking ahead: Climate Launchpad Grand Global Finals

ClimateLaunchpad (CLP) is the world's largest competition for early-stage green business ideas, started in 2014. The program supports the development of innovative solutions to combat climate change and accelerate the transition to a more sustainable economy.

In Austria, CLP is run by [Thinkubator.earth](https://thinkubator.earth), an interdisciplinary think and do tank founded by two WU alumni. STaR has closely collaborated with the Thinkubator team since its founding, and we are excited to be involved again with the CLP this year.



The three winning teams (out of nine highly competitive and innovative pitches) of this year's National Finals in Austria were announced at KURIER's **Speak Out Festival** on June 17, where our core team also took part in several activities.

Coming up is the **Grand Global Final of Climate Launchpad**, to be held for the first time in Austria in **October 2025**.

STaR collaboration with Thinkubator has already expanded into several other teaching and Third Mission-related activities, and CLP continues to enhance our visibility both locally and internationally.



Looking ahead:

No sustainable development without migration

Migration is integral to sustainable development, as reflected in **migration-related SDG targets** (e.g., 5.2, 8.5, 8.8, 10.c, 10.7). At WU, a growing number of research initiatives are addressing urgent migration-related questions, both across various institutes and within STaR's core team. In the 2024–2025 academic year, we will consolidate these efforts to disseminate current work to the broader public and provide policy advice, thereby seeking to further contribute to the WU Rectorate's work program priorities on *Synergies* and *Third Mission*.



On **November 19**, we will host **WU Matters WU Talks**, titled [Mythbusting Migration: No sustainable development without migration](#)



Event description: Few topics have received so much public attention and yet have been so widely misunderstood as international migration. Migration is embedded in the UN Sustainable Development Goals – but what does that mean? Do we live in an era of mass migration? Does migration exacerbate issues such as brain drain, inequality, and social tensions? Will climate change bring about another refugee crisis? And what role do businesses play in the realm of migration and sustainable development?



Panelists: STaR Faculty Member **Jesús Crespo Cuaresma**, **Jason Gagnon** (Head of the Migration and Skills Unit, OECD), **Aida Hajro** (Professor of International Business at the University of Leeds and Visiting Professor at WU), and **Judith Kohlenberger** (Head of Research Institute for Migration and Refugee Studies and Management). Event host and moderator: **Milda Žilinskaitė** (STaR).

Also in **November**, we will partake in the 9th Annual Meeting of the Business and Human Rights Impact Community in Geneva, organized by the Global Business School Network (of which WU is a [standing member](#)), the Geneva School of Economics and Management, the NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights, and the Alliance Business School.

Please also save the date for the **WU Research Encounter on Migration** on **January 14, 2026**. More information will be available via the WU Marketing & Communications website and Research Institute for Migration and Refugee Research and Management.

Looking ahead: ESD Workshops for WU faculty

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) plays a central role in higher education, as it enables learners to understand complex social, ecological, and economic challenges and to actively engage in shaping responsible solutions. Integrating ESD into courses helps foster future-oriented thinking and embed sustainable approaches across different disciplines.

The team at RCE Vienna supports WU faculty in integrating ESD into their teaching. Each semester, two half-day workshops will be offered that provide practical methods and formats for incorporating ESD into existing courses or for embedding ESD principles from the outset when designing new courses. In addition, an online toolkit with a collection of ESD learning formats is being developed and will be made available to all WU faculty.

Roadmap:

- The roadmap foresees the development of the workshop concept in Fall 2025, followed by a pilot workshop and the launch of the first regular workshop. The initial working version of the online toolkit will be released as well.
- In 2026, the workshop series will continue and the online toolkit will be officially launched at WU.
- In 2027, further workshops will be conducted alongside a comprehensive evaluation of both the workshop concept and the online toolkit, which will then be updated accordingly.



Christian Rammel



Marie-Sophie Attems



Daniel Schmelz

Looking ahead: Student & alumni engagement

Starting this October and with the support of **WU's Marketing & Communications team**, we will be hiring two student assistants from WU's Master's programs to support us with STaR projects. Their tasks will include website updates, promoting the [Sustainable Work Lab](#), assisting with [WU Matters](#) and other events, engaging on [social media](#), and various other activities.



As in previous years, we will continue working closely with student and alumni organizations that promote sustainability on our campus, as well as with various **Master's programs** at WU, and **Volunteering@WU**.

We will also continue to support **student-organized events and workshops**, which are typically planned on a semester basis. For Fall 2025, we're partnering with SEEP students to co-host a panel discussion on **Transformative Science**. The event will bring together perspectives from feminist economics (the care economy, engaged science, and topics related to SDG5) and broader frameworks of socio-ecological transformation.

We are currently in the process of contacting the speakers and organizing the event. More details will be provided on the [STaR homepage](#) as soon as they are finalized.

Like every year, we will continue encouraging WU students at all levels to write their theses on sustainability-related topics. We'll be updating our downloadable [Potential Supervisors](#) list—the only resource of its kind at WU—and will also continue conducting and sharing interviews with students who have successfully defended their theses, both on our website and LinkedIn page.



@2025, WU Competence Center STaR

Written by Milda Žilinskaitė

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