

Strategy of the Section on Environmental Social Science and Geography (ESGO), 2023 - 2026

Introduction to ESGO

The staff in the Section of Environmental Social Science and Geography (ESGO) are doing research, teaching and public consultancy and advice within environmental economics, political science, sociology and geography. We also have a focus on integrated environmental and climate assessments and analysis, linking social science and geography to natural science disciplines for integrated modelling and analyses. The section includes about 20 staff members (as of primo 2023: two professors, six senior researchers, one senior advisor, one tenure track researcher, three postdocs, five PhD students and an academic employee).

The section has a strong focus on green transition, specifically on research to support policy development to support green transition.

Pathways, practices, behavioural aspects and efficient incentives for societal transitions of land-use, urban environments and energy consumption are central research subjects in the section. These are linked to endpoint effects on human health, climate, air and water quality as well as soil, landscape and biodiversity. Transition related to GHG mitigation and adaptation has a large focus in the section too. Interdisciplinary research on optimal and cost-effective implementation of environmental regulation and efficient provision of ecosystem services are key, including ecosystem services mapping and modeling as well as land use and land use change assessments. We also have research activities on other subjects, e.g. sustainable waste handling

Mission and vision

The mission of our work is to establish research based knowledge for stakeholders, policy-makers and decision-makers, and the public, on sustainable and green transition of the society, in relation to climate, environment, ecosystem services and biodiversity.

Our vision is to perform high quality research within the social science and geography disciplines, to explore economically efficient as well as socially and/or politically feasible solutions, policies and social practices, to support green transition at local, national and international levels. Our vision is to contribute to society through research and teaching, as well as by providing policy advice for the Danish Ministries, the EU Commission, the European Environmental Agency as well as municipalities, NGO's and private enterprises.

International position and strength

The ESGO staff has a strong track record in attracting external funding and publishing results, and the staff collaborates with hundreds of research organisations and other organisations. Staff of ESGO coordinates and participates in many H2020 projects (including initiatives in collaboration between EU and national funding agencies in Member States), other types of EU funded projects, UN initiatives, projects funded by funders in a range of countries, and projects funded by the Nordic Council. The section is also active within Partnership for European Environmental Research (PEER) – a partnership between eight of the largest European environmental research centres, and the European University Alliance Circle U. National, projects funded by e.g. the Innovation Fund Denmark has also provided a strong national and international network within all parts of ESGOs research areas. We hold a strong position in applying integrated modelling and analyses, spanning from spatial modelling, environmental economics to policy analyses and analyses of practises.

Strategic goals

Research and talent

- We aim to use our competencies and expertise in research to support green transition

- To support this strategic goal we aim for applying and whenever possible coordinate relevant applications for calls e.g. Horizon Europe, Danish funding organisations etc.
- We aim to recruit and maintain talents from across the world
- We aim to use our experiences and expertise for developing new partnerships

Public sector consultancy and industrial collaboration

Consultancy work, both public and private, is important for ESGO as it supports the aims of doing policy relevant research and communicating research to stakeholders.

- We aim to maintain our pool of advisory projects for the Ministries, as part of the contract with the Ministry of Environment, and commissioned projects for projects for the Ministry of environment and also the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries
- We also aim to achieve more projects for EEA as part of larger consortia, as well as for the EU Commission
- We aim to continue doing research based public consultancy, and always strive for developing the basis for research based advise
- We also aim to work to ensure that advisory projects are included in what we are individually evaluated on, e.g. by development of a more inclusive set of evaluation indicator/criteria. More effort should be given to bridging the science-policy gap by setting off time for dissemination that creates impact

Education/Teaching programmes

- Even though we are part of a university, we are the only department without an education program. However, we have a pool of ongoing teaching activities in ESGO, both at AU and externally, where we teach master level courses, summer schools, continuing education courses etc. We aim to develop this portfolio further
- We aim to secure development of sustainable education, by developing the courses we are teaching and also by establishing more courses. We will invest in continued education which can be translated/synergized with formal teaching programmes by developing continuing education courses, as well as summer courses. Central support offered from the Faculty or AU at central level to help set this up/distribute information will be key in this process. Single lecture /tutorship as part of ongoing courses could be very useful and a way into teaching more

Action Plan

Research and talent

- We will utilize the funding conditions so that we can continue to develop high quality research and expertise that make us the go-to department in certain research fields
- We will increase visibility and develop existing and new networks. We find that many parts of ENVs are quite weak on communicating with the broader public. We will have more focus on creating visibility, and be more present in media with help from AU communication department
- We will focus on developing new partnerships as well as utilizing and strengthening existing partnerships
- We will maintain ESGO's number of PhD's (5) and post docs (3) despite reduced faculty co-funding for PhD's
- We will support competency development for early career researchers

Public sector consultancy and business collaboration:

We will:

- Maintain our pool of advisory projects for the Ministries, as part of the contract with the Ministry of Environment, and broaden the portfolio of projects for municipalities, regions, other ministries, Nordic Council etc. by being visible, with more focus on dissemination
- Maintain networks to contribute to EEA consortia and EU commissioned work (and still keep an eye on our resources invested in these networks)
- Push for development of indicators for inclusion of advice in evaluations – and discuss the process at department level

Teaching/education

We will:

- Develop further the courses we are teaching
- Establish more courses
- Develop post-master courses (continuing education) offered by ENVS
- Develop summer courses
- Raise the need for support by Faculty/central AU.