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Sustainable Practices Guidelines

Guidelines for organizations working with youth
to transition towards more sustainable practices

contextos

YOUTH POWER
Germany

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Document Information

Project: GreenGuard – Mobilizing Digital Solutions for Genuine Environmental Progress
Project Coordinator: Contextos – Cooperativa para o Desenvolvimento e Coesão Social, CRL (Portugal)
Deliverable: WP2 – A2.4.Guidelines for organizations working with young individuals to transition towards more sustainable practices
Output Leader: Istituto ad ordinamento universitario Scuola Superiore Carolina Albasio (Italy)
Contributing Beneficiaries: Contextos – Cooperativa para o Desenvolvimento e Coesão Social, CRL; Youth Power Germany EV (Germany); Pannonia Consulting D.O.O. (Croatia)

Document History

Date: 31-03-2025
Version Nr: v.01
Deliverable Version and Changes: 1st Version

Acknowledgement & Disclaimer

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Project Summary

Mobilizing Youth Against Greenwashing

Digital Tools and Education for Authentic Sustainability

Vision

To empower youth and youth workers to critically engage with environmental sustainability by fostering awareness, knowledge, and tools to counteract greenwashing across Europe.

Mission

To equip young people and organizations with practical digital tools, non-formal education, and guidelines that promote environmental authenticity and responsible civic participation.

Goals

Empower

young people and youth workers

through quality non-formal education to recognize and counteract greenwashing.

Create and disseminate

guidelines for organizations and youth workers

to adopt sustainable practices and prevent greenwashing.

Develop

user-friendly digital tools

including a mobile app and eLearning platform, to support environmental activism.

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Partner Institutions

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Contextos

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What is Greenwashing?

Greenwashing | gɹinˌwɔʃɪŋ (verb)

Greenwashing is a deceptive practice in which companies ***misrepresent their products, services, or operations as environmentally friendly,*** *often through vague language, misleading imagery, or unverified claims.* ***It aims to create a false impression of sustainability,*** *obscuring harmful practices and undermining consumer trust, environmental integrity, and genuine accountability.*

Greenwashing Index

The **Greenwashing Index**, developed under the **GreenGuard project**, evaluates the authenticity of environmental claims across **Croatia, Germany, Italy, and Portugal** using six criteria: **clarity, certifications, alignment with practices, transparency, consistency, and lifecycle consideration**.

Findings reveal that many companies, particularly in energy and consumer goods, present vague or misleading sustainability messages. These often conflict with their actual operations, signaling widespread greenwashing.

Youth are especially impacted, reporting **confusion, eco-anxiety, and declining trust in environmental communication**. The index highlights the need for regulation, third-party validation, and educational tools to support informed, sustainable choices.

Country Comparison

Country	Focus Sectors *	Overall Score	Key Weaknesses	Youth Trust Impact
Croatia	Energy	**Low**	Lack of transparency, inconsistency, poor lifecycle consideration	High eco-anxiety, low brand trust
Germany	Automotive Energy	**Medium**	Dual-track strategy, future-facing claims without immediate action	Confusion, moderate behavioral change
Italy	Consultancy	**Medium**	No third-party certifications, lack of measurable outcomes	High emotional stress, demand for transparency
Portugal	Consumer goods Aviation	**High**	Misleading biodegradability claims, uneven lifecycle coverage	Widespread eco-guilt, critical of vague claims

* The sectors presented refer to the case studies selected to test the application of the Greenwashing Index.
The Greenwashing Index publication is available at https://zenodo.org/records/15592402

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How does Greenwashing impact youth?

Mental Health Impact

Many young people report stress, anxiety, and guilt when confronted with misleading sustainability claims..

Consumer Skepticism

Youth are increasingly aware of deceptive marketing. Misleading environmental messages reduce trust in brands and discourage sustainable behavior.

Behavioral Shifts

Young consumers adapt their habits in response to greenwashing—becoming more selective, doing their own research, and calling for accountability and transparency from brands.

GUIDELINES:
how can organizations help?

Establish Transparent and Accountable Practices

- **Clarity in Communication:** Ensure that all sustainability claims are clear, specific, and verifiable to avoid greenwashing.
- **Third-Party Certifications**: Utilize recognized environmental certifications to validate sustainability efforts.
- **Lifecycle Assessment:** Consider the environmental impact of products and services throughout their entire lifecycle.

GUIDELINES:
how can organizations help?

Engage Youth in Decision-Making

- **Participatory Approaches:** Involve young individuals in the planning and implementation of sustainability initiatives.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Create channels for youth to provide input and feedback on organizational practices.

Integrate Sustainability into Organizational Culture

- **Education and Training:** Provide sustainability education for staff and youth participants.
- **Sustainable Operations:** Adopt environmentally friendly practices in daily operations, such as reducing waste and conserving energy.

GUIDELINES:
how can organizations help?

Foster Community and Network Collaboration

- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with other organizations, schools, and community groups to amplify sustainability efforts.
- **Resource Sharing:** Exchange best practices and resources to build collective capacity for sustainability.

External Resources
for Youth Participation and Sustainability

Meaningful Youth Participation Toolkit – UNESCO

https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en/knowledge-hub/meaningful-youth-participation-practical-toolkit

T-Kit 13: Sustainability and Youth Work – Council of Europe & European Commission

https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/-/t-kit-13-sustainability-and-youth-work

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Practical Guidelines & Tools

For youth organizations

The following pages aim to provide **practical guidelines** for youth organizations to give **readily-implementable, everyday-usable guidelines to be more environmentally conscious**, while **raising awareness on actual sustainable practices** that help **discern greenwashing from genuine eco-sustainable actions.**

SPREAD THE KNOWLEDGE!

Along with the guidelines, you'll find **printable, gamified tools** to implement and assess your organization's and personal **sustainable practices!**

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Sustainable Water

Building Awareness for Sustainable Water Use: Educating and Empowering the Youth

Water is the essence of life, and with growing concerns about climate change, pollution, and overuse, it's crucial that young people understand the value of water and how to use it responsibly. **Youth organizations have a powerful role to play in educating and mobilizing the next generation of water-conscious citizens.**

Tips and Tricks for Organizations

Raise Awareness on Water Themes in Your Educational Programs

Introduce youth to the water cycle, the global water crisis, and local conservation issues through experiential learning activities, storytelling, and project-based approaches.

Walk the Talk: Audit and Improve Your Own Practices

Evaluate how your office or event venues use water. Install low-flow taps, use rainwater for gardening, and avoid plastic bottled water. Lead by example and showcase your water-saving practices in your sustainability communication.

Partner with Local Experts and Authorities

Bring in guest speakers from environmental NGOs or water utilities to host talks or lead field visits. Co-design workshops with scientists or engineers to bridge the gap between technical knowledge and youth-friendly learning.

Empower Young Leaders

Create mentorship opportunities and leadership programs where young people can design and implement their own water conservation projects. Offer seed funding, visibility, and support to help them scale their ideas locally or even across borders.

Good Practices

Education for Climate: Saving Water Habits

This EU initiative encourages students and teachers to share practices on water conservation, aiming to instill lifelong water-saving habits through community engagement and peer learning.

https://education-for-climate.ec.europa.eu/community/saving-water-habits/topics

Educational Videos

"Europe's Water Crisis: 4 Solutions"

This video outlines the pressing water issues in Europe and presents actionable solutions at individual and policy levels.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWAbeEmfFjg

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Tracker: Water Conservation

Daily Tracking Table

A weekly log with common water-saving actions. Each action gets a checkmark or a score (1–5) to quantify how often or how well it was followed. Mark each action you completed with a checkmark (✓) or leave blank if not done.

Name: **Org.:** **Week:**

DAY	Turned off tap while brushing	Took <5-min shower	Reused greywater	Avoided bottled water	Reported/fixed leaks	Total Actions
MONDAY						
TUESDAY						
WEDNESDAY						
THURSDAY						
FRIDAY						
SATURDAY						
SUNDAY						

Total for the week: ___ / 35

Reflection: What was your biggest challenge this week? What are your water goals for next week?

📅 Weekly Focus Themes (Optional)

Week 1: Bathroom Water Use
Week 2: Water & Food Choices
Week 3: Water at School/Work
Week 4: Community Impact

🧠 Reflection Questions

- What new water-saving behavior did you try this week?
- How can I get my friends or family involved in water conservation?
- What water-related issue in my community needs more attention?

👫 Group Challenge Mode (For Organizations)

Create a leaderboard or a shared dashboard where youth groups can:

- Log weekly totals collectively
- Share success stories and improvement tips
- Celebrate small wins with monthly recognition or badges

Example categories:

💦 "Most Improved Saver"
🌍 "Top Team Impact"
🧠 "Creative Awareness Campaign"

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Energy: Power the future!

Educating and Empowering Youth for Sustainable Energy Use

Energy powers everything we doo: from charging phones to heating homes!
But Climate change, air pollution, and resource depletion **are all tied to our energy choices. For this reason young people have a vital role to play in shaping a more sustainable energy future!**

Lead by Example and Spark Energy Awareness!

Integrate Energy Topics into Your Programs
Organize workshops or games that explore energy sources, consumption patterns, and personal energy footprints. Encourage participants to track and reduce their own energy use.

Make Your Space Energy Smart
Switch to LED lighting, use power strips to eliminate phantom energy, and install timers or sensors to control heating and lighting in common areas.

Host Energy Challenges
Launch a month-long campaign where youth compete to reduce their home or school's energy use, with updates and rewards along the way.

Invite Local Experts
Collaborate with engineers, architects, or renewable energy startups to lead interactive sessions or tours of solar farms and green buildings.

Support Youth-Led Innovation
Create a "green energy lab" where young people can brainstorm or even prototype energy-saving solutions.

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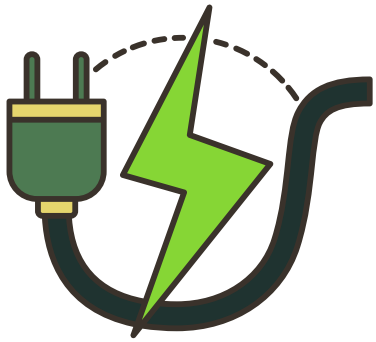
Energy Check-up!



IS YOUR SPACE ENERGY-SMART?	WHAT TO LOOK FOR?	YES	NO	ACTION NEEDED
💡 **Lighting**	Are lights off in empty rooms?			
	Are LEDs used instead of old bulbs?			
🔌 **Electronics**	Are devices turned off when not in use?			
	Are power strips used for groups of tech?			
🌡️ **Heating**	Is heating/cooling used efficiently (not too hot/cold)?			
	Are windows and doors sealed properly?			
🌍 **Awareness**	Do people know basic energy-saving tips?			
	Are posters or reminders visible?			
📊 **Tracking**	Is energy use being recorded or reviewed?			

✅ What to Do Next:

Count your YES answers:

6–8 → You're energy aware! Keep it up and share tips.

3–5 → Good start—look for quick wins to improve.

0–2 → Time to team up and take action!

Choose 2 Actions Needed and create a mini plan ("Make reminder signs for turning off lights").

Share results with your group or teacher and re-check next month!

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Lower the footprint!

Educating and Empowering Youth for Sustainable Energy Use

The choices we make every day, how we move, eat, meet, and even clean can either pollute the air or help clean it? Good news: **youth organisations can be real change-makers when it comes to improving air quality and lowering carbon emissions.** And it doesn't take a massive budget or a degree in science: just **small, smart choices that add up.**

Every small step matters!

You don't need to do everything perfectly: just start with **the first step!** And invite others to join! When we show we care about clean air and a healthy planet, others will follow your steps!

walk, cycle, or take public transport instead of using a car

switch some of your in-person meetings or events to online

plan activities close to home, or encourage carpooling

serve local, plant-based meals during your events

open windows often and bring plants into your space

choose non-toxic, eco-friendly cleaning products

power down lights, laptops, and appliances when not in use

go paperless: reduce paper waste and avoid emissions

open windows often and bring plants into your space

choose long-lasting, local, and low-packaging products

plant trees or join reforestation projects

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Green Procurement Checklist

This checklist is designed to support youth organisations in aligning their purchasing practices with environmental sustainability principles. Its aim is to encourage thoughtful and responsible decisions that reduce environmental footprints, promote ethical and sustainable supply chains, and integrate green thinking into all levels of procurement.

General Principles

- Is the the product or service is truly necessary? ◯
- Before purchasing, can you reuse, repair, or share? ◯
- Have you prioritized local and ethical suppliers? ◯
- Are suppliers aligned with environmental and social responsibility standards? ◯

Product-level Considerations

- Is the product made from recycled or renewable materials? ◯
- Does it have credible eco-labels (e.g. EU Ecolabel, FSC, Cradle to Cradle)? ◯
- Is the product durable, reusable, or repairable? ◯
- Is there a clear end-of-life plan (recycling, return scheme, biodegradability)? ◯
- Does the supplier take back used items or offer recycling programs? ◯
- Is the packaging avoided, or minimal/recyclable? ◯

Energy and Technology

- Does the equipment have energy efficiency certifications (e.g. Energy Star, EU Energy Label)? ◯
- Are digital tools or cloud services hosted on green servers or carbon-neutral platforms? ◯
- Is there a plan to power devices using renewable energy where possible? ◯

Logistics & Delivery

- Is the product sourced locally or regionally to minimize emissions? ◯
- Is there an option for grouped or low-emission delivery? ◯
- Is green travel prioritized for in-person delivery or transport? ◯

Service Procurement (e.g. printing, catering)

- Is the service provider certified in sustainable operations? ◯
- For catering: Are plant-based, seasonal, and local ingredients prioritized? ◯
- For venues: Are energy-saving systems, waste reduction, and accessible infrastructure in place? ◯

Monitoring and Reporting

- Is there a method for documenting and tracking green procurement practices? ◯
- Are suppliers required to report on sustainability criteria? ◯
- Can your procurement be included in your organization's environmental reporting? ◯

📌 Tips for Implementation

Integrate this checklist into your internal procurement policy

Apply it during pre-approval procedures for purchases or contracts

Engage with with partners, trainers, and service providers

Raise awareness among staff and volunteers

Include green criteria in tenders and requests

Track your progress and impact

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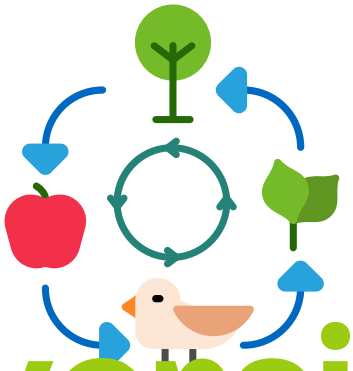
Waste & Biodiversity



Empowering Youth Organizations: Awareness and Action for Waste Reduction and Biodiversity Promotion

Biodiversity and waste are closely connected. Trash in nature harms animals, pollutes water and soil, and destroys habitats. Even food waste means wasted water, land, and energy. Every item thrown away impacts ecosystems and our future.

What You Can Do

Youth organizations can lead by example and promote responsible habits:

🌿 Mealtime Choices

- Use reusable bottles, bags, and cutlery
- Buy local, seasonal, and organic
- Plan meals, reduce leftovers, compost scraps

🧵 Smart Consumption

- Repair, reuse, and reduce packaging
- Avoid fast fashion: swap or thrift!
- Choose natural fibers to reduce microplastics

🏛️ Greening the Office

- Go digital, reuse supplies, and sort waste
- Hold eco-swap events and upcycling challenges
- Use native plants and eco-friendly cleaners
- Compost food scraps and reduce packaging
- Celebrate local biodiversity with monthly spotlights

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Waste log Tracker

Track and reduce office waste – one week at a time!

Week: _____

♻️ RECYCLABLE WASTE	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
📄 Paper							
📦 Cardboard/Boxes							
🍶 Plastic (bottles, packaging)							
🥫 Metal (cans, foil, etc.)							
🫙 Glass (bottles, jars)							
🍌 Food scraps for composting (e.g., fruit peels)							

Total of ♻️ RECYCLABLE: _____

❌ NON-RECYCLABLE	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
🍗 Non-compostable Food Waste (and 🍌 Food scraps that didn't go to composting)							
🥤 Food Packaging and Disposable Cups/Utensils							
🗑️ Other Waste (mixed or unknown)							

Total of ❌ NON-RECYCLABLE : _____

Suggestions for use:

- Weigh or count items in your waste bins to estimate quantities.
- Add rows for specific items if needed.
- Reflect weekly on common waste types, areas for reduction, and sorting improvements.
- Track progress over multiple weeks and set goals (e.g., max 5 plastic items).
- Highlight reused or recovered items under "🔁 Items Reused or Saved From Waste."

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