



everGREEN Framework

Guidelines to support the VET Sustainability Transition



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List of Abbreviations

ESD	Education for sustainable development
EU	European Union
GAP	Global Action Programme
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
VET	Vocational Education and Training

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1. Introduction

This document has been developed within the project "**everGREEN_In - Empowering VET Institutions towards Greener Initiatives**" funded by the Erasmus+ programme.

The everGREEN project¹ introduces innovative practices that prepare Vocational Education and Training (VET) communities, including leaders, staff, and learners, to initiate the greening process of the sector and enable behavioural changes and greener mindsets at both professional and personal level.

Within this Framework document, the everGREEN project partnership describes a comprehensive, yet flexible and easy-to-use four-step framework to help VET institutions realise their greening potential and become agents of change towards sustainability. This Framework serves as a guide explaining the need for greening and its institutional benefits, and includes several key elements to help VET leaders and their institutional teams understand the scale, scope and critical steps in greening their institutions and programmes and develop a strategy before they get started. This Framework is closely aligned with the institutional practice guide "Greening Technical and Vocational Education and Training", published in 2017 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET. everGREEN aims to make the Guide published in 2017 more workable and manageable for VET organisations by enriching the approach proposed in the Guide with a variety of practical tools and instruments described in this Framework.

The UNESCO (2017) procedure is based on a simple approach with four axes:

1. Understanding the requirements of a whole-institute approach
2. Planning the greening process
3. Implementing the plans
4. Monitoring and assessing the results

Within the key steps, there are **five individual areas** for implementing the greening process in VET institutions: Greening the Campus, the Curriculum and Training, the Community and Workplace, the Organizational Culture, and the Research. These areas are **independent actions that make up a whole-institution approach**, which is integral for the effective re-orientation of VET to appropriately address emerging needs. The whole-institution approach incorporates sustainable development not only to curricula and training, but also to the organisational structure and management of the institutions, the application of sustainability ethos, the inclusive participation of the community as a whole, and the continuous adaptation of methods and tools used to correspond to changing needs.

¹ To facilitate the readability of this document, the full project title will be abbreviated to "everGREEN" in the following.

The present **everGREEN Framework** adapts and practically implements the UNESCO guidelines within the everGREEN project. It is addressed to VET leaders and staff, while the impact of its realisation is anticipated to span across VET learners, the labour market, and society in general. It supports the preparation of the VET sector to fully align with the Commission's running awareness campaign "European Year of Skills 2023" aiming to equip learners and educators with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to live, work and act to contribute to achieving environmental sustainability, as well as to support education and training institutions to integrate sustainability into teaching and learning and across all aspects of their operations.

Despite the many different vocational and training education contexts in European countries, the everGREEN Framework compiles some common elements that were concluded from the national mapping surveys that the everGREEN consortium conducted in the seven participating countries of the everGREEN project (Germany, France, Slovenia, Greece, Italy, Belgium and Luxembourg) through interviews with experts. It is designed in such a flexible way that it offers adjustability potential to the needs of each specific VET institute and allows for tailor-made solutions that will better address shortages, hence increase effectiveness of results.

Having the UNESCO practical guide for institutions as its solid basis and adding on the already existing guidelines, the everGREEN Framework offers recommendations and original tools, produced within the everGREEN project implementation, in order to compile all the necessary information that a VET institution needs when undergoing their greening process.

¹ To facilitate the readability of this document, the full project title will be abbreviated to "everGREEN" in the following.

CHAPTER TWO

**The significance of VET in the
green transition**

2. The significance of VET in the green transition

Climate change and the destruction of the environment are existential threats to Europe and the world. The European Green Deal therefore aims to create the transition to a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy (European Commission, 2019).

The EU has emphasised the importance of the VET sector in this transition at various occasions:

- ➔ The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) has remarked that this transition can be maximised by developing the skills, knowledge, and competences of VET organizations to operate resource-efficient processes and technologies (CEDEFOP/OECD, 2015).
- ➔ In 2020, the European Commission published the Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience, which highlights that the broader twin transitions towards a more digital and greener economy will require VET to adapt to ensure that VET learners acquire the skills needed for the green and digital transitions while also reconfirming and strengthening the central role of VET in the lifelong learning continuum (Corpuz, A., et. al, 2022).
- ➔ Shortly after, the OSNABRÜCK Declaration of the Ministers in charge of vocational education and training of the Member States called the attention of the vocational education and training, as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economy (Osnabrück Declaration 2020).

Both documents are in line with the European Skills Agenda (European Commission, 2020), and priorities 2 and 5 of the Council Resolution on a Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030). Furthermore, the Commission has proposed a Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability in January 2022, to help integrate the green transition and sustainability within education and training (European Commission, 2022).

Already at this point in time, it is visible that the number of sustainability-trained talents in the workforce is increasing in a way that is very important for the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The proportion of green talent increased from 9.6% in 2015 to 13.3% in 2021, a global growth rate of 38.5% (LinkedIn Economic Graph, 2022). With everGREEN, we would like to further support and actively promote this process.

CHAPTER THREE

Sustainable VET – Why and How?

3. Sustainable VET – Why and How?

A major component in accomplishing the global vision of achieving sustainability is the creation of more sustainable production and consumption patterns. As mentioned earlier, the greening of the economy is leading to drastic changes in the skill requirements of workers, as jobs need to adapt to the new realities. This may require retraining of workers to meet the new requirements or, in the case of jobs that are being eliminated, to find employment in other sectors. At the same time, new occupations are emerging for which people need to be trained from scratch. Failure to address the new demands of the economy in education and training will inevitably lead to a dangerous skills shortage. (UNESCO, 2017)

VET as a catalyst towards a green economy

The greening of VET institutions is an essential element to achieve this through the wide-ranging skill sets that they offer to the workforce. But knowledge is only one component of VET that makes them vital to the economy. Among other things, VET increases employment opportunities, builds sustainable lifestyles and promotes sustainable enterprises and self-employment. UNESCO (2017) emphasises that VET institutions are the main educators and trainers of workers in sectors that are critical to enabling sustainable practices.

VET supports the transition to a sustainable society (low-carbon economy and climate-resilient society) through occupations that require sustainability and environmental friendliness. Such sectors, e.g. energy, manufacturing, iron and steel, construction, agriculture and food, are mainly served by vocationally qualified and trained workers. However, due to increasing environmental and economic challenges, new expectations are being placed on these conventional tasks. A trained workforce is needed with up-to-date knowledge and skills to enforce the highest environmental standards and practices by following the established code or adjustments to environmental standards.

To achieve this, there is a need for skills development and employment strategies that support the transition to a green economy. Necessary components of such strategies are e.g. expanding the current scope of vocational education and training, preparing teachers and trainers to effectively transfer their knowledge and skills, and empowering the workforce to adapt to technological change. (UNESCO, 2017)

The results of the transnational survey conducted by the everGREEN consortium among the partner countries (Germany, France, Slovenia, Greece, Italy, Belgium and Luxembourg) also confirm that the inclusion of green concepts in VET is crucial. The survey highlighted a clear issue regarding the lack of knowledge of the SDGs and a shortage of good practices and targeted lessons for students to increase their awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability.

Additionally, greater institutional involvement is needed to address the real urgency of improving the situation and increasing the inclusion of environmental curricula within VET institutes. Participants in the everGREEN survey were convinced that incorporating green concepts into VET will not only equip students with the necessary skills to contribute to a more sustainable future, but they will also be better able to take advantage of opportunities in the growing green economy.

The current literature and our own survey lead us to conclude that VET institutions are in part responsible for addressing global challenges such as climate change. The promotion of sustainability practices and green skills can play an essential role in shaping a more sustainable future.

In summary there are several reasons why it is crucial for the VET sector to engage in the greening process:

- ➔ Firstly, a worker who has skills and competences geared towards green occupations is more employable than someone who lacks these qualities.
- ➔ Second, the greening of vocational training improves not only the employability of workers but also the production of enterprises from a social and economic perspective. This can increase the profitability of enterprises.
- ➔ Thirdly, VET institutions improve their own profile and become more competitive by adapting to the changing demands of the labour market.

In order for VET to meet these demands of a greening economy and society, it needs to be transformed by adapting the content of VET to current labour market needs. In this way, the greening of VET institutions will not only promote the normal institutional growth process, but also accelerate the formation of a community that is constantly learning and changing. This is a challenging task for VET organisations and the question arises as to how they should go about it. To this end, it is useful to first look at what aspects are hidden behind the terms sustainable or green VET.

What does greening VET mean?

Since the original task of VET organisations is to prepare their students for working life by imparting knowledge and skills, the educational aspect is naturally the first focus of our consideration. To this end, we would like to briefly elaborate on the concept of **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)** as a starting point for greening curricula and education. The next chapter will go into more depth on ESD. ESD simply means that we should use the world's existing education and training systems, together with public awareness systems, as an effective means of implementing sustainable development.

The goal of sustainable VET, then, is both to improve access, retention and delivery of relevant green knowledge, skills, values, and perspectives, and to realign existing disciplines, programmes, and outcomes to change unsustainable practices at all levels (UNESCO, 2012).

The United Nations encourages colleges, universities, and communities to take further steps on ESD and the new SDGs. UNESCO's new **Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD** draws attention to the role of educational institutions as essential contributors to a more sustainable future. The programme aims to multiply and expand ESD action by integrating sustainable development into education and education into sustainable development.

A key element of GAP is to go beyond teaching the concept of sustainable development in some subjects and reorient the entire educational institution so that everyone in the community develops the knowledge, skills and values that will help them lead and sustain a sustainable lifestyle and work in a sustainable economy (UNESCO, 2014).

This reorientation – or more precisely, this transition towards sustainability – of an entire educational institution was described as "**Greening VET**" in the UNESCO Practical Guide for institutions (2017). "Greening" in this context is seen as a process of adapting knowledge and practices with the aim of aligning them with the overall concept of sustainability.

Greening VET helps to transform learning and training environments, build capacity, and develop skills of educators and trainers that lead to more sustainable practices not only in the classroom but also in the college and workplace. All members of a VET organisation (management, teachers and trainers, students, administration, etc.) should become active members of a green society working towards a green economy.

everGREEN is guided by the described "greening VET" concept, which is the most holistic approach. This everGREEN framework and the tools and methods developed accompany VET organisations step by step through the process towards a green VET organisation.

CHAPTER FOUR

**everGREEN in the context of the
sustainable development agenda**

4. everGREEN in the context of the sustainable development agenda

Sustainable Development was brought to the public attention by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development report “Our Common Future”, most often called Brundtland Report, officially introduced at the UN General Assembly in 1987.

Promoting sustainable development requires action in the 3 pillars of sustainability: economic, environmental and social:

- ➔ **Environmental sustainability**, which refers to the institution’s practices and responsibilities that preserve and conserve our natural world. It focuses on the impact institutions have on ecological systems (managing resources, preventing pollution, water and energy use, waste control, mobility and commuting, etc.).
- ➔ **Social sustainability**, which refers to the impact that institutions have on people and the ability of institutions to manage that impact – both internally and the broader communities in which they are operating. Education is key for the improvement of their social impact.
- ➔ **Economic sustainability**, which refers to the institution’s ability to manage the cost of operations and the resulting revenue in a sensible balancing action, focusing on environmental and social stability in the long term while also remaining economically viable.

There is also a fourth factor, standing across the three previously mentioned pillars: **Governance**. Governance refers to the institution’s ability to establish the policy and leadership structure, necessary to ensure sustainability practices are put into place and supported by institutions. (United Nations, 2015).

The UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, in chapter 36 of Agenda 21 proclaimed that “education has to be reoriented towards Sustainable Development”. This chapter laid the first foundation for **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)**. UNESCO has shared a draft framework for ESD beyond 2019. Its three messages are: (a) transformative action of individuals, (b) structural change – relationship between economic growth and sustainable development, and (c) technological future – critical thinking and green skills.

As a starting point for everGREEN, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to define the areas in which sustainability in educational institutions could be monitored. According to the already implemented measures and the effectiveness of actions in universities, schools, and education institutes, the following **sustainability categories** were selected **for the everGREEN project**:



Figure 1: Sustainability categories to measure sustainability progress in VET

The above-listed sustainability categories that allow to measure the greening progress in VET can be summarized in four wider categories:

- Education and Curriculum
- Transportation and Mobility
- Resources (energy and water)
- Waste and Circularity (waste management)

It is important to highlight that the four categories incorporate other categories. For example, *Waste and Circularity* includes also Food and Beverage waste and Communication (material and technology waste). Resources also refers to the building energy usage and digital technology energy consumption.

The everGREEN consortium linked those selected sustainability categories for VET to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The SDGs, agreed by the United Nations in 2015, are a seventeen-point plan to end poverty, combat climate change, and fight injustice and inequality. They recognize that ending the world's deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. Every one of the seventeen SDGs and most of their targets, if they are to be achieved, require awareness-building, public/worker understanding, educational programmes and/or training. (United Nations, 2015).

The European Commission is committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes internal and external actions across all sectors. Education and training play a crucial role in helping people understand and act on sustainability. For this reason, the European Commission, through the topics of the European Green Deal, supports all actions towards this goal (European Commission, 2019).

In particular, the greening of VET is vital in order to meet the 17 SDGs. The transversal role of VET in transforming industry and consequently in sustainable development and economic growth indirectly includes actions that contribute to the achievement of the 17 goals.

In order to define focal points for the everGREEN project from the broad field of sustainable development, an internal workshop was held in Göttingen, Germany. The aim was to understand which specific SDGs relate to VET and how VET can achieve sustainability based on these. During this workshop, the aforementioned sustainability categories were linked to the SDGs.

In the following table, the result is depicted:



Figure 2: Potential contribution of VET to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The everGREEN workshop concluded that the SDGs shown in the figure above can be explicitly linked to the VET institutions' activities and function, through which VET can contribute to the sustainability process.

CHAPTER FIVE

**everGREEN – Understanding VET
green practices in Europe**

5. everGREEN – Understanding VET green practices in Europe

The everGREEN team conducted several surveys with the aim of mapping current trends in greening in partner countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, and Slovenia) and in the EU. A comprehensive report on the findings can be found on our website. Here we share the key findings with you.

Mapping of green practices currently used in VET

Based on responses from the everGREEN online survey, some green best practices emerged as widely used:

- ➔ One of the most prominent practices is the **promotion of smart working**, which involves using technology to reduce the need for physical commuting to work. This practice saves employees time and money and reduces transportation's carbon footprint.
- ➔ Another practice that emerged is the **promotion of public transportation** and bicycles to go to work. This sustainable alternative to using cars significantly contributes to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
- ➔ In addition, the **use of natural lights** within structures has also been highlighted as a green practice. This practice reduces the need for artificial lighting and promotes the well-being of occupants.
- ➔ **Energy efficiency**, like using energy-saving light bulbs, is also widely used to reduce energy consumption and lower carbon emissions.
- ➔ **Reduction in the use of paper and plastic**, reduction of **printing materials**, and appropriate waste management are prevalent practices to reduce waste and conserve resources.
- ➔ Installation of **water refill sites** and use of **recycled materials** are additional practices in the partner countries that contribute to sustainability.

Despite the widespread use of these practices, there is still a **lack of complete knowledge and commitment to the SDGs and sufficient funds and resources by institutions**. However, respondents know the importance of a green community for future opportunities and are keen to increase their green efforts. Though new initiatives and practices have been introduced within educational institutions, they still require further implementation and support to create a more sustainable future.

Gathering qualitative data through VET experts and education authorities' interviews

The data collected from VET experts and education authorities in Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, and Slovenia highlight the importance of environmental sustainability in VET. However, it also suggests that there is still a long way to go before sustainable development is fully integrated into VET institutions.

In **Belgium**, VET organizations implement green practices, incorporate sustainability in their mission statements and curriculums, and encourage employees to learn about sustainable development. However, they face obstacles such as lack of funds, cultural awareness, expertise, and time. Partnerships with the private sector and support from policymakers are crucial for success.

As for **France**, sustainability topics, energy savings, clean materials, environmental regulations, waste management and CSR, are all currently included in the general education programs and plan for VET and integrated in apprenticeship schemes as well, however, there is an opportunity to adapt national directives and sustainability practices already implemented in VET to fit local needs. Pieces of training should also include soft skills and emotional processes related to climate change. The construction field requires trainers' skills in energy performance challenges. Involving all stakeholders in the strategic plan for greening education, including teachers, staff, students, and the community, is essential for sustained change. Emphasizing the benefits of learning sustainability can also increase students' interest in VET courses focused on this topic.

The data collected in **Germany** suggests that although environmental sustainability is considered necessary in VET, it has not yet been fully integrated into VET institutions. Teachers and trainers lack the essential competencies to address green practices and sustainability, and VET organizations lack resources. Additionally, traditional vocational training is seen as less desirable than higher education, and companies' attitudes toward vocational graduates have shifted accordingly in some areas. The government is urged to take action and provide funding to promote sustainability in VET and necessary training to teachers and staff.

In **Greece**, for example, although there is an interest in addressing sustainable development in VET, these schools are viewed as schools of "second choice," despite the efforts to make them more attractive to students. The lack of a national strategy and resources for green education have resulted in poor status of the greening process in VET institutions. The Greek government has expressed interest in addressing sustainable development in VET institutions, but at the end of the day, a comprehensive strategy is needed for a successful green transition in the educational sector.

In **Italy**, VET institutions show great interest in sustainable development and green practices, with some already including them in the curriculum and implementing them in the institution's structure. However, the lack of clear institutional-level strategy and financial support for teachers and staff training are significant obstacles to implementing green practices. External personnel support for teachers and students may be necessary to overcome these challenges.

In **Luxembourg**, VET is an active part of education. Still, the current high provision of courses does not keep up with market demand, as the general framework for implementing green practices remains somewhat unclear. A more systematic approach to green practices is necessary, emphasising research, continuous training, workshops, and the integration of sustainable development into the curriculum.

Lastly, **Slovenia** has a strong interest in incorporating sustainable development into VET education, supported by educational authorities. The VET sector actively implements green practices through various programs and projects, including modernising vocational education. However, there is a need for more official documents and regulations to make environmental practices visible and regulated within institutions. Experts' help is needed to create strategic sustainability plans, and policymakers' consistent involvement is crucial. Overall, the everGREEN survey data suggest that environmental sustainability is essential in VET, but has not yet been fully integrated into VET institutions. Teachers and trainers are not adequately prepared to address green practices and sustainability, and VET organizations lack resources. The governments are urged to act and provide funding to promote sustainability and provide necessary VET competencies.

We conclude that a national strategy and consistent government support for sustainable development in vocational education are essential. There is a need to make environmental practices in institutions more visible and regulated by official bodies. VET institutions need to become more attractive to students by incorporating topics such as digitalization, sustainable development, new technologies, and financial literacy. Partnerships with the private sector are also critical to success - this may also be a way to counter trends of favouring university graduates as seen in Germany and elsewhere. Knowledge of environmental sustainability is seen as an added value to improve job opportunities for young learners entering the labour market. The demand for green jobs is being driven by governments and companies making commitments to reduce carbon emissions or achieve other sustainability goals. Therefore, it is necessary for vocational training institutions to equip them with green skills and knowledge.

The next two chapters are dedicated to the practical approach of everGREEN. It describes in detail which aspects of a VET organisation should be addressed in a greening process and how greening can be initiated and implemented in the long term.

CHAPTER SIX

**everGREEN – Embedding
sustainability across VET**

6. everGREEN – Embedding sustainability across VET

According to UNESCO (2017) there are overall five areas through which sustainability could be pursued by VET institutions: **Campus, Curriculum and Training, Community and Workplace, Organizational Culture, and Research**. everGREEN proposes action in four areas mentioned first. Research was excluded from the project's focus it is of little relevance to the VET sector in the participating partner countries.

The following figure shows how a sustainable VET can be connected to broader social, economic and environmental systems:

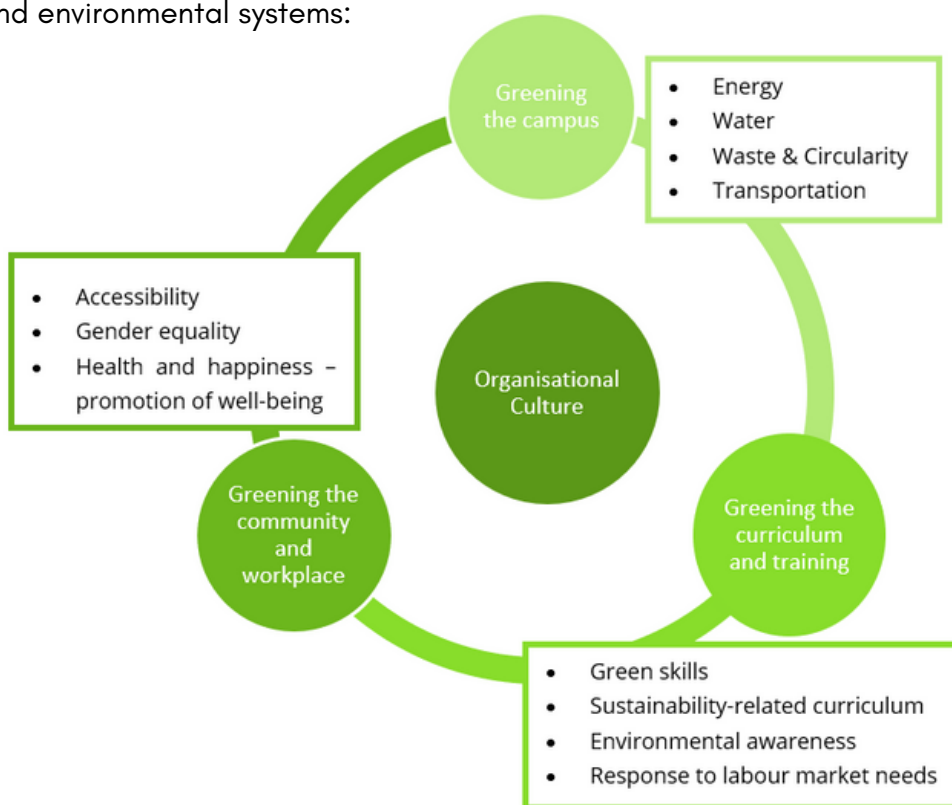


Figure 3: Sustainable VET connection to social, economic, and environmental actions




Do not be put off directly at this point. Depending on the current situation of your VET organisation, it may be necessary to tackle a limited number of these areas first and work your way forward piece by piece – depending on the availability of resources. It is also important to emphasise that it does not have to be a linear process; some approaches may go hand in hand and be interlinked.

In the following, we would like to briefly describe the individual approaches of UNESCO (2017) so that you can get an idea of what is behind the terms. For each of these approaches, the everGREEN project is developing measures, tools and methods that institutions can draw on and that cover all three axes of sustainability (environmental, social and economic). The materials will be made available free of charge to all on the everGREEN online support tool from winter 2023. They will include at least 28 mini-courses on the four approaches, as well as a variety of checklists, guidelines, and assessment tools.

Greening the Campus

The aim of this approach is to manage the campus (buildings, landscape, maintenance procedures and campus services) in a way that strengthens operational sustainability mechanisms.

This area entails the reduction of impact associated with resource usage, sustainable mobility and waste management:

-  Resources (Water & Energy)
-  Transportation and Mobility
-  Waste and Circularity

This includes improving the environmental conditions and aesthetics of the site (good air quality, access to daylight and better accessibility for students with disabilities), increasing energy efficiency and reducing water consumption. In addition, other services such as food, procurement and transport are also integral to greening the campus.

As a result of the greening of the campus, not only are the operating costs of the facility reduced. It also creates a facility that is a model for sustainable living - allowing the VET organisation to act as a role model for its students. In this way, green competences can be taught by exemplifying them to the students.

Greening the Curriculum and Training

The aim of this approach is to integrate sustainability into the existing curriculum and training.

This approach involves greening thinking by teaching skills that prepare students to play a role in a green economy. It is about adapting relevant training courses and content to meet the current demands of technology and the labour market. Skills should be taught that can be used to solve problems in a more sustainable way. This greening of the curriculum should not be limited to environmental issues, but should also take into account social and economic aspects. This will create an effective and organised programme of theoretical and practical teaching content whose learning objective is aligned with the SDGs.

Topics such as energy efficiency, solar energy, wind power, green building, healthy food and entrepreneurship are all growth areas that could be integrated into an institution's curriculum to prepare students for green economy careers. To this end, VET organisations can integrate the latest research into existing courses and programmes, offer staff development events in collaboration with local businesses, and/or even launch new programmes.

In summary, greening the curriculum and education equips students with knowledge, skills

and competencies adapted to the current needs of society and the economy, which increases their employability and competitiveness in the labour market. In addition, the VET organisation establishes itself as an attractive institution in the market, offering modernised and competitive curricula and training.

Greening the Community and Workplace

The goal of this approach is to engage industry, business, and the broader community in the VET Institution's sustainability plans and programs so that sustainable practices in the workplace and sustainable lifestyles become the norm.

This approach includes preparing students to apply the fundamentals of sustainability in their future workplaces. While greening the curriculum focuses on later work content, greening the community and workplace focuses on the work environment. The VET organization - made up of a variety of individuals - is part of the local community. It is influenced by it, but also influences it in return. The greening of the community and the workplace cannot occur without the development of local green skills that can produce sustainable local markets and businesses.

Within the VET organisation, greening the community and workplace contributes to sustainable lifestyles and consumption among members. In addition, partner networks can be built in the local economy involving school communities that apply circular economy principles. In the long run, the VET organization releases students into the labour market prepared to make professional as well as private economic decisions also incorporating environmental considerations.

Greening the Organisational Culture

The aim of this approach is to embed sustainability into all aspects of the institution.

Culture is the main pillar guiding the greening process; a strong base of green values and ethics combined with green skills and knowledge is an important foundation for social change that also impacts other areas such as the economy and the environment.

This approach is most closely interwoven with the rest of the approaches. Greening the campus, curriculum and education, as well as the community and workplace, imparts knowledge and skills to individuals that continuously influence organisational culture, while organisational culture significantly influences whether and how the other approaches are advanced.

The greening of organisational culture leads to sustainability approaches being reflected in the official policies and plans of the institution. Environmental and sustainability skills are applied in everyday life and decision-making, and the newly acquired knowledge, skills and competences improve professional practice, work processes and methods. The institutional culture - from management to practitioners and from top administrators to new staff or students - is underpinned by values and ethics consistent with sustainable development.

CHAPTER SEVEN

**everGREEN – Designing steps
towards VET sustainable
transition**

7. everGREEN – Designing steps towards VET sustainable transition

The challenge for the United Nations under the 2030 Agenda is to develop and improve integrated approaches to sustainable development (United Nations, 2020). To meet this challenge, UNESCO published the guide *Greening Technical and Vocational Education and Training – A practical guide for institutions*, which has already been mentioned several times in this document. It is supposed to help VET leaders and practitioners in improving their understanding and implementation of Education for Sustainable Development. This guide recommends a **four steps process for greening VET**, which the everGREEN project follows in its structural design. This chapter explains the UNESCO four-step process and presents the innovative approaches, methods and tools everGREEN provides to support VET organisations in implementing these steps in practice.

STEP 1: Understanding the process

Understanding the requirements of a whole institutional approach

The first step is for VET organisations to develop an understanding of what is meant by a greening process and a whole-institution approach. This is necessary so that all people involved can appreciate what they will be facing in the following process.

The term 'greening' can easily be misunderstood. It is not just about making the school facility physically more environmentally friendly. The idea behind the greening approach is to **fundamentally implement a sustainable way of thinking and acting at all levels of the VET organization**. Therefore, greening does not have a defined target point to be reached, but is a process designed for continuous improvement. In order to achieve this, all members of the organizations, be it teachers, administrators, management, students, as well as stakeholders such as funding agencies or parents, need to be involved – a **'whole-institutional approach'** is needed. Greening should be an integral part of the institutional ethos, present in the minds of all organizational members and encompassing all aspects of the institution's activities.

Furthermore, it should be noted that a VET institution is not isolated from its environment. In order to successfully implement a greening process in one's own institution, it is helpful, if not necessary, to know national strategic agendas, potential funding programmes, legal frameworks but also aspects such as labour market developments and students' wishes.

As described earlier in this framework, **everGREEN focuses on four areas** through which the greening process can be carry out: **Greening the Campus, the Curriculum and Training, the Community and Workplace, and the Organisational Culture**.

This UNESCO approach can sound overwhelming and too challenging at first sight, so that one does not dare to start the greening process in one's own institution. **This is where everGREEN comes in.** The everGREEN project will hold various online sessions to explain in detail the theoretical aspects of the greening process. Furthermore, an interactive support tool will be available to help you understand your current situation and where you are in the greening process. Please remember that greening is a continuous process with an open end. Not all areas have to be included in the first step. This would run the risk of getting bogged down and losing the overview. To start with, it makes sense to tackle a limited number of sites and to continuously expand the greening process over time. But first, the most important thing is to find a sensible, promising start for which sufficient resources (both human and financial) are available.

The **everGREEN** project provides you with an **online Support Tool** which helps you to be clear about the following points that are relevant for an institutional greening approach:

- ➔ Is there a vision to anchor the implementation of ESD in your institution?
- ➔ Do institutional stakeholders have the capacity to implement a greening campaign?
- ➔ Are those involved in education and training equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes on sustainability?
- ➔ Is there interest or broad commitment to the topic of sustainability in the community?
- ➔ Are there existing or untapped resources to support the process?
- ➔ Can the national agenda (policies, goals, etc.) support your institutional greening initiative?

Once these questions are being answered with the help of the everGREEN support tool and depending on the capacities of your institution, **you can make a decision on whether or to what extent to initiate the greening process in your VET organisation.**

STEP 2: Planning the Greening of VET

Planning a greening strategy

Once there is an understanding of what the greening process entails and a positive decision has been made to implement it, the time has come to create a detailed plan. This should include concrete goals, as well as measures and responsibilities for achieving them.

Of course, every organisation is unique, but everGREEN will guide you through common actions to create your custom plan for greening your VET institution.

1. You will identify the lead participants within your institution that will steer the greening process in the initial phase. These individuals will become part of the everGREEN Greening Teams, which will be closely mentored and supported by the project consortium during the development and implementation of their greening plan.

2. During the online sessions with the greening teams, you will work to develop a rationale for your organisation. The rationale will raise awareness for the vital necessity of being involved in a whole-institution approach for greening. In short, you will need to answer one simple question: Why should you initiate the greening process in your VET organisation? The greening teams need to establish a sense of urgency in their organisations and convince others of the importance of instant action, that will serve the whole institution (students, community, and staff). The rationale establishes a clear aim to guide your institution to design its next actions. In any case, the greening teams should highlight the benefits that the institution will gain by undergoing the greening process. As an institution you are not only reducing your costs for energy, water, food, among other things, but you are also positioning yourselves in the community and society as environmentally conscious. The image of your organisation will be improved and promoted as an institution that educates students and provides them with appropriate competences in the ever-changing labour market. In short, engaging in the greening process proves that the institutions are going the extra mile to adjust and keep up with the new emerging needs, in a way to differentiate from other institutions and modernize themselves.
3. In order to develop an institutional greening concept, you will first need to self-assess the current status and readiness level of your organisation. The everGREEN project team has developed a tool for the evaluation of VET's current greening status: the 9 Greening Scenarios. This tool can be used by institutions that are either taking their first steps toward sustainability or by those which have already demonstrated progress. The 9-scenario matrix represents the 9 possible combinations between the aspiration level (light, medium and strong) and the readiness level (low, medium, and high) of a VET institution.

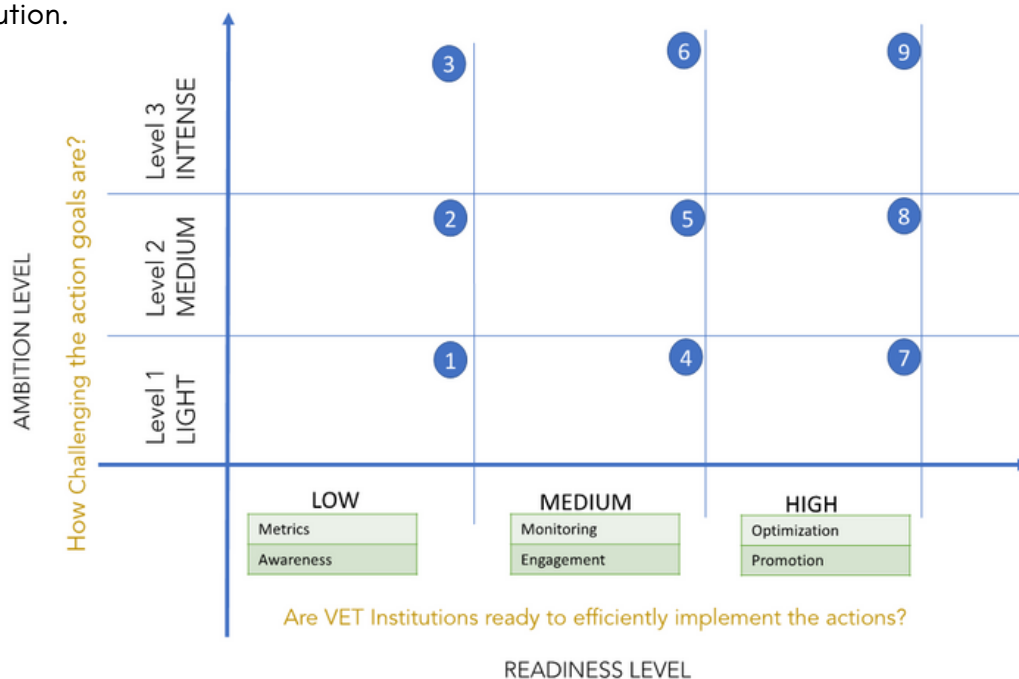


Figure 3: Sustainable VET connection to social, economic, and environmental actions

The everGREEN Support Tool helps you to position your organisation in this matrix and to better understand the scenario you are in.

4. Last but not least, we come to the actual development of your institutional greening plan. The everGREEN project consortium will coach all participants in a 3-day face-to-face course through the creation of their individual greening plans and prepare them in detail for their implementation. During the course you will develop a plan that clearly defines the goals of the greening process for your organisation based on performance indicators and includes activities to achieve these goals in the short, medium and long term. The everGREEN support tool will help you in this process by suggesting based on your selected scenario:

- ➔ appropriate tools and methods that can support you in the process, and
- ➔ qualitative and quantitative performance indicators related to your intended objectives

All tools and methods used during the face-to-face course for the preparation of the greening plans will be made freely available in the form of an annex to this document after the training at the end of 2023. In this way, we want to ensure that the everGREEN approach can also be used by interested VET institutions that may not have the opportunity to attend our face-to-face course in person.

STEP 3: Implementing the Greening plans

Putting plans into action with proposed tools and resources

Once a greening plan has been established, it is time to identify the resources, tools and support needed to implement it. However, institutional implementation can vary widely among the everGREEN Greening Teams, as organisations might be at different stages of greening and VET is provided in different ways in different countries and sectors.

In the following, we describe essential elements that you can use to guide you in taking a purposeful, if not holistic, approach to greening your organisation:

- ➔ First of all, based on the objectives identified in the previous step, you should be clear about what actions should be taken to achieve the objectives. Then you should assign responsibilities accordingly - e.g., to individual departments, to individuals or teams, to groups of students, etc. A helpful tool at this point can be implementation guidelines, for which we will provide you with templates and recommendations during the everGREEN training course. Your greening process should start with a series of actions aimed at short-term success. Quick, easily achievable successes help to create a positive momentum, continuously motivate fellow campaigners, and gain further allies for the whole-institute approach, as people like to participate in success projects.
- ➔ Secondly, the wise use of resources is crucial to the success of the implementation. First and foremost is the effective and efficient use of human resources. On the one hand, you need to choose which people have the necessary skills to carry out planned actions, and on the other hand, you need to ensure that these people also have the necessary spare capacity. One financial resource you may want to consider as your greening process progresses is savings in energy, water and waste management. In many best practice examples of greening projects, the investment of these savings in further sustainability activities is a key driving mechanism for the ongoing greening process.

➔ Finally, it is important that you make the results of your actions clear to yourself and your organisation. Celebrate your successes together and ensure that new behaviours and activities are sustained and developed. Success can also be a driver for continuity – as long as you realise success, you are likely to continue to receive leadership support. At this point, a good case can also be made for using the financial savings from e.g., energy, water, and waste reduction initiatives to further develop your organisation's greening potential.

Lessons learned and new knowledge should also be continuously incorporated into updates of the greening plan and new activities. You may recall that the greening process does not have a fixed goal but is subject to continuous change and expansion.

This implementation phase of the greening process will follow the 3-day everGREEN face-to-face course. During this time, you will continue to receive support through online follow-up meetings. In addition, at this stage of your greening process, the everGREEN Support Tool will again provide you with helpful support. You get direct and free access to training opportunities that provide you with interactive resources and tools to support you in your implementation. The tool recommends resources that match the greening scenario you selected in the previous step. The everGREEN online mini-courses cover the four previously mentioned areas of greening (greening the campus, greening the curriculum and training, greening the community and greening the organisational culture). They provide you with helpful knowledge to implement your greening plan and the achievement of your targeted level of greening.

STEP 4: Monitoring progress and assessing results

Monitoring tools to assess the greening process

In order to make greening a continuous process, frequent monitoring is needed to allow for regular adaptation and updating. Only by assessing the progress made can it be determined whether and to what extent the goals of the greening plan have been achieved. This step therefore describes the need to develop assessment criteria which describe a **set of expectations and predetermined indicators of achievements**.

The greening process basically contains **aspects whose development is easier or more difficult to measure and assess**. Resource savings are one of the aspects that can be easily measured by quantitative indicators, as well as, for example, the number of courses in which sustainability topics are covered in class. Other aspects, such as the change in institutional culture, which includes the deeply held beliefs of the members of the organisation, are difficult to specify quantitatively. At this point, it may be necessary to find **qualitative indicators** to describe them in order to monitor their success. Ideally, these assessment criteria should already be considered when formulating the goals in the greening plan.

The everGREEN project will assist you in setting up your monitoring framework, in which you clarify the scope of your assessment, define the assessment criteria as well as desired outcomes and timeframes. EverGREEN also offers tools that you can use to evaluate and monitor your progress. The tools range from simple to complex and detailed monitoring schemes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

8. Conclusion

This framework has now given you an overview of how the everGREEN project contributes to making the UNESCO guidelines for greening VET (2017) easier to use and manage.

The described everGREEN online Support Tool with the 9 Scenario Assessment and the 28 mini-courses, as well as all other tools, methods and guidance will be developed by the everGREEN project team during 2023 and extensively piloted and tested with VET representatives. Once the materials are finalised, a comprehensive annex will be added to this framework, which will provide a detailed overview of all everGREEN products available. You will then be able to access the online Support Tool, mini-courses and all other materials free of charge via the everGREEN website.

If we have already convinced you of our approach and you would like to participate directly in the pilot phase with your vocational training institution, then you have the chance to become part of our Greening Team! This offers many advantages. You will of course get free access to all everGREEN materials - but on top of that we offer you:

- ➔ A comprehensive international blended-learning programme consisting of 3 online sessions and a 3-day face-to-face course in Nice, France with participants from the everGREEN partner countries Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Slovenia and other EU member states.
- ➔ Extensive support and mentoring by the project partnership during the initiation of your greening process.
- ➔ The opportunity to become part of a European network of VET institutions dedicated to sustainability, from whose knowledge and experience you can benefit.

If you would like to enjoy these and other benefits, then please do not hesitate to contact our project coordinator Sarah Wild, BUPNET GmbH in Germany, by email at swild@bupnet.de.

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