



# GREEN GUIDANCE IMPACT REPORT

*How can green guidance impact  
practice, organisations and policy*

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Exploring Green Guidance Report #5

# About Exploring green guidance

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# Abstract

This report presents the results of the pilot phase of the *Exploring Green Guidance* project, which tested how the concept of green guidance can be implemented in everyday career counselling, education, information and guidance practice. Around 60 guidance practitioners from several European countries were trained as *Green Guidance Ambassadors* and experimented with a set of tools and approaches with their clients, reaching an estimated 300 people in individual and group guidance contexts.

The report draws on pre- and post-survey data, practitioner reflections, case studies, and focus groups transcripts to examine what changed in practice and what challenges emerged. Practitioners reported integrating tools that helped clients explore their values, reconnect work with environmental and social concerns, understand concrete opportunities linked to the green transition. In many cases, these conversations shifted the focus of guidance from short-term job placement toward broader questions of meaning, contribution, and the societal role of work. The pilot also shows how a durable integration of sustainability into practice relates with individual commitment of practitioners and a shift in how they perceive their role, rather than on a specific set of tools.

At the same time, the pilot revealed structural barriers: limited labour-market information on sustainable careers, institutional constraints on guidance practice, further training and peer exchange. The findings suggest that green guidance is both feasible and relevant for contemporary career practice, but its wider adoption will require continued professional development, localised resources for practitioners, and stronger links between guidance systems and sustainability policies.

# Recommendations

The project concludes with a series of recommendations which can take the field of green guidance forwards, they are reproduced here, but further detail can be found at the end of the report.

## Career guidance practitioners

- Start with what resonates with clients (not necessarily with the environmental issues).
- Experiment with appropriate ways to proactively open the topic with all clients and students.
- Develop your own ethical stance through reflective practice.
- Find or develop peer networks and communities of practice.
- Dedicate time to adaptation and localisation of the tools and resources.
- Be aware of the ideological risks of individualisation and depolitisation that can be encouraged by green guidance approaches.

## Service managers and institutional leaders

- Recognise sustainability as a legitimate dimension of your service's scope.
- Provide protected time for training, preparation, and peer exchange.
- Pursue a balanced approach to institutional integration (participative rather than imposed).
- Extend green guidance and green education training to teachers and other front-line professionals.

## Policymakers

- Integrate sustainability explicitly into national career guidance frameworks, quality standards, performance indicators, competency frameworks for practitioners.
- Connect green transition employment policy to career guidance investment.
- Support the development of national green labour market intelligence that is accessible to guidance practitioners and their clients.
- Resist the conflation of green guidance with a narrow green jobs' agenda.

## Project funders and the Erasmus+ programme

- Fund the continuation and formalisation of the green guidance community of practice.
- Invest in localisation of tools and resources.
- Fund the development of shorter, context-specific implementation pathways alongside the full handbook and toolbox.
- Design future funding calls for institutional and policy embedding alongside individual practitioner training.

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# 1) Introduction and methodology

This report documents the results of the pilot testing phase of the *Exploring Green Guidance* project (Erasmus+, 2023-1-SK01-KA220-VET-000158513). It covers the period from approximately September 2025 to February 2026, during which trained ambassadors (career guidance practitioners, teachers, community workers and other career professionals) tested the project's tools and activities with real clients and students across ten countries.

The report draws on the following data sources:

- a post-testing online survey completed by 51 practitioners across all partner countries;
- focus group and interview transcripts from Portugal, Slovakia, Czechia, Poland, Norway and an international group (participants on a green guidance 5 day training);
- a selection of written case studies submitted by the participants.

Not all practitioners submitted every form of documentation, and the survey data are incomplete - only a subset of those who participated in training and testing filled it in. All figures for participant counts are therefore estimates presented with explicit caveats, and all practitioners and clients are referred to anonymously throughout.

The primary audience for this report is threefold: project funders interested in evidence of impact and transferability; career guidance practitioners, providers and professional associations considering adopting or adapting green guidance approaches; and policy-makers at national and European level with an interest in the integration of sustainability into career education and guidance services.

The project's starting point is that career guidance does not take place in a social vacuum. Practitioners who help individuals make decisions about work and learning are also, implicitly or explicitly, shaping how people relate to the labour market, to collective wellbeing, and to the ecological and social crises of our time. The *Exploring Green Guidance* project asked what it would mean to make that implicit dimension explicit and to provide practitioners with the concepts, language, and practical tools to do so. What follows is an account of what happened when they tried.

## 2) Participants in the pilot

### Practitioners

Across all partner countries, approximately 60 practitioners went through green guidance training and took on the role of ambassadors during the pilot phase. These practitioners were spread across the following national pilot groups.

Country	No. of participants	Description of participants
Czechia	9	Career practitioners recruited on a voluntary basis.
Norway	10	Career guidance students and current practitioners.
Poland	8	Mostly teachers recruited from collaborating schools with some practitioners working with adults and vulnerable groups.
Portugal	24	Participants in an accredited green guidance training programme.
Slovakia	11	Practitioners recruited from the membership of the national professional associations, representing all sectors of career guidance provision, including working with people with cognitive disabilities.
International	10	Practitioners from the UK, Finland, Sweden, Latvia and Switzerland who participated in a 5 days intensive training in September 2025.

Figure 1. Pilot participants

Most of the participants in the testing phase had already been involved in some project activities e.g. training on green guidance, participation on innovation factories and co-development of tools, training for ambassadors. Depending on the country, the training length varied from 4 to 40 hours.

In terms of their professional profile, practitioners came from a wide range of roles and sectors. Among the 51 survey respondents, the most common roles were career counsellor or guidance practitioner (approximately 22 respondents), psychologist (approximately 16), and school counsellor (approximately 6), with several respondents combining multiple roles. Sectors represented included schools (15 respondents), higher education or university settings (11), private practice (6), NGOs or charities (6), vocational education and training (5), and public

employment services (1). Combining this data with the participants on the focus groups allowed us to estimate the following numbers of practitioners involved.

Sector	Estimated total
Schools (primary, secondary, VET-school)	~20
Higher education / University	~17
Continuing vocational education and training	~5
Charity / NGO	~7
Private practice	~6
Other (unspecified or mixed)	~7
Public employment services (PES)	~4

Figure 2. Estimated number of practitioners in the pilot phase, by sector. Note: some practitioners have several roles.

## Clients and students reached

Reconstructing an accurate count of clients and students who received green guidance interventions is not straightforward. Not all practitioners submitted case studies, and many implementations were woven into existing sessions rather than delivered as standalone programmes. What follows is a conservative estimate based on documented evidence and should be understood as a minimum rather than a complete figure.

From the written case studies and focus group accounts, the following direct interventions can be identified: a Portuguese school-based programme spanning three sessions with two vocational secondary classes, involving approximately 37 students; a workshop with 8 master's students in psychology in Sweden; a Portuguese primary school class of 24 children aged 9 to 10 (programme in preparation); a Portuguese RVCC group of adults (approximately 11); a Slovak group of adults with mild intellectual disabilities (approximately 10-15); multiple individual guidance sessions across Portugal, Latvia, Slovakia, Switzerland, the UK, and Norway; several classes of pupils from Poland and Slovakia. Several practitioners in the international focus group also reported reaching between 30 and 160 students through lectures and seminars in which green guidance elements were woven in. The Slovak and Polish practitioners document additional school-based interventions with 7th and 8th grade classes.

Taking all of this together, a conservative but reasonably grounded estimate is that green guidance tools and approaches were used in direct contact with at least 200 to 300 individuals during the pilot period. This figure includes interventions ranging from a brief values conversation in an individual session to a three-session programme; and it does not capture the secondary dissemination that several practitioners undertook with their own colleagues and professional networks, which is documented separately.

Country	Experts	
University Students	~100+	International (Reading, master's groups), Czech Republic, Slovakia.
Primary/Secondary Pupils	~150+	Slovakia (84 documented), Poland (multiple grades 7-8), Portugal.
Adults in Transition / VET / Jobseekers	~50+	Portugal (RVCC candidates), Poland, Slovakia (Labour office clients).
Vulnerable Groups	~20+ (intensive)	Slovakia (Adults with mild intellectual disabilities), Poland (Crisis support).

Figure 3. Estimated number of participants (clients and students) in the pilot phase

### 3) Implementation strategies and tools tested

#### Approaches to integrating sustainability into guidance practice

Practitioners described two ways of introducing sustainability:

- Explicit framing, for example by stating at the beginning of the process or the workshop something in these lines: “I am a Green Guidance ambassador; sustainability is a core topic; would you like to explore it?”
- Implicit integration using methods different (Ikigai, value cards, enlarging perspective in line with the “world needs”) without foregrounding sustainability as a labelled topic.

Some practitioners explicitly report testing both approaches and finding neither universally better; suitability depended on client readiness and context.

*I tried different approaches. Sometimes I introduced the topic very gently, for example through methods like the tree exercise or Ikigai, and other times I presented it very openly, explaining that I work as a Green Guidance ambassador and that sustainability is the core theme. I cannot say that one approach worked better than the other - it really depends on the client.*

*Career practitioner, Slovakia*

They indicate that green guidance works best when it is experiential, visual, narrative, focused on working with values, and connected with real lives. Purely informational approaches are deemed less attractive and less effective. Activities that connected emotions, identity and concrete examples of green work were particularly effective.

*I often used nature-based conversations, walking sessions, mindfulness outdoors, and even horse-assisted activities. These approaches helped clients feel safer, reflect more deeply, and sometimes make significant life transitions.*

*Career practitioner, Norway*

Across almost all documented uses, practitioners adapted the tools to their context rather than applying them as designed. This included simplifying language for younger or less-educated client groups, translating materials into national languages (an ongoing and time-consuming process, documented across several countries), shortening activities that were too long for available session time, combining tools from multiple sessions into single activities, and weaving green guidance questions into existing frameworks rather than delivering them as separate activities. Green guidance was implemented

through different approaches of adaptation and translation: translation of concepts (present sustainability in an understandable and simple language), translation of methods (adapting tools to age/ability, readiness), and translation of relevance (connecting sustainability to the client's actual constraints, motivations and situation).

*Some terms were too professional or abstract for the average client, requiring the counselor to 'translate' them into more understandable language.*

*Career professional, Czechia*

A pattern across most countries (with exception of institutions explicitly promoting integration of sustainability in guidance services) is that green guidance was not implemented as an officially mandated approach, but as professional adaptation of practices based on the individual commitment of practitioners. For example, counsellors placed SDG posters in offices, adapted and redesigned existing tools, embedded sustainability questions 'under the radar' in lectures, seminars and one-to-one conversations, and adapted career fairs by using labels for green employers. Some practitioners integrated green guidance by re-framing it around topics of ethics, values, wellbeing, or building critical consciousness to support students and clients to deal with their negative experiences with the world of work, discrimination, exploitation and burn-out. Practitioners also embedded the dimensions of green guidance into existing tools without naming them or connecting them explicitly to sustainability. This 'stealth embedding' is present across several countries. These integration tactics allow practitioners to act even in constrained systems, which shows its adaptability but is also a warning signal suggesting a lack of formal support for green guidance. We will return to this in Chapter 7.

## **Tools and approaches across the five dimensions of green guidance**

The findings and observation of practitioners are structured through the lens of the five dimensions of green guidance (Dimsits & Hooley, 2024). For each dimension, three questions are addressed:

- Which tools and approaches related to this dimension were tested?
- What worked and why?
- What was difficult?

The five dimensions are not mutually exclusive in practice, most documented interventions touched on two or more simultaneously. Where a tool or finding belongs primarily to one dimension but has clear implications for another, this is noted.

All of the tools discussed are available from <https://www.green-guidance.eu/resources/exploring-green-guidance-toolbox/>

### **1: LEARNING ABOUT THE SUSTAINABLE WORLD**

This dimension was the most heavily represented in the toolbox and one of the most consistently tested across countries, particularly in school and VET settings. The tools used under this dimension include :

- *SDG cards* (UN Sustainable Development Goals as a visual sorting and discussion tool) - used in Switzerland, UK, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, and Portugal across school, university, and individual counselling contexts.
- *Introduction to green jobs* and *How green is this company?* - used in Portugal in vocational secondary school classes and extracurricular career sessions in the UK.
- *Sustainable Career Card Sort (SCCS)* - used in Portugal with secondary school students in professional courses.
- *Who takes care of the environment? Green jobs around us* - used in Slovakia with primary and secondary school pupils.
- *Trends shaping the future labour market* - used in Slovakia with secondary students and adults in employment services.
- *Green jobs in pop culture - WALL-E* - used in Slovakia with adults with mild intellectual disabilities.
- *Design a sustainable city* - used in Poland with 7th and 8th grade students and in Slovakia in a youth work context.
- *Eco-jobs around us* - used in Poland with 7th grade primary school students.
- *Introduction to the green economy* - used in Czech Republic with secondary school students.
- *I know someone who works in a sustainable/green job* - used in Poland with unemployed adults.
- Several practitioners created their own supplementary resources under this dimension.

**What worked:** The most consistent finding was that information-focused tools worked best when anchored to the students' own experience rather than delivered as abstract content. In Portugal, the *sustainability thermometer* exercise (analysing companies' environmental impact and sustainability policies) was effective because students were assessing companies where they had actually worked. Students had not previously connected sustainability to employment, and that the exercise gave them an opportunity and practical language for it.

In Slovakia, the activity that approached sustainability through the lens of pop-culture (movies such as WALL-E ) succeeded with a group of adults with mild intellectual disabilities (a population that might have been expected to struggle with the abstract dimensions of the topic) because it grounded green career concepts in a familiar and emotionally resonant cultural reference. The practitioner reported that the activity supported confidence, environmental

competence, and practical orientation around sustainable work options in equal measure.

The SDG cards and SDG-inspired tools proved remarkably versatile across age groups and national contexts. Young students in secondary education were often already familiar with the SDGs from geography or civics classes, which gave these approaches a readymade entry point. For older adults the cards were useful precisely because they made the dimensions of meaningful work visible and navigable.

The green careers information tools (tools focusing on green jobs, sustainable city design) consistently generated enthusiasm among young people when delivered in collaborative or creative group formats and were deemed as particularly useful for career education contexts.

**What was difficult:** The principal difficulty under this dimension was a gap between students' general environmental awareness and their ability to connect that awareness to career thinking. The concept of a 'green career' as something actively chosen or constructed was relatively new and required scaffolding.

A related difficulty was language. The vocabulary of green economy, circular economy, and sustainable labour markets is technical, often English-derived, and carries different connotations in different national contexts.

Also a need for localised resources (for example case studies of companies, citizen-led initiatives and individuals from the local context), and high-quality 'green LMI' was raised by several practitioners.

## 2: RECONNECTING WITH THE WORLD

This dimension was the least evenly distributed across countries and contexts. The tools and approaches documented under this dimension include:

- *Moments of resonance* - used by a Finnish practitioner with university students and by a Polish practitioner with adults; also completed in Portugal.
- *Ecological dialogues* - and conversation starters, used in all countries as low-threshold tools to open a sustainability dimension within existing sessions.
- *Ecological career education through fairy tales and stories* - used in Portugal with a 9-year-old client in clinical-guidance work.
- *Critical deconstruction of job dissatisfaction* - used in Poland with adults.
- *Nature-based and animal-assisted practices* documented in Norway, where the practitioner described using walking sessions, mindfulness outdoors, and horse-assisted interventions in earlier work with individuals.
- Several practitioners also described informal reconnection practices that did not use a named tool: placing SDG posters and IKIGAI circles in counselling offices as ambient prompts; using the SDGs as a framework

for conversation about meaning and direction without formal activity structure; and beginning individual sessions with open questions about the client's relationship to environmental issues as a way of testing readiness.

**What worked:** The *moments of resonance* tool was consistently described positively by those who used it. It worked well as a self-directed reflective activity and added a collaborative dimension at the end by having students present their moments of resonance to each other.

The *fairy tales and stories* tool used with a child experiencing climate anxiety was documented: Over several sessions, the practitioner used narrative, symbolism, and a 'fear box' technique to help the child transform environmental fear into a sense of constructive agency. The child's invented character - 'the Earth Soldier' - became a sustained metaphor for protection, courage, and care that the child took home in the form of a diary ('me and the planet'). Parents reported measurable improvements in sleep, mood, and daily emotional regulation.

The conversation starters were widely valued precisely because they required no special session structure or additional time - they could be woven into any existing guidance conversation as a light probe of whether a client was ready to explore the sustainability dimension.

Some practitioners described extensive use of nature-based conversation, outdoor walking sessions, and animal-assisted work (horse) in supporting individuals with mental health challenges - practices they retrospectively identified as 'green' under the project's broader social sustainability framing. These cases illustrate that the reconnection dimension often already exists, latently, in practitioners' repertoires (different experiential methods, using artistic, metaphorical language, emotions) and that green guidance training may be as much about recognising and naming existing practice as introducing entirely new approaches.

**What was difficult:** This dimension was the hardest to implement in some guidance contexts. The resonance, experiential, and focal practices it encompasses tend to require time, a relationship of trust, and an unhurried space. Practitioners often had little room to engage with the slower, relational, and body-involved quality that this dimension implies.

Practitioners also noted an unresolved ethical question about the limits of reconnection work within a career guidance frame: at what point does inviting a client to reflect on their relationship with the living world move beyond the practitioner's professional scope? Many of her clients were primarily seeking economic stability, and some practitioners say that introducing something as

expansive as nature-relatedness or care ecology risked trivialising both their material concerns and the ecological question itself. In other cases practitioners say having dared to open this dimension with even disadvantaged clients with a surprisingly good results, which indicates a latent interest for sustainability by many clients if this topic is opened in a skilful way.

The tools for this dimension also tended to be the most culturally and linguistically situated, making adaptation for translation and different national contexts particularly demanding. The fairy tales approach, for example, requires a practitioner with genuine clinical skill in narrative therapy.

### 3: BUILDING SOLIDARITY WITH THE WORLD

This dimension appeared in almost every documented implementation in some form. It is the dimension that most closely corresponds to the reframing and shifting career guidance from a purely individual frame (what is right for me?) to a broader one (what is right for me, for others, and for the world?). The tools and approaches used under this dimension include:

- *What kind of life do I want? My life, my contribution* - used by several practitioners in Portugal, and appearing in the survey responses of practitioners from Slovakia and other countries. Used primarily with adults in prior learning recognition contexts, unemployed adults, and career changers.
- *Smooth / soft goals* - used in Portugal and Slovakia with adult clients in career guidance and orientation processes.
- *IKIGAI* adapted for green guidance, used in Slovakia, Sweden, Portugal, and Czech Republic, with both individual clients and groups.
- *Challenges of the world and a meaningful career* - used in Portugal across secondary school, university, and individual guidance contexts, and in Slovakia in a youth work context.
- *Green RIASEC* - used in Slovakia with adults.
- *SDG-based values positioning* - used informally across multiple countries, asking clients to choose and discuss which goals feel personally relevant.
- *What kind of life do I want?* combined with GreenComp (Bianchi et al., 2022) a competency framework for sustainability - used in Portugal with adult clients.
- Some students' workshops also belong substantially to this dimension: framed as helping students move from individual career goals to a broader perspective on 'what the world needs', using a modified IKIGAI and dilemma exercises.

**What worked:** When working with adults in the context of recognition of prior learning (Portugal), the *My life, my contribution* activity was particularly effective at surfacing contributions that adult clients had made to community, family, and environment but had never categorised as such.

*She was surprised to discover how many contributions she was already making - to her own wellbeing, to others, and to the environment - without having recognised their value.*

*Career counsellor, Portugal (from a case study)*

The *Challenges of the world and a meaningful career* tool worked well in group formats with secondary and university students who were approaching career decisions. A Portuguese school counsellor who used it with 12th-grade students reported that it reoriented the entire conversation from individual trajectory to collective responsibility, which she described as opening a different kind of seriousness in students who were accustomed to guidance sessions focused entirely on their own grades and educational options.

The IKIGAI adaptation, focusing on the *What the world needs* dimension, consistently fostered career reflection. Slovak practitioners noted that clients who had previously thought about career choices in terms of passion and skills were genuinely surprised to find the world's needs question very generative. University students in Sweden who worked through the adapted IKIGAI in the master's workshop found it connected directly to their developing professional identity as psychologists.

The SMOOTH goals tool allowed practitioners to introduce considerations of harmony and broader impact through a goal-planning framework that clients already found familiar, rather than requiring a separate sustainability conversation. This provides a good example of natural and implicit embedding of sustainability into an existing tool.

**What was difficult:** The principal difficulty was the gap between the individual frame clients typically brought to guidance and the broader frame the tools sought to introduce. Several Portuguese practitioners noted that clients (particularly younger ones and those from immigrant or economically marginal backgrounds) tended to have a strong focus on personal and family context and found it hard to extend their reflection outward. One practitioner working with a 19-year-old Brazilian immigrant was clear about this:

*He found it difficult to understand the broader impact of his career on society and the world. He focused much more on personal and family contexts, and had more difficulty perceiving this larger impact. If I had had more time, I think I could have helped him to direct the questions better and reach a more expansive reflection.*

*Career counsellor, Portugal*

The enlargement of decision-making criteria works most naturally with clients who already have some degree of psychological security and reflective capacity. With clients whose primary concern is economic survival, a forced pivot to

solidarity and world-contribution risks feeling irrelevant or even insulting. Similarly, some practitioners raised the difficulty of discussing collective versus individual responsibility when delivering activities to language-learners or marginalised groups. When she asked SDG-based questions in the form '*how can you do this in your life?*', it felt as though they were placing the burden of the climate crisis on the individuals - people who were already in a precarious position relative to the labour market. The collective framing of sustainability information needs careful handling to avoid inadvertently increasing guilt or helplessness, or reinforcing neoliberal narratives that depoliticise sustainability.

#### **4: IMAGINING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES**

This was the most sparsely tested dimension in the pilot, because it is the most conceptually demanding and challenging to introduce within standard guidance formats, and the most politically exposed. The tools and approaches documented under this dimension include:

- *Letter from the future* - used by a Swiss practitioner across multiple individual and group contexts with both secondary school students and adults in career transition, and appearing in the Slovak survey data.
- *Designing a sustainable city* - used in Poland and Slovakia. While this tool is primarily an LMI tool, the city design format also invites imaginative and utopian thinking about how the built environment and economy could be organised differently.
- *Ecological metaphors* - used in Slovakia in a youth work context.
- *Ethical dilemmas tool* (adapted for psychology) - used in Sweden in a master's workshop.
- *Utopia-building collaborative game* - mentioned by the Portuguese facilitator as a resource shared with the group, developed by a Portuguese academic as a collaborative utopia-construction activity.

Beyond named tools, this dimension surfaced most clearly in discussion rather than in formal activity use. Some focus groups discussed the value of imagining how things could be without first constructing barriers. Some also referenced the concept of '*symbolic misery*' (*misère symbolique*) - a subsist versus exist framing - as a theoretical anchor used in the training that practitioners had brought into sessions with students.

**What worked:** The letter from the future was used a lot and practitioners described using it consistently and successfully as a bridge between an SDG-based first session and a follow-up conversation about what the client actually wanted their life and work to look like. It worked as a take-home assignment and generated letters that clients then brought back and discussed - often with genuine surprise at what they had written. One practitioner described it as working well across a wide age range, both with young high school students and with adults in their 40s and 50s navigating career change.

The dilemma tool in school workshops produced very engaged discussion. Students could recognise themselves in the scenarios, found the absence of clear answers generative rather than frustrating, and several asked to take the full dilemma set home. The practitioner noted that the scenarios touched on systemic problems that could not be solved at the individual level - and that this was precisely what generated productive discussion about what a first small step might look like, and about the non-linearity of change.

*Some dilemmas touched on issues requiring systemic change, and students found it discouraging that these could not easily be solved at the individual level. To address this, I invited them to reflect on what a first small step could look like and discussed how complex sustainability challenges often require patience - that progress is rarely linear, and sometimes a step back makes room for two steps forward later.*

*Career counsellor, Sweden (master's workshop)*

In a case study from Portugal - a 43-year-old client navigating between veterinary clinical work and her values around animal welfare, education, and social justice - the practitioner used the *My life, my contribution* tool to help the client step back from a purely employment-centred frame and see her whole life, including her educational projects, her animal welfare advocacy, and her growing awareness of economic inequality in access to veterinary care, as the terrain of her career.

In focus group discussion, the imagining alternatives dimension emerged most powerfully through practitioner reflection. Several participants described having their own professional self-concept changed by the training - that to help people navigate their lives in relation to a changing world' is itself an act of imaginative alternative-building.

**What was difficult:** This dimension faced the structural difficulties as utopian and alternative-economy thinking is, by definition, at odds with the dominant framework of most career guidance services, funded and organised around the goal of labour market integration. Several practitioners noted the dissonance between the imaginative ambition of this dimension and the very concrete pressures clients faced. The goal is not helping a client whose primary need is to secure income to explicitly imagine a degrowth or care economy, but to develop critical consciousness about the structural factors behind and plant seeds of alternative possibilities.

Some practitioners explicitly stated that green guidance is developing against the current of political movements that are actively rolling back sustainability commitments at European and national level. This creates a peculiar situation -

practitioners are trying to open imaginative space for alternatives at the same moment that the macro-political context is contracting.

Practitioners also identified a knowledge gap. To engage credibly with concepts like degrowth, the care economy, or post-work futures requires preparation that goes beyond standard career guidance training. Without confidence in this conceptual territory, it is hard to hold open a client conversation about it. This opens avenues for practitioners' training that would allow them to gain a deeper and practical knowledge of the 'real utopias' which might be found in the social economy, food cooperatives, local currencies, and regenerative enterprise (Olin Wright, 2010).

## 5: CHANGING THE WORLD THROUGH CAREER

This dimension encompasses two related levels: helping individual clients identify concrete pathways for contributing to change through their career and life choices, and the practitioner's own role as an active agent of professional and institutional change. Both levels were documented in the pilot, with the second more richly evidenced than the first. The tools and approaches documented here include:

- *Challenges of the world and a meaningful career* (see also Dimension 3) - when used with groups it consistently moved into territory of collective action and citizenship.
- *Six paths to greening your career* - mentioned in the Portuguese survey data in combination with other tools.
- *Career decision-making table integrating sustainable development* - used in Poland with adults including people with disabilities.
- *Work with (eco)skills* - used in Slovakia with university students and adults.
- *Green careers and possibilities of greening one's career* - used in Slovakia with adults.

At the level of practitioner-as-change-agent, the following documented actions fall under this dimension: practitioners influencing the redesign of an annual university career fair around green themes; lobbying to revise institutional career policy to include explicit language about ethical careers, and introducing a sustainable travel discount for companies attending career fairs; building a green guidance network within his organisation; working to embed green guidance into municipality's community action plan; planning a 5-ECTS green guidance module in a new programme; and disseminating the idea of green guidance within the national school psychology network.

**What worked:** At the client level, the most documented positive outcome under this dimension came from the case studies with adults, where the *My life, my contribution* table led clients to identify specific future-oriented actions they had not previously considered including a hospital cleaning worker who proposed raising sustainable cleaning practices with hospital management and a career-

changer who began exploring whether her veterinary clinic could develop pro-bono or subsidised care capacity. In Slovakia, a school-wide green guidance programme led to pupils implementing concrete steps in their school including waste management and energy saving approaches.

The *Challenges of the world* tool, when used with secondary school students in Portugal, generated concrete proposals by student groups about what could change in their communities and workplaces. Students discussed whether it was ethically acceptable to sacrifice profit for environmental protection. Practitioners described this as transforming the guidance session from an individual focused conversation to a civic engagement one.

One practitioner's combination of policy lobbying, curriculum embedding, and sustainable travel initiative represents a systematic attempt to shift institutional conditions rather than work within them.

*All of you have made impacts and changes. Small or big doesn't really matter - it all adds into the positivity of the world. There have certainly been moments where I've just felt: it's a lot easier to just do things the normal way and do what's in my job description. But that's not the right thing to do.*

*Career counsellor, UK*

**What was difficult:** At the client level, moving from reflection to action was the hardest step. Several practitioners noted that sessions ended with a client more aware of their potential contribution, but without a clear pathway for what to do next. The *Challenges of the world* tool invites clients to think about what could change, but does not always provide the scaffolding for how they could personally contribute to that change within their career. Practitioners felt they needed more tools specifically designed to help clients translate enlarged awareness into concrete steps - what practitioners in several focus groups called the '*and now what?*' question. More work needs to be done by practitioners and guidance providers in how to effectively mediate sustainable career opportunities to their clients on the traditional labour market but also on its margins. This might include the development of opportunity mapping tools, realistic case studies of different types of career transitions including entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship, hybrid livelihoods, and civic engagement.

For practitioners working with clients in precarious situations the contributing to change dimension was the most difficult to introduce without it feeling aspirational in a way that was disconnected from the client's immediate reality. A practitioner working with unemployed adults (including Ukrainian refugees) noted that their circumstances left very little space for the kind of forward-oriented, agency-affirming work this dimension assumes. Again, the danger of

individualising structural problems and shifting the blame on individuals is a dangerous ideological bias that needs to be avoided.

At the institutional level, practitioners working 'as ninjas' (without management support or institutional mandate) faced the risk of sustainability work being deprioritised or discontinued if circumstances changed. One-person efforts, however impressive, are structurally fragile. Several practitioners observed that the transition from individual initiative to embedded practice requires institutional legitimacy.

## Most frequently used tools and approaches

Practitioners were not required to test a specific set of tools, nor to use them in a prescribed sequence. They were encouraged to select activities that felt relevant to their context and clients. This resulted in a diverse picture of implementation, with almost every tool in the toolbox appearing at least once across the data. Several tools, however, emerged as consistently preferred across countries and contexts.

The adapted *Ikigai* model was one of the most popular tools, for its ease of use and the fact that it directly connects what a person cares about with what the needs of the world. In general, the *World challenges/needs of the world* framing served a similar purpose - its' aim is to help clients look beyond their immediate job search. In schools, activities using future orientation, utopian thinking and solving wicked problems were used to get students thinking creatively about the future, connect their aspiration with a collective future, foster cooperation and vocational goals. For adults, activities reframing career success, rethinking career planning (e.g. *SMOOTH goals* tool), focusing on values was used the most frequently. *SDGs* acted as a solid framework for university students to think about their career options.

Practitioners agree that matching the right tool to the right group is essential. For younger pupils (ages 10-15), practitioners found that visual and collective activities like *Designing the sustainable city* or *Green fairy tales* worked best. These tools take abstract environmental concepts and turn them into something they can easily connect to, or transform them to tangible actions, such as students designing better waste systems for their own schools. In contrast, university students (ages 18-25) needed space for deeper reflection.

*I tested the tool about designing a green city with an eighth-grade class, even though it is theoretically aimed at secondary school students. I found the tool itself very interesting. The children really picked it up - they were genuinely interested and became very engaged in the activity.*

*School career counsellor, Poland*

Tools like *Ethical dilemmas* and the *SDGs* helped them navigate 'eco-anxiety' by thinking about concrete actions, putting focus on where they can have the most

impact professionally. For adults and vulnerable groups, the focus often had to be shifted to pragmatism. For people in survival mode (such as the unemployed or those with disabilities) short, tangible exercises like *Moments of resonance* or *SMOOTH Goals* were seen as the most useful, as they helped them find immediate self-worth and meaning in their current situation rather than getting lost in abstract future scenarios. Also tools focusing on the development of the critical consciousness about the dominant narratives around work, career, growth and performance were deemed as efficient.

*The biggest difficulty was sometimes the abstraction of the materials. When you have a client who is primarily worried about paying rent, it is hard to pivot to 'green values' without making it feel like a luxury they can't afford.*

*PES counsellor, Slovakia*

## **WORKING WITH VALUES**

Values-based activities were the most widely used entry point, appearing in nearly every case study and mentioned by practitioners in all three focus groups. The appeal was consistent, as this approach allowed practitioners to introduce sustainability as a question of personal meaning and professional identity, rather than as an external environmental agenda. The tools specifically designed around ecological or sustainability-oriented values were frequently adapted to fit existing values frameworks practitioners were already using. In several cases, practitioners merged green values work with their standard opening activities - one practitioner, for example, created an entirely new set of values cards incorporating sustainability dimensions.

## **IKIGAI IN GREEN GUIDANCE**

The adapted IKIGAI exercise, which adds a particular focus on the fourth dimension *what the world needs* alongside the often more emphasised dimensions of what you love, what you are good at, and what you can be paid for, appeared in case studies in different countries. It was valued for translating green guidance principles into a format that many clients and practitioners already recognised, making the sustainability dimension feel like a natural extension rather than an imposition.

## **WHAT KIND OF LIFE DO I WANT? MY LIFE, MY CONTRIBUTION**

This activity, which uses a reflective table crossing three dimensions of active life (care, creation, and engagement) against four life domains (family, work, learning, and community), was the most frequently named tool in the focus groups and appeared multiple times in the survey. It was used primarily in adult guidance contexts, especially in RVCC (recognition of prior learning) processes, where it proved particularly effective at helping adults recognise contributions they were already making to sustainability without having labelled them as

such. Multiple practitioners reported that clients expressed genuine surprise at their own existing engagement with sustainable practices when invited to map it out systematically.

### **IDENTIFYING MOMENTS OF RESONANCE**

Practitioners using this tool reflected on how it changed her approach to career guidance, moving toward a deeper, more resonant method of interaction with her clients.

*These tools turned out to be at a much higher level than I even expected... [the tool 'identifying resonance moments'] is brilliant. I liked it so much that, honestly, it was the first tool that immediately turned out to be so deep that I just can't believe it's so well-developed.*

*Career guidance practitioner, Poland*

### **WHO AM I IN THE GREEN WORLD? AND RELATED IDENTITY TOOLS**

Several versions of this tool (focused on exploring the client's relationship to environmental values and sustainable career options through self-reflection and imagery) were used across Slovakia, Poland, and Portugal, particularly with school-age children and young people. It was consistently described as accessible, engaging, and appropriate for groups with limited prior knowledge of sustainability.

### **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

The *UN Sustainable Development Goals*, presented as visual card sets, were used across Switzerland, the UK, Sweden, Finland, and Portugal, with both individual clients and groups. Their appeal lay in providing a concrete framework that clients could engage with selectively, identifying which goals felt personally relevant before connecting these to career directions. Practitioners in higher education found that students were already familiar with the SDGs from other courses, making them a natural bridge. One practitioner noted using the 'wedding cake' visual model of the SDGs rather than the standard list format, finding it better at conveying interdependence.

### **CHALLENGES OF THE WORLD AND A MEANINGFUL CAREER**

This more implicitly political and systemic tool, which invites clients to connect global challenges to career meaning and professional contribution, was used in Portugal, Latvia and Slovakia. It tended to generate richer reflection when used with clients who were already grappling with questions of professional purpose rather than immediate employment needs. Portuguese practitioners found it generated unexpectedly sophisticated responses from secondary school students when framed around group discussion.

### **LETTER FROM THE FUTURE**

This reflective writing exercise was used by the several practitioners consistently across both individual and group contexts, with both young students and adults over 45. It was described as working well as a take-home task completed between sessions, providing a concrete focus for follow-up conversations about the intersection of personal aspiration and sustainability values.

### **CONVERSATION STARTERS**

The set of short questions designed to open or deepen a sustainability dimension in any guidance conversation was the tool most commonly used as a low-threshold integration strategy. Some practitioners described using these questions opportunistically in individual sessions, as a way of testing whether a given client was ready or interested in exploring the sustainability dimension of their career decisions.

### **HOW GREEN IS THIS COMPANY?**

These more information-focused tools, exploring green practices in organisations and mapping career pathways into sustainable sectors, were used primarily in secondary and vocational education contexts, but also in extracurricular career sessions. They were valued for making the concept of green careers concrete and labour market-relevant rather than abstract.

## 4) Starting working with green guidance

### Working with values

The clearest finding across all data sources is that green guidance worked best when practitioners approached it through values. In this form sustainability was framed not as an environmental topic but as a question of meaning, contribution, identity. Clients across age groups and backgrounds engaged readily when asked what kind of life they wanted to live, what they already contributed, and how their work could matter beyond a salary. The sustainability dimension arrived as a consequence of that reflection rather than as its premise. It was in some cases used as a way of reconnecting people's careers to wider societal issues and overcoming the disconnect that people felt between their personal values, societal structures and their professional lives.

### Young people and creative formats

With children and adolescents, activities with visual, playful, or narrative formats worked best. For example, one case study involving a 9-year-old with climate anxiety used the fairy tales and stories tool to create a character called 'the Earth Soldier', which became the central thread of several therapeutic sessions and, according to the practitioner, led to a significant reduction in the child's anxiety and improvements in sleep and daily regulation. The narrative and metaphor allowed the child to engage with environmental fears through a constructive and age-appropriate lens.

*The symbolic approach through narrative is very powerful with children. The use of the Green Guidance activities favours the transformation of fear into a more purposeful, conscious action - which gives children hope that there is something they can do.*  
*Psychologist, Portugal*

Practitioners working with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>- grade pupils similarly found that visual and game-based tools e.g. the *design a sustainable city* activity and *who takes care of the environment?*, generated authentic engagement with complex topics.

### Higher education: Connecting values to systemic issues

With university students, particularly those approaching graduation and career entry, green guidance tools opened productive conversations about professional identity and social responsibility that standard career counselling rarely reached. A good example is a master's workshop in psychology: eight postgraduate students engaged so enthusiastically with the *dilemmas* tool and the *IKIGAI*

exercise that the workshop repeatedly overran and students requested copies of the materials.

*The discussions were rich and dynamic. Many students could recognise themselves in the cases, and several asked to receive the full set of dilemmas afterwards to continue reflecting on their own.*

*Career counsellor, Sweden (master's workshop case study)*

One practitioner providing a seminar programme at the university (through a combination of lectures, small group work, and extracurricular sessions) used *ethical framing* to engage arts and humanities students who might otherwise have felt that green careers were not for them.

### **Adults: Recognising contribution**

One of the reported positive outcomes was what might be called the recognition effect. Adults in guidance processes discovering, through structured reflection, that they were already living and working in ways that aligned with sustainability values. This was particularly marked in RVCC (prior learning recognition) contexts, where the *What kind of life do I want?* activity prompted adults to articulate everyday contributions to family, community, and environment that they had never framed in career terms.

*She (the client) was surprised to realise how many contributions she already made to her own wellbeing, to that of others and to the environment. She was unaware of this value.*

*Career practitioner, Portugal, describing a 45-year-old client*

*It was necessary to do this activity to realise how much I was already doing in the various areas of my life. We don't always value ourselves enough.*

*Client testimony, Portugal*

This effect appeared to reinforce self-esteem and motivation alongside sustainability awareness.

### **The group format as an amplifier**

Multiple practitioners noted that group settings generated significantly richer reflection than individual sessions, both because clients learned from each other's responses and because collective discussion helped shift the frame from individual responsibility to shared concern. This is a concern for guidance systems often organised and funded as individual interventions, especially when working with adults, and also opens avenues for experimentation with more collective-based approaches.

## 5) Clients' reactions

Many practitioners indicate that sustainability is far from being naturally integrated into clients' career thinking. Many clients are familiar with everyday ecological behaviours (waste separation, reducing plastic use, limiting individual car transport or flying), but have difficulties translating sustainability into career choices. There is a clear separation between personal and professional life. Clients care about sustainability in their personal lives, but do not perceive sustainability as legitimate career content. Sustainability is rarely perceived as a legitimate career decision criterion. Green Guidance tools, approaches, interview techniques help clients reconnect these concerns with their career. This is usually where an pro-active approach is necessary (proposing the topic, priming, asking questions), as clients do not necessary find this topic as legitimate for career sessions or do not connect it to their career choices.

This gap was particularly visible in university counselling contexts, where two counsellors reported surprisingly low spontaneous interest, even among students enrolled in 'green' study programmes. Sustainability appeared to be treated as a lifestyle topic rather than a something that can be connected to career.

*I feel like students are aware of sustainability in personal context: they know about fast fashion and about waste separation and other things, but in the context of a career, they are not making that connection. So maybe I will introduce this topic it in some other, more subtle way in my career practice.*

*University counsellor, Slovakia*

The most consistent impact visible across settings is the shift from individual fit to a wider contribution. Students and clients are used to reflecting on their personal needs, aspirations and capacities, but 'had not really thought about what the world/community/society needs'. In these contexts, the sustainability dimension is rarely about green jobs, but about expanding the decision criteria to bring in values, contributions to society and community, future consequences, and enhance the legitimacy of caring about these in career decisions. For some practitioners, green guidance increases the risk of being perceived as campaigning or promoting certain personal values. The workable stance is not 'convincing clients', but 'making space for a wider decision criterion when the client is ready'.

In contrast, younger pupils and community groups often reacted with strong emotional engagement, curiosity and creativity. Here, green guidance opened spaces for collective imagination, community action and change: sustainability-oriented guidance can function as a driver of civic engagement and school culture transformation, not only individual career choice support.

Practitioners say that a simple segmentation is necessary. What works depends on group 'readiness' and age does not necessarily correlate with readiness, the intervening variable seems to be the capacity to deal with abstraction, long-term thinking, and familiarity with the sustainability-related vocabulary.

*The students started to think more deeply about what a 'green job' actually is. They realized it's not just about planting trees, but that even a technician or an architect can work 'green' if they change their approach to resources.*

*School counsellor, Poland*

In some cases, using a more pragmatic approach, connected to the opportunities on the labour market was more useful:

*Participants were surprised that even 'non-green' occupations have a green dimension. It helped clients realize that they can be 'green' in any job by changing their approach and behavior.*

*Career practitioner, Czechia*

This stresses the importance of valuing the more subtle impacts around meaning-making, ecological awareness, critical consciousness, individual and collective agency, widened horizons, and enlarged decision criteria. The aims and impacts of green guidance emerged as being more about broadening thinking than about the selection of a limited series of green occupations.

## 6) Impact on practitioners

### Analysis of the pre- and post-testing surveys (attitudes, beliefs)

A qualitative analysis of a pre-training and post-testing survey was used to assess the effects of exploring green guidance on participating practitioners and their attitudes towards climate change and sustainability, perceptions of the role of career guidance in societal transformation, and self-efficacy and readiness to implement green guidance practices in their professional context.

The analysis focuses on learning outcomes and professional positioning, rather than long-term behavioural or client-level outcomes. Impact was assessed through a validated Likert-scale questionnaire administered at two points in time:

- Pre-training survey (n = 75)
- Post-training survey (n = 51)

The questionnaire explores beliefs about climate change, attitudes towards sustainability-oriented guidance, perceived client demand, and practitioners' confidence in implementing green guidance. Participation was anonymous. Respondents were invited to generate an alphanumeric code to enable pairing, but this was not used consistently.

Given the structure of the data, a layered analytical strategy was adopted:

1. **Primary analysis.** Unpaired pre/post comparison with group-level comparison of pre- and post-training responses using mean scores, percentage agreement, and effect sizes.
2. **Secondary analysis.** As the project team is confident that the same participants completed both questionnaires, an exploratory *quasi-paired* analysis was conducted by matching responses using stable demographic characteristics (language, age, profession, country). Only unique combinations present once in both datasets were retained. This approach allows an exploratory within-person comparison while acknowledging the probabilistic nature of the matching.
3. **Triangulation with qualitative feedback.** Open-ended comments were used to contextualise and interpret quantitative trends.

At baseline, participants already demonstrated a high awareness of climate change, including strong agreement that climate change is real, human-induced, and associated with serious consequences and also positive attitudes towards sustainability, with broad agreement that career guidance should contribute to environmentally sustainable societies.

However, responses were more heterogeneous regarding perceived client demand for sustainable careers and lifestyles, practitioners' own capacity to

implement green guidance in daily practice and the extent to which green guidance was already being practiced. This confirms a well-documented pattern in the literature, where strong values and awareness coexist with uncertainty about professional action.

Post-training results show a consolidation of already positive attitudes towards sustainability and the societal role of career guidance. While changes on these items are moderate (reflecting a ceiling effect), the training reinforced participants' perception that addressing environmental sustainability is a legitimate and necessary dimension of guidance practice.

The most substantial changes are observed in items related to self-efficacy, particularly *I am capable to implement green guidance in my daily work* and *I want to implement green guidance into my daily work*. Across both unpaired and quasi-paired analyses, these items show clear upward shifts in mean scores, increased proportions of Agree and Strongly agree responses with medium to large effect sizes. The training appears to have significantly reduced the gap between awareness and action, it strengthened practitioners' confidence, perceived competence, and readiness to engage with green guidance in concrete ways.

Post-training responses indicate a more nuanced understanding of clients' relationship to sustainability: increased recognition that clients raise sustainability issues when making career choices, greater confidence in addressing such issues within guidance conversations and a shift from seeing sustainability as an external constraint to viewing it as a legitimate guidance topic.

Open-ended responses reinforce the quantitative findings. Participants frequently refer to feeling *more legitimate* addressing sustainability in guidance, having *concrete tools and language* to engage clients and a shift from abstract concern to *practical integration*. Several comments highlight that the training helped participants navigate ethical tensions, institutional constraints and uncertainty, rather than offering simplistic green jobs narratives.

This part of the impact analysis has some limitations, namely the reliance on self-reported data, absence of a fully paired longitudinal dataset and a lack of long-term follow-up on actual practice change. But, overall the evidence suggests that participating in the project and using the tools substantially enhanced practitioners capability in green guidance.

## **Practitioners' identity**

Across all focus groups and throughout the survey comments, practitioners described a meaningful shift in how they understood their professional role, which several characterised as a widening of scope.

Before the training, many described their practice as necessarily focused on the individual: on client's needs, career options... Green guidance training introduced a different frame: the individual career conversation as a space where questions of meaning, collective wellbeing, and social and ecological responsibility could legitimately be present. For many, this felt like recovering something that had been implicit in their professional values all along but had never been transformed to explicit language or tools. Practitioners experienced themselves also as facilitators of ethical reflection, ecological awareness and responsibility towards future generations.

*The transition to 'Green Guidance' means that as counselors, we are no longer just helping individuals find a job, but helping them find their place in a sustainable future, which adds a completely new layer of social responsibility to our profession.*

**Career practitioner, Norway**

*For me, it was a change in the way I look at my work. It's no longer just about 'where will you go to school?' but about 'what world do you want to live in?' and how that person can contribute to it through their profession.*

**School career counsellor, Poland**

Practitioners say that it is not necessary to be a climate scientist, they need the ability to work with emotions, uncertainty, and ethical reflection. Green guidance training and experimentation shifts practitioners away from expert-centric delivery toward reflective facilitation and co-learning.

Green guidance required practitioners to balance support for personal aspirations with a broader reflection on social and environmental contribution. Green guidance can initially create professional confusion even among counsellors. This shows that green guidance is not primarily about new tools but rather a new way of how practitioners perceive their role, which can produce disorientation and requires a personal commitment of the practitioner. The toolbox is in this case just a secondary thing, as this practice relies mainly on the shift of how practitioners perceive their roles.

*My vision was very reduced and very centred on the individual. Then I quickly realised - no, it's you who are wrong. This is possible, you can go much further.*

**Career counsellor, Portugal**

*The sessions I was having were very directed at that student - your average, which platform to use, what profession you'd like. This time I brought a different question: what contribution can you also bring? Because no one is happy alone - we are happy in society.*

**School counsellor, Portugal**

This shift was not uniform nor without ambiguity. Several practitioners noted the tension between this expanded vision and the structural pressures of their daily work such as the 25-minute appointment slot, the demand for concrete employability outcomes, and the academic focus on grades. Many practitioners were frank about the frustration of working within institutions that equate career counselling with CV writing. Others noted the dissonance between their individual practice and the macro-political direction and even observed that green guidance was developing against the current trend of European political movements that were stepping back from sustainability commitments, making it feel, at moments, like they were working against the tide.

However, the dominant note in the data is not frustration, but rather motivation and a sense of recovered purpose in their work. Practitioners described feeling more equipped to engage with clients' full complexity, more connected to their broader professional values, and more alive to the possibility that career guidance, done differently, could be a site of genuine social change.

*I think that what has stayed with me most is the consciousness of us in the world. Bringing the other and the ecological and social context into the session, but doing so in a way that is about reflection and awareness of personal importance - speaking about what I do and my contribution to the world. I find this axis extremely rich.*

**Career counsellor, Slovakia**

*Our work is not only about knowledge and tools - it is about attitude. I usually feel that the world is saying: talk about this later, let's deal with other things first. And I always understand: no, we need to talk about it now. We are already in a different world, and we cannot keep skipping this.*

**Career counsellor, Latvia**

Several practitioners also reflected on the relational effect of the training itself - the community it built among a group of practitioners across countries who would otherwise never have been in conversation with each other. The international focus group in particular showed evidence of genuine cross-national learning, with practitioners adapting each other's approaches and finding reassurance in shared difficulties.

*Sitting and listening to all of you in this forum helps me keep the mindset that we can change things. It gives me hope. Because there have certainly been moments over the past couple of months where I've just thought: it's a lot easier to just do things the normal way and do what's in my job description. But that's not the right thing to do.*

**Career counsellor, UK**

The professional identity of career practitioners is being touched and questioned during the process of training and testing of the tools. There is something deeply engaging about integrating sustainability into one's practices - the question of professional commitment underlying green guidance is crucial. Green guidance is not simply an option that they integrate or not into their daily work, but rather a reasoned and conscious choice that distinguishes this practice by incorporating the question of the impact of work on others and the common world. Its effective implementations do not rely primarily on tools, but rather a deep conviction and ethical commitment that shapes the work of career professionals.

## 7) Challenges and obstacles

The pilot produced an equally clear picture of the difficulties practitioners encountered. These were not primarily conceptual (most ambassadors were convinced of the value of green guidance), but structural and systemic.

### Time

Time was the single most frequently cited obstacle across all countries and all data sources. It appeared in every focus group, in a majority of survey comments, and in every case study that addressed challenges at all: practitioners lacked time to read and prepare; session formats (typically 25-50 minutes for individual consultations) were too short for most tools as designed; and many practitioners carried workloads that left little capacity for integrating a new approach. The autumn term pressure at universities was a recurring context with several practitioners noting that September to December was their peak period for student distress, leaving almost no room for exploratory or developmental work.

*I had very little time to apply a tool. This is also a reflection on expectation management - I think I was expecting, perhaps, a different kind of response or a different result, and I myself feel that perhaps I need to manage my own expectations.*

*Career counsellor, Portugal*

*Time has been my enemy. I started to do whole sessions but we didn't have time to complete them because some activities are quite long - it takes more than an hour to get through all the steps.*

*Career counsellor, Slovakia*

### Institutional isolation

Practitioners repeatedly emphasised the absence of institutional anchoring. Without explicit recognition, protected time and leadership support, green guidance remains dependent on individual motivation and commitment. The majority of practitioners implemented green guidance as individuals, without institutional backing, without colleagues who were doing the same thing, and without any explicit mandate from management. Several described working 'under the radar', choosing not to inform academic colleagues or managers of exactly what they were doing, either for fear of resistance or simply because there was no established channel for it.

*A lot of what I've been doing has been done by stealth. I haven't actually gone to an academic and said I'm going to be doing this for the students. There is a certain element of doing things under*

*the radar - being a green guidance ninja.*  
**Career counsellor**

The practitioners were motivated and curious, had relevant prior training, but were unable to integrate green guidance into daily practice without it being recognised and anchored at the level of organisational culture and management. Notably, career practitioners in public employment services and schools function as representatives of the public system, meaning that new approaches need to trickle down through institutional channels rather than being adopted by individual practitioners in isolation.

This finding suggests that a next priority for the projects or initiatives, or any adoption strategy should be the development of resources specifically designed for institutional leaders and managers, rather than only for individual practitioners. Practitioners explicitly call for support from leadership and policymakers to create space and legitimacy. It is also suggested to use institution-compatible language (leadership/policy framing) that give practitioners arguments that can translate into mandate, workload legitimacy, and service design changes. However, there is a danger of creating resistance if green guidance is forced upon practitioners in a top-down approach without allowing time and necessary resources for the necessary understanding of what green guidance is and the process of shifting their professional identity. A balanced approach of creating an open institutional climate that encourages critical conversations around the role of guidance and allows for and actively encourages sustainability-focused practice experimentations is needed.

### **Variable levels of spontaneous client interest**

Several practitioners noted that clients rarely arrived with explicit interest in sustainability as a career topic, and that introducing it required active initiative from the practitioner. This was particularly noted by practitioners working in individual counselling rather than group settings, and with clients whose primary concerns were economic such as finding work, securing income, or managing a career transition under financial pressure. The Slovak practitioners observed that Gen Z students were more engaged with sustainability in life contexts (fashion, consumption, recycling) than in career contexts, suggesting a disconnect between values held privately and the frame through which career choices are made.

*Every client knew that I work with this topic, but almost none of them reacted to it spontaneously. I often felt that I was the one initiating the conversation. When I introduced it, it was usually received positively, although some clients simply did not want to deal with this topic.*

**Career counsellor, Slovakia**

Another practitioner reported a telling counter-example: at a career fair, a 'wall of dreams' exercise inviting students to write their vision for the future found that at least half the responses expressed some form of wanting to make the world better. The sustainability concern was there but it had not been given a professional vocabulary or a guidance context in which to appear as a legitimate concern.

*At the grammar school I was actually surprised by how interested the students were. They asked many questions about green jobs and we had a very lively discussion about it.*

*Secondary school career counsellor, Slovakia*

Most agreed that the main difficulty is finding ways for making this issue seen as relevant and legitimate for clients. There were several examples of clients who did not spontaneously raise sustainability and ecological issues spontaneously, however, when primed by the practitioner in a meaningful way, it was revealed as one of their main concerns. One practitioner's testimony is particularly revealing: a client in professional reorientation regretting not having these sustainability-related career conversations when choosing her initial career path.

*Some say clients are not interested in sustainability because they do not bring it up themselves. I am not convinced that silence equals disinterest. I do not think many clients realise that these are topics they are allowed to talk about with a career counsellor. That is partly on us. We shape expectations through the questions we ask, the language we use, and the signals we send. Not everyone will want to engage with these topics, and that is fine. But those who do should feel that it is allowed.*

*University counsellor, Sweden*

## **Ethical discomfort**

Some practitioners expressed some ethical unease about introducing sustainability themes into career guidance conversations. The concern, expressed was that doing so risked imposing the practitioner's values on clients, appearing politically activist, or inappropriately influencing choices that should remain the client's own. This was particularly acute for practitioners working in public sector contexts.

Practitioners recognise the tension but generally concluded that exploring values and including ecological and social values, is not the same as prescribing choices, and that the tools were designed precisely to create reflective space rather than to steer clients toward particular decisions.

*We don't need to worry about influencing clients' choices - what we're doing is creating a platform where they can actually voice their concerns and hopes. When I see at least half the students*

*on the wall of dreams writing about wanting to make a better world, I realise that maybe if I raise these questions, it's OK.*

*Career counsellor, Sweden*

Some practitioners raised the concern that many clients were primarily focused on economic security and job certainty, and that introducing environmental considerations without contextual relevance would risk trivialising both the environmental issue and the client's real needs. Some expressed that their ethical concerns were clarified having found that it is possible to ethically integrate green guidance and social justice issues and to facilitate the development of critical consciousness and active citizenship. They expressed satisfaction for seeing the emotional and social impact in their clients, the importance of hope and purpose to face the social and environmental crisis.

*The handbook also highlights something very important about the ethics of career guidance: if we sense resistance from a client, we should not push the topic by force. That was an important observation for me, because not everyone is ready or willing to enter this topic immediately.*

*Career practitioner, Poland*

## **Translation and adaptation burden**

Practitioners in countries where the toolbox was not available in the national language faced a significant additional burden: translating, adapting, and printing tools. Beyond translation, cultural adaptation was often necessary. Terminology such as 'green economy', 'circular economy', and 'sustainable careers' carried different connotations in different national contexts and required explanation even with well-educated adult clients.

## **Eco-anxiety and avoidance**

A smaller but notable cluster of practitioners mentioned encountering clients who were frightened by the topic of sustainability and resistant to engaging with it in a career context. This was distinct from indifference, an active avoidance driven by anxiety about climate change. Some argued that not addressing climate-related concerns in career conversations actually increases anxiety rather than reducing it, and that opening the topic explicitly (while handling it carefully and perhaps in group rather than individually) tends to be relieving rather than distressing.

## **Ideological risks - green guidance sustaining neoliberal narratives?**

Practitioners committed to green guidance should be alert to a set of ideological risks that sit within the approach itself. The pilot data show several of these risks in embryonic form. When green guidance frames sustainability primarily through personal values, individual contribution, and the question of '*what can I do through my career?*', it risks reproducing the individualisation of structural

problems that critical social science has long identified as neoliberal discourse, by locating the solutions to collective crises with individuals rather than in the political and economic conditions that generate those crises.

The individual lens, and reflection on the environmental impacts of individual choices can be valuable, but they can also function as a form of depoliticisation, converting a systemic problem (ecological breakdown driven by specific economic arrangements and political choices) into a story about individual virtue, consumer behaviour, effort, and meaning-making. The 'heroic practitioner' narrative that runs through some of the pilot's most enthusiastic accounts (the ninja working under the radar, the ambassador spreading green culture one conversation at a time) celebrates individual commitment while quietly normalising the structural absence of institutional support that makes heroism necessary in the first place.

There is also a risk of what might be called the epistemic narrowing of the approach. Green guidance, developed largely within career guidance and vocational psychology traditions, may inadvertently discover and reframe concerns about ecological justice, about the politics of work and growth, about collective agency, that have long histories in labour movements, environmental justice activism, and political ecology, and present them in a professionally sanitised form that strips away their structural and conflictual dimensions. This risk is visible in the pilot data where the dimensions of green guidance most consistently implemented were those most compatible with standard guidance practice such as values exploration, labour market information and expanding decision criteria. Imagining alternatives and collectively contributing to systemic change remained the least tested dimensions, yet these are precisely the dimensions that resist individualisation most strongly. Imagining alternatives requires engaging with profound systemic critique, and contributing to change means treating guidance itself as a site of collective and political transformation, not only personal development. A green guidance practice that never reaches these dimensions and stays comfortably within meaning-making and values clarification risks becoming, despite its best intentions, another technology of individual adaptation to conditions that require structural challenge. Practitioners should therefore hold the approach with a degree of critical self-awareness: the tools work, but what they work to produce matters. Helping a client find meaning and contribution within existing economic structures is not the same as helping them think critically about those structures, and neither is it the same as supporting them to act collectively to change those structures.

## 8) Possibilities for future developments

Practitioners who participated in the pilot had a wide range of ideas about ways in which green guidance could be developed and what tools and resources might be needed in the future.

### Shorter, modular tools and implementation pathways

The most common practical request was for activities that fit within typical session formats of 25 to 45 minutes, without requiring preparatory sessions or follow-up work to be meaningful. Several practitioners noted that the toolbox activities as designed were often better suited to workshop settings or multi-session processes than to standard individual guidance appointments. A library of five- to ten-minute green guidance 'micro-interventions' that could be embedded into any career conversation without restructuring it was suggested by multiple participants.

Some participants explicitly praised the list of tools with filters but also say that it takes time to work through the materials. It would be interesting to have curated implementation pathways e.g. '*first session entry points by readiness level*'; '*three safe ways to introduce sustainability into individual conversations*', '*school 45-minute format*', and '*PES [public employment service] short format*'. The topic is complex and so more approachable, shorter, flexible-entry resources would be useful.

*Some counsellors left the meeting (on introduction to green guidance) more confused than when they arrived. The topic was difficult for them to grasp and they needed time to become familiar with the concept of Green Guidance.*

*PES guidance service manager, Slovakia*

*The term green career guidance feels new and unfamiliar, and it lacks clear practical meaning. I feel a need for more knowledge, a shared vocabulary, and discussions with colleagues before I would feel confident introducing sustainability into conversations with clients.*

*Career practitioner, Norway*

### Locally relevant resources

While the production of European level tools is a valuable starting point, many practitioners were hungry for resources with stronger local relevance. Printed, ready-to-use versions of the core tools in local languages were identified as a concrete bottleneck. Practitioners who could not hand a client a card or worksheet in their own language found it significantly harder to integrate the

tools into practice. Investment in localised materials (beyond digital translations) was a recurring request from practitioners who did not have the toolbox available in their native language. Counsellors also repeatedly pointed to the need for updated labour market intelligence on green sectors. Similarly, multiple cases highlight the need to localise green jobs to fit national contexts and frameworks.

*In the future, we need more local success stories - real examples of companies here that have successfully transitioned. It's easier to inspire a client with a neighbor's success than with a study from abroad.*

*Career counsellor, Czechia*

## **Peer networks and regular exchange**

Practitioners expressed a clear desire for continued structured exchange with colleagues doing similar work. The focus groups themselves were experienced as very useful as they provided an opportunity to hear how others had used the tools, see the diversity of adaptations possible, and name shared difficulties reduced the sense of isolation that several practitioners described. Some practitioners proposed that the training and ambassador group should remain active as a community of practice, with periodic shared reflection sessions.

*This network, this inter-vision, is fundamental. Many of us are very alone. Despite being in different areas, we are relatively close to each other, and I think continuing this is important.*

*Psychologist, Portugal*

## **Institutional buy-in, management support and policy embeddedness**

Multiple practitioners identified management and institutional support as a structural prerequisite for meaningful and sustainable integration. Without a mandate or at minimum an explicit institutional acknowledgement that green guidance is part of the service's scope, practitioners faced a choice between working covertly and not working at all. Some participants suggest that a '*green guidance management or service development pack for leaders*', designed to make the case to directors, school principals, or service coordinators, would address this gap directly.

*People are interested, but hesitant to jump on the bandwagon. Practitioners want the approach to be well established and anchored in their organisation, with their management and colleagues, before it can become an integrated part of their practice.*

*Career practitioner, Norway*

## Teacher and educator training

Several practitioners working in school contexts noted that the most significant leverage point was not individual counsellors but classroom teachers, who have far more regular contact with students and could embed sustainability-related reflection into subject teaching. A school psychologist put this plainly:

*We psychologists in schools can barely do this on a large scale. Teachers should be included in these training programmes so they can work on these topics in their classes.*  
*School psychologist, Portugal*

## Professional development pathways

Most practitioners who participated in the pilot received some training and development as part of this pilot activity. This was seen as very useful, but it was also recognised that *Exploring Green Guidance* was a time limited project that would come to an end. There is a need for ongoing training and development in green guidance, particularly if green guidance is going to continue to gather pace and grow.

Some practitioners proposed that ambassadors could form part of a future training team, delivering adapted green guidance courses to psychologists and counsellors. Several practitioners in higher education identified a next step of developing workshop formats that could be embedded in existing course structures, reducing the need for additional session time.

## Wider narrative change

Sustainability is still largely framed as a moral lifestyle topic rather than a legitimate career concern. This cultural narrative gap limits client engagement and their expectation for careers services. Green guidance therefore needs to be accompanied by broader awareness-raising, policy recognition and public discourse connecting sustainability, employability and meaningful work. Framing green guidance in terms of individual contribution, mission, personal values also carries the risk of reinforcing this neoliberal narrative and losing from sight the transformative dimension of green guidance.

## 9) Recommendations

### Career guidance practitioners

**Recommendation P1. Start with what resonates with clients (not necessarily with the environmental issues).** In many cases green guidance can be more efficient when it enters career conversations through questions of meaning, contribution, identity, critical reflections around the world of work, future developments of work. These topics are often closer to the experiences of our clients than explicitly talking about ecology and climate change. In general, sustainability can be woven into all your practice if it is framed in questions like *'what kind of life do I want to live'*, *'what do I want my work to contribute'* and *'in what kind of world do I want to live?'*

**Recommendation P2. Experiment with appropriate ways to proactively open the topic with all clients and students.** Clients rarely arrive with sustainability on their agenda, but this does not mean they are uninterested. The pilot repeatedly showed that clients who had not mentioned sustainability spontaneously responded positively when a practitioner introduced it, and that some later expressed regret at not having had these conversations earlier in their careers. It is therefore relevant to integrate sustainability as a legitimate guidance topic, using low-threshold tools such as conversation starters or a SDG/values questions, calibrated to the client's readiness and situation. Test several approaches, document and learn from your experiments.

**Recommendation P3. Develop your own ethical stance through reflective practice.** Practitioners sometimes expressed discomfort about whether introducing sustainability themes was a form of values imposition. The pilot evidence suggests this concern, while legitimate, can be worked through rather than resolved by simply avoiding the topic. Exploring values, including ecological and social values, acknowledging wider social and ecological concerns, does not mean prescribing choices. Discuss this ethical tension explicitly in peer reflection and supervision, formulate and write down your own ethical stance on how the ecological and social crisis impact how you see your role as a career professional.

**Recommendation P4. Find or develop peer networks and communities of practice.** Practitioners who participated in the focus groups and ambassador network consistently described them as the most valuable element of the project, more so than the tools themselves. Peer exchange and mutual encouragement reduced the isolation that most described as their primary day-to-day experience of implementing green guidance. If you can, seek out or build local and national peer networks, use the international community of practice developed through this project, and advocate to your institutions for protected time to participate in inter-vision and professional exchange.

**Recommendation P5. Dedicate time to adaptation and localisation of the the tools and resources.** It is important to adapt the tools to your context, i.e. to cut an activity to fit a 25-minute slot, to merge it with an existing values exercise, to use a single question from a longer tool if that is what a session allows. The pilot shows that competence is built through this kind of flexible, iterative practice. To help your students and clients to connect their green aspirations to reality, it is important to develop your own resources, map opportunities in your region. This should not only include green jobs, but also companies that are really committed to sustainability, citizen-lead initiatives and social enterprises.

**Recommendation P6. Be aware of the ideological risks of individualisation and depolitisation that can be encouraged by green guidance approaches.** Green guidance can, despite its intentions, reproduce a broader cultural pattern of individualising problems that are structural in origin, convert questions about ecological breakdown and economic organisation into stories about personal virtue and meaning-making. The imaginative and transformation dimensions of green guidance are often the most difficult to implement in practice and are also the ones most likely to be quietly dropped under time and institutional pressure. You do not need to adopt a particular political position, and guidance sessions should not become sites of ideological instruction. But you should consciously ask yourself where your practice sits: Am I helping clients adapt to the world as it is, imagine the world as it could be, or act collectively to make it different? There is no single correct answer, but there should be a deliberate one.

## Service managers and institutional leaders

**Recommendation M1. Recognise sustainability as a legitimate dimension of your service's scope.** Practitioners require clear signal that they are entitled to introduce sustainability-related questions into career conversations and that doing so is consistent with their professional mandate. This can be done through service agreements, session protocols, or team conversations. A revision of a service description or policy to include explicit reference to sustainable careers and the societal role of guidance can be a low-cost / high-impact change.

**Recommendation M2. Provide protected time for training, preparation, and peer exchange.** Time was the most universally cited barrier by practitioners. Managers who want green guidance integrated into their service need to treat preparation and inter-vision time as an integral part of quality and professional development. Protected reflective time for practitioners to share experiences, review tools, and adapt materials can help deepen and sustain the change of practice.

**Recommendation M3. Pursue a balanced approach to institutional integration (participative rather than imposed).** Green guidance requires a shift in how practitioners understand their role. This shift cannot be mandated from above without the time, open discussion, and support that allow it to take root. Institutions should create an open climate that encourages sustainability-focused experimentation; they should actively avoid approaches that treat green guidance as a checkbox compliance requirement or that introduce it without explaining the rationale. Practitioners who understand why the approach matters are significantly more engaged than those who are simply told to use the tools and materials.

**Recommendation M4. Extend green guidance and green education training to teachers and other front-line professionals.** School-based practitioners were explicit that the scale of change required exceeds what career counsellors can achieve alone. Teachers have far more regular contact with students and are better placed to embed sustainability-related reflection into subject teaching. Managers in school and VET contexts should consider how green guidance principles and tools can be shared with teaching staff, and explore joint training formats that build a common language across the institution rather than concentrating it in the guidance function.

## Policymakers

**Recommendation PL1. Integrate sustainability explicitly into national career guidance frameworks, quality standards, performance indicators, competency frameworks for practitioners.** Green guidance is currently something individual practitioners do by personal conviction. Including sustainability as a legitimate dimension of career guidance in national frameworks would create the mandate and institutional legitimacy and give more manoeuvring room for managers to integrate this practice on the organisational level.

**Recommendation PL2. Connect green transition employment policy to career guidance investment.** European and national green transition strategies invest heavily in reskilling programmes and labour market adaptation, but rarely in the guidance infrastructure that helps individuals navigate these transitions. Governments and European institutions should fund the integration of sustainability into career guidance as a component of green transition strategy.

**Recommendation PL3. Support the development of national green labour market intelligence that is accessible to guidance practitioners and their clients.** A recurring gap in the pilot was the absence of usable, locally relevant information about green jobs, green employers, sustainable career pathways in national labour markets, but also in niches on the margins of the traditional labour market e.g. citizen-led initiatives and cooperatives. Publicly accessible, practitioner-friendly databases of these opportunities, with enough local granularity to be useful in a guidance conversation, are needed.

**Recommendation PL4. Resist the conflation of green guidance with a narrow green jobs agenda.** The pilot's evidence is clear that the impact of green guidance is not always about immediate transitions into explicitly green occupations. Policies that reduce sustainability in career guidance to labour market information about green sectors will miss the deeper and more durable impact that the approach can have in preparing citizens to be actors of the social and ecological transition. Policy frameworks should be designed to support the full breadth of green guidance practice (across all five dimensions documented in this report) and should measure its outcomes accordingly, not only focusing on job placement rates in green sectors. Rethinking the yardsticks by which guidance is evaluated is necessary. Rethinking the yardsticks by which guidance is evaluated is as necessary as rethinking the accounting systems by which we measure prosperity and well-being.

## **Project funders and the Erasmus+ programme**

**Recommendation F1. Fund the continuation and formalisation of the green guidance community of practice.** The ambassador network built through this project is the pilot's most significant non-material output. It is currently dependent on project funding and volunteer commitment. Future funding should prioritise the infrastructure for ongoing exchange: regular inter-vision sessions, a shared resource library with adaptation guidance, and national-level network development that does not require the project team to coordinate everything centrally.

**Recommendation F2. Invest in localisation of tools and resources.** Practitioners in several countries spent significant time translating tools that existed only in some languages, often without being able to achieve the level of cultural adaptation needed for effective use. Future funding should support the development of nationally contextualised versions of the core toolbox. Localisation should also extend to labour market information: the absence of national green jobs data, local case studies is a barrier to grounding sustainability conversations in their clients' actual context. For the transformative dimension of green guidance, mapping opportunities outside of the traditional labour market is also crucial.

**Recommendation F3. Fund the development of shorter, context-specific implementation pathways alongside the full handbook and toolbox.** The toolbox as currently developed is comprehensive but can feel overwhelming to practitioners encountering it for the first time. Future development should produce curated entry pathways that provide sequenced, time-bounded implementation routes. This can reduce the friction that currently prevents some practitioners from getting started.

**Recommendation F4. Design future funding calls for institutional and policy embedding alongside individual practitioner training.** The pilot demonstrated that training individual practitioners is necessary but not sufficient for systemic change. Funding opportunities for the career guidance field should explicitly require applicants to address how trained practitioners will be supported within their institutions (through management engagement, protected time, and service-level policy integration) rather than treating training as an end in itself. Integrating the focus policy-making into the Erasmus+ call is a step in the right direction.

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