

Netzwerk
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GET-AHED



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Defining indicators for a sustainability self-assessment tool for HEIs: A participatory approach within the GET-AHED project

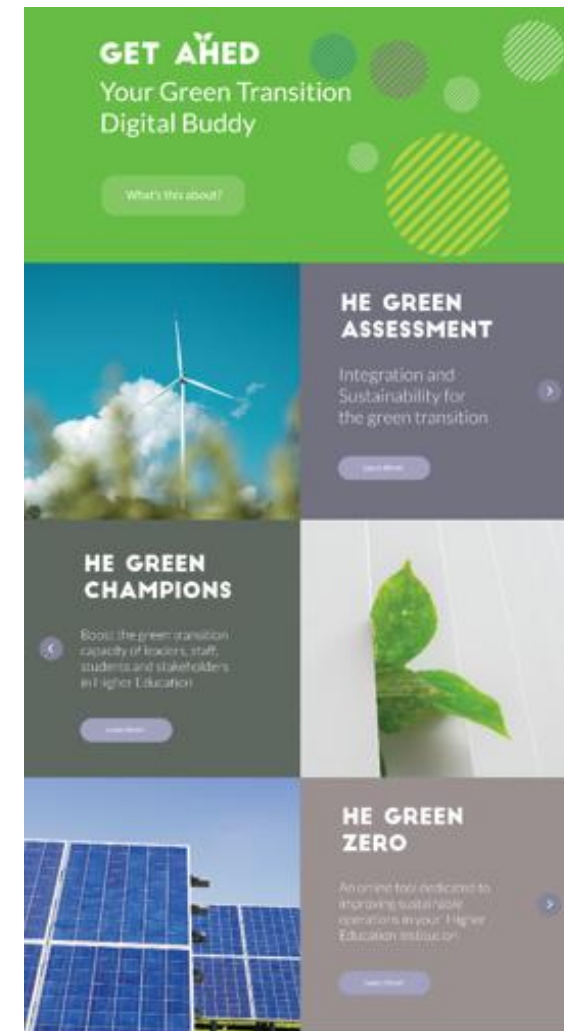
5. Konferenz des Netzwerks Hochschulforschung, 8. Mai 2025, Wien

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What is GET-AHED?

Green Education & Transition – A Higher Education Digital buddy

- 🌍 The GET-AHED project aims at supporting HEI-strategies and sustainability reporting practices
- 🌍 ERASMUS-EDU-2022-PI-FORWARD-LOT1
- 🌍 February 2023 – January 2026
- 🌍 A **digital platform** developed in consultation with several associate partner EU ministries, HEI representative bodies and an existing European University alliance which will provide HEIs across the EU with a range of online tools to **enable them to implement the EU's Green Transition and Green Education and Training priorities.**



HEIs' role in the green transition

-  Science, Research and Innovation Performance Report (EC, 2022) highlights: **HEIs play a critical role in supporting the diffusion of sustainable solutions**
-  HEIs as “**priority organisations and agents of change**” (Findler et al., 2019; Karatzoglou, 2013; Prieto-Jiménez et al., 2021; Weber, 2012)
-  Kekäle & Pinheiro (2025) see HEIs as **one of the key players in climate change** next to political decision makers and companies/investors (long-term time-span, highest potential in producing knowledge, innovation and education)
-  HEIs' role stands out in at least 4 interconnected fields (Guitérrez-Mijares et al., 2023; Fissi et al., 2021):
 - HEIs (esp. larger ones) increasingly adopt energy-efficient habits to reduce greenhouse emissions
 - HEIs train and socialise students, provide competences on the topic
 - HEIs conduct basic and applied research on environmental sustainability, and develop green solutions
 - HEIs inform and involve relevant non-academic stakeholders, can inspire sustainable attitudes and behaviour
-  HE-sector will have to reflect strategically how to boost its own visibility and performance (Lucaci, 2022), while safeguarding their institutional integrity (Kekäle & Pinheiro, 2025)

Sustainability assessment practices

-  Sustainability self-assessment tools (SATs): “(...) instruments that offer HEIs a systematic set of procedures and methods to **measure, audit, benchmark, and communicate their sustainable efforts**” (Findler et al., 2019, p. 3)

-  Meta-studies of existing tools (e.g. Tumbas et al., 2015, Mapar et al., 2020) find:
 - In parts: Poor applicability for the HE-context
 - Strong focus on operations
 - Core activities (education, research and third mission) underrepresented
 - Qualitative indicators are widespread, but difficult to interpret
 - Lack of representativeness of cultures, sustainability dimensions, socio-economic contexts
 - Strong focus on outcomes

-  The prevalence of sustainability reporting/sustainability assessment in the HE sector has increased in recent years, but different levels of implementation can be seen (Leal-Filho et al., 2022)

-  But: if well-tailored, SATs have the potential to enhance HEI sustainability (Singh et al., 2023)

GET-AHED HE Green Assessment

How HE Green Assessment wants to fill the gap:

- It has been built under strong involvement of HEIs (participatory approach)
- HE Green Assessment follows a **whole-university approach**
- It fosters **intra-institutional collaboration** by involving different HEI-missions and activities
- The tool is **process-oriented** much rather than results-oriented (no benchmarking etc.)
- It serves an **educational purpose**, promoting awareness and encouraging the generation of new ideas

The screenshot displays the GET-AHED HE Green Assessment website. At the top, a dark navigation bar includes a 'Profile' button and links for 'Home', 'News & Events', and 'Resources'. A user profile dropdown is open, showing 'Hi, Christina!' with 'Edit Profile' and 'Sign Out' options. The main content area features a large image of a hand holding a coffee cup, with the text 'HE Green Assessment' and a placeholder paragraph of Lorem Ipsum. Below this, a grid of six icons represents different assessment dimensions: Organisational Management, Assessing and Reporting, Operations, Community and Outreach, Education and Curricula, and Research. A 'Get Started' button is positioned below the grid. The footer contains contact information for WPZ Research GmbH, a 'Stay up to date' section with a newsletter sign-up, and logos for GET-AHED and the European Union.

GET-AHED

Home / HE Green Assessment

HE Green Assessment

Hi, Christina!

Edit Profile

Sign Out

Once you have answered each section, please click the "Next" button to proceed.

Get Started

GET-AHED is a digital platform providing HEIs across the EU with a range of online tools to enable them to implement the EU's Green Transition, Green Education and Training priorities.

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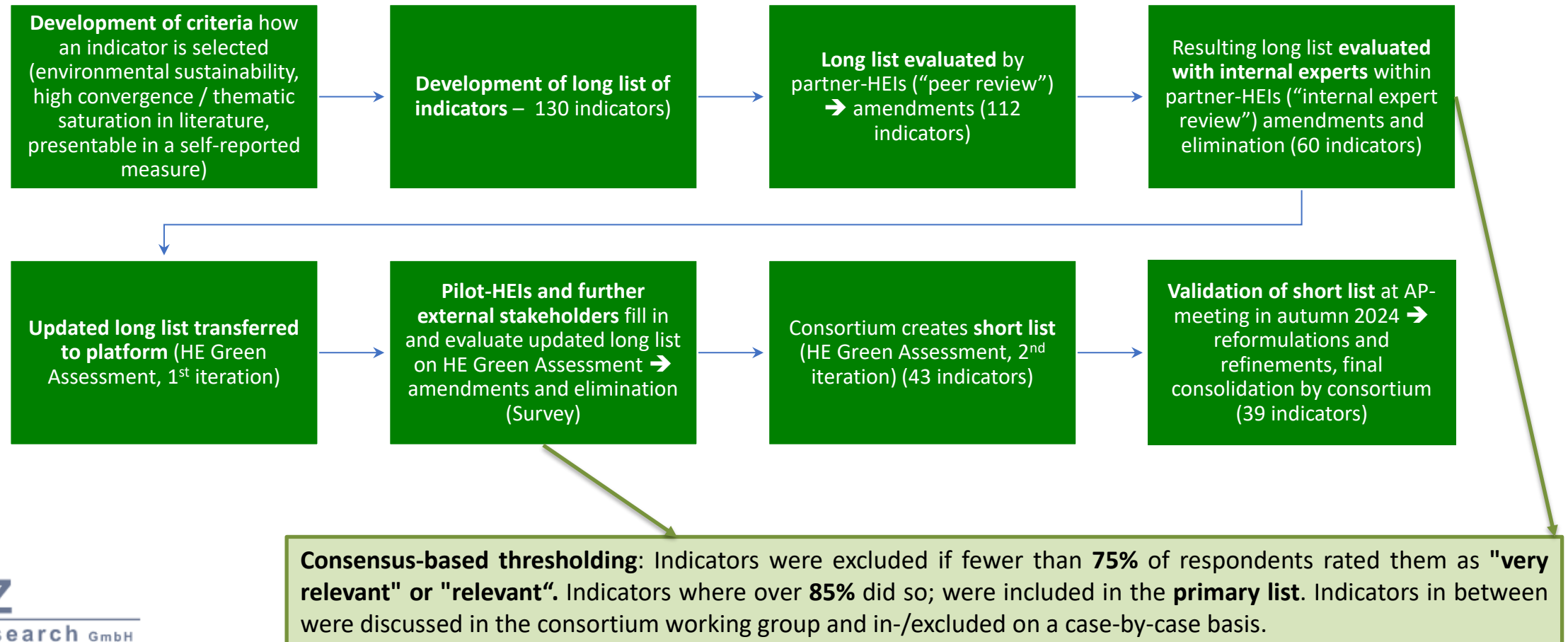
GET-AHED news
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GET-AHED

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Methodology indicator development (1)

- Definition of **dimensions** (i.e. sections of the tool) **based on literature review**
- Development of **indicators** based on analysis of existing SAT and meta-studies (e.g. Du et al., 2023; Mapar et al., 2022) as a starting point, followed by a multi-step procedure:



Resulting dimensions and indicators

Dimension	# indicators
Organisational Management	5
Operation	9
Education and Curricula	5
Research, Development and Innovation	8
Community and Outreach	7
Assessment, Reporting and Evaluation	5

Methodology indicator development (2)

Pilot-HEI online survey

- Snowball-sample (Call for pilot-HEIs was spread in consortium and associate partners' networks, via social media, at conferences etc.)
- 32 HEIs from all over Europe completed the online survey, e.g.
- Pilot HEIs were asked to:
 - rate the relevance of each of the 60 indicators (4pt-scale from 1=„not at all relevant“ to 4=„very relevant“)
 - suggest the merger of indicators or the shift to another dimension
 - suggestion reformulations and provide further comments
 - Provide further information on their institution
- Analysis: frequency analysis as basis for consensus-based thresholding and qualitative data analyses

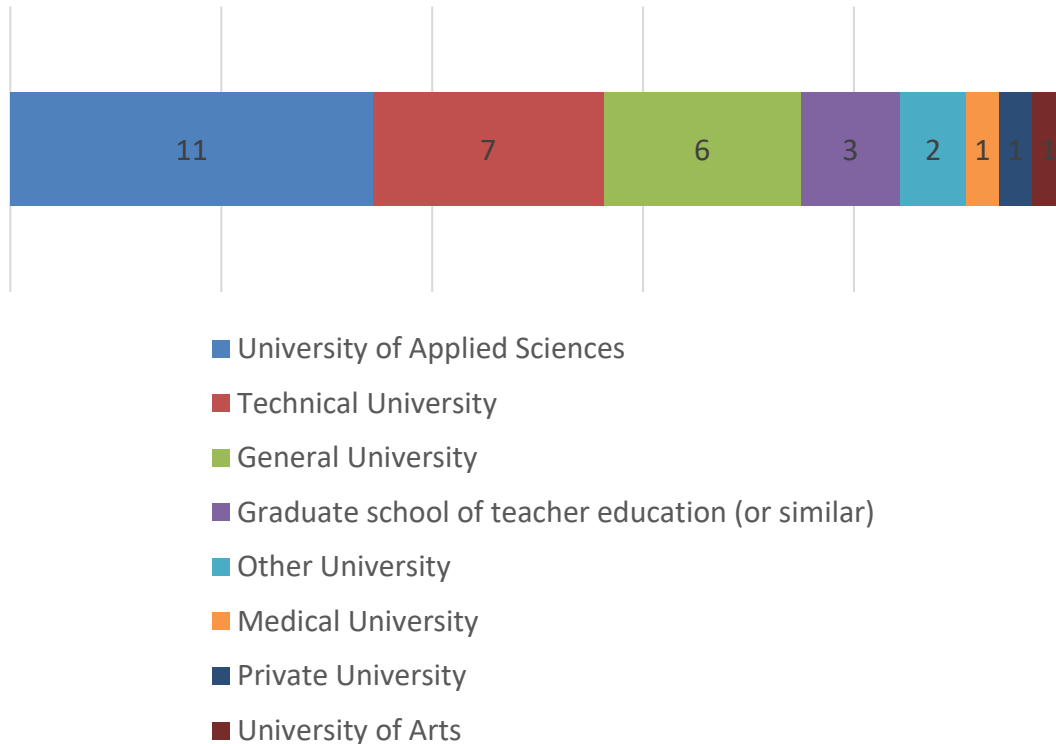


Example analysis grid

Code	Indicator	Percentage ≥ 3	Comments	Correct dimension?	Merge?
B1.3	The HEI's procurement and tendering policy prioritises environmentally sustainable investments.	0,91		95,65%	
B1.4	The HEI's leadership demonstrates commitment to environmental sustainability as a priority in its decision-making processes.	0,87	I think that the mentioned indicators don't fit to organisational management in a narrow context. I think to use the category it must be explained what you understand under this term. From my point of view I see it very narrow to organisati Example of the Green Deal could be eliminated or go into the explanation box	90,91%	B1.6
B1.5	The HEI has a clearly defined strategy for sustainability that aligns with international strategies and policy frameworks.	0,71	Example of the Green Deal could be eliminated or go into the explanation box		
B1.7	The HEI has dedicated structures, such as a staff committee, for coordinating and integrating environmental sustainability activities across the HEI.	0,91		91,30%	
B1.8	The HEI utilises educational, training and awareness-raising activities to disseminate the principles of environmental sustainability among its students, staff and external stakeholders.	0,96	The HEI utilises research-based educational training and awareness-raising activities to disseminate the principles of environmental sustainability. The university should foster the integration of research-based findings in educational training within the medical field	59,09%	
B1.12	The HEI promotes environmental sustainability across all its departments, both academic and non-academic.	0,82			
B2.2	The HEI implements an environmentally sustainable campus strategy by incorporating elements of green building into the design, construction, renovation of its infrastructures and land use.	0,87	eliminate "has a green campus/land use strategy"	87,50%	
B2.3	The HEI implements measures and actions to reduce water consumption.	0,87		95,83%	

Results (1): Sample description

- Participating institutions (n = 32)



Job titles of participating HEI representatives:

- Vice Rector
- Dean
- Head of Department
- Head of Sustainability
- Head of quality management
- Professor for Sustainability Management
- Representative of sustainability unit
- Member of Green Team
- (Senior) lecturer for sustainability
- Impact manager

Results (2): Descriptives

- 50% of participating HEIs have a dedicated “**Sustainability Unit**”
- 63% are **not yet familiar** with (environmental) sustainability self-assessment tools (SAT)
 - Out of those familiar with SAT, less than 1/3 use them for their sustainability reporting
- 72% do **not have any kind of sustainability reporting** installed at their institution
- 50% of participating HEIs have **high interest in sustainability assessment**, as per their willingness to be indicated on the project website

Institution type	% having Sust. Unit	% familiar with SAT
General Uni.	33%	0%
Grad. Teach. S.	33%	33%
Medical Uni.	100%	0%
Other Uni.	0%	0%
Private Uni.	100%	100%
Technical Uni.	43%	86%
Uni. of Applied Sci.	64%	18%
Uni. of Arts	100%	0%

Results (3): Indicators assessment

Dimension	Avg. Relev. Score [SD]	Avg. Appropri. Score*
Organizational management	3.21 [0.81]	84.89%
Operations	3.19 [0.87]	91.14%
Education and curricula	3.29 [0.75]	96.40%
Research, development, innovation	3.08 [0.87]	96.41%
Community and outreach	3.08 [0.84]	97.39%
Assessment, reporting, evaluation	3.01 [0.91]	93.07%

* Percentage of respondents selected “Correct dimension”.

Results (4): Short-listing the indicators

Dimension	# Indicators initially	# Short-listed indicators	“Retention rate”
Organizational management	12	5	42%
Operations	12	9	82%
Education and curricula	5	5	100%
Research, development, innovation	11	8	73%
Community and outreach	13	7	54%
Assessment, reporting, evaluation	7	5	71%

Examples of indicators

Dimension „Research, Development and Innovation“:

B4.13 | The HEI engages in and promotes entrepreneurship and start-up initiatives focused on environmental sustainability.

Description:

The HEI actively fosters and promotes entrepreneurship and start-up initiatives centred on environmental sustainability. By fostering innovation and providing support, it encourages the development of green business solutions.

To score highly, HEIs should:

- *Host incubators for sustainability-focused start-ups.*
- *Provide mentorship and funding opportunities for eco-entrepreneurs.*
- *Partner with industry to accelerate the commercialisation of green technologies.*

Dimension „Operations“:

B2.11 | The HEI promotes waste avoidance and reduction measures, including circular economy approaches (e.g. in food waste management), across its campus.

Description:

The HEI encourages waste reduction on campus to foster environmental sustainability. It includes ways to reduce food waste, hazardous waste and promote recycling.

To score highly, HEIs should:

- *Use digital documents and implement a needs-based purchasing practice to minimise paper waste.*
- *Promote recycling programmes for plastics, paper and electronics.*
- *Practice organic waste composting through waste management staff.*
- *Implement sustainable food waste management strategies at the campus level.*

Dimension „Education and Curricula“:

B3.3 | As part of its future skills strategy, the HEI incorporates a range of competencies into curricula, therefore preparing students for a more environmentally sustainable lifestyle.

Description:

The HEI equips students with practical skills to address sustainability challenges effectively, preparing and motivating them to develop innovative solutions and drive positive environmental change.

To score highly, HEIs should:

- *Promote activities that require students to critically analyse environmental issues (e.g. debates, simulation, and other projects)*
- *Offer courses on sustainable resource management, health, nutrition, green shopping and technologies.*
- *Explore sustainability from multidisciplinary perspectives.*

Mind our current calls for contribution! (1)

Platform usability test – Call for Pilot HEIs!

We're kicking off the **second pilot phase** of the GET-AHED platform – and we're looking for **higher education institutions** ready to test, explore, and help refine our tools.

As a **pilot HEI**, you'll get:

- Exclusive early access to the platform
- Insightful tools: self-assessment, training resources, good practices
- A quick and easy feedback process (just 15–30 minutes!)

Your input will directly shape a European initiative supporting the green transition in higher education.

 Pilot testing begins **mid-May 2025**

Register here:

 Questions? Reach out: get-ahed@wpz-research.com



Mind our current calls for contribution! (2)

Final Conference – Call for Papers!

For our final conference in Cork, Ireland, on October 20 and 21, 2025, we are searching for interesting contributions in the realm of our topic **Advancing Sustainability in the Higher Education Sector**.

For further information, see attached conference call or go to: <https://www.get-ahed.eu/conference-2025/>



Thank you for your attention!

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