Become Busy Xelerator

Training Guide 4 – Young People: GreenX

Project number: 2023-1-EL02-KA220-YOU-000160907

WWW.BECOMEBUSY.EU

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation (INEDIVIM). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

1.Introduction

Purpose of the Training and Connection to the BBX Programme
The GreenX training has been developed as an integral component of the BBX programme, a learning framework designed to support young people in developing entrepreneurial mindsets, real-world problem-solving capacities, and the confidence to engage in innovation with purpose. While BBX is composed of three thematic pathways — TechX, SocialX, and GreenX — each dedicated to a different dimension of entrepreneurship,

GreenX specifically focuses on sustainability and environmentally driven innovation. Its role within the BBX structure is to equip participants with the knowledge, awareness, and practical tools needed to understand emerging environmental challenges and explore how they can be transformed into opportunities for meaningful and responsible entrepreneurship.

Unlike traditional classroom-based learning, GreenX adopts a non-formal, experiential, and youth-centred approach, encouraging participants to engage actively with ideas rather than observe them passively.

Throughout the training, learners explore real examples of environmental innovation, participate in interactive discussions, and develop team-based projects that respond to real needs and contexts. In doing so, the training supports the broader BBX objective of empowering young people to take ownership of their learning, express their creativity, and begin identifying how their interests, values, and skills align with emerging opportunities in the green transition.

GreenX is therefore not only a thematic module, but also a stepping stone for young people to develop a sense of agency in shaping the future. By understanding how entrepreneurship can contribute to environmental responsibility and societal wellbeing, participants begin to recognise that innovation and sustainability are not separate goals — they are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The training invites participants to see themselves as contributors to a changing world, bridging environmental knowledge with entrepreneurial thinking and long-term positive impact.

Why Sustainability and Green Innovation Matter for Youth

Sustainability and green innovation matter now more than ever because the environmental decisions made in the present will determine the living conditions, social wellbeing, and economic stability of future generations. International frameworks such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasise that the health of the planet is inseparable from human prosperity, equity, and peace.

At European level, the European Green Deal and the legally binding European Climate Law underline this urgency by committing Europe to climate neutrality by 2050 and promoting structural transformation across energy, industry, mobility, infrastructure, agriculture, and education systems.

For young people, this transformation is especially relevant. Many of the careers, technologies, and business models that will exist in the next decade will be shaped by sustainability requirements, environmental innovation frameworks, and circular design principles. Green entrepreneurship — once considered a niche — is becoming a mainstream driver of emerging markets, funding opportunities, and new forms of employment. As industries increasingly prioritise environmental responsibility, skills related to sustainability, innovation, systems thinking, and circular economy are becoming key assets for young professionals entering the workforce.

Beyond economic relevance, sustainability also resonates emotionally and socially with youth. Climate anxiety, ecological grief, and frustration around inaction are becoming common among young generations — yet research and recent movements show that these emotions coexist with high motivation and willingness to drive solutions. Policy frameworks such as the EU Youth Strategy 2022–2027 explicitly recognise youth as critical actors in the green transition and encourage their participation not only as learners, but as leaders, advocates, innovators, and contributors to policy development.

Therefore, sustainability and green innovation matter for youth not only because they represent future employment opportunities, but because they allow young people to engage with issues that affect their lives, their communities, and the generations that will follow. GreenX gives space for that engagement — transforming concern into creativity, values into actions, and ideas into change-driven initiatives.

Learning Outcomes

Through participation in the GreenX training, young people develop knowledge, competencies, and attitudes that support their growth as responsible innovators and engaged citizens.

Throughout the learning experience, participants deepen their understanding of sustainability concepts, explore frameworks such as the circular economy and eco-design, and learn to analyse environmental challenges not only as problems, but as starting points for creative, strategic, and impactful innovation.

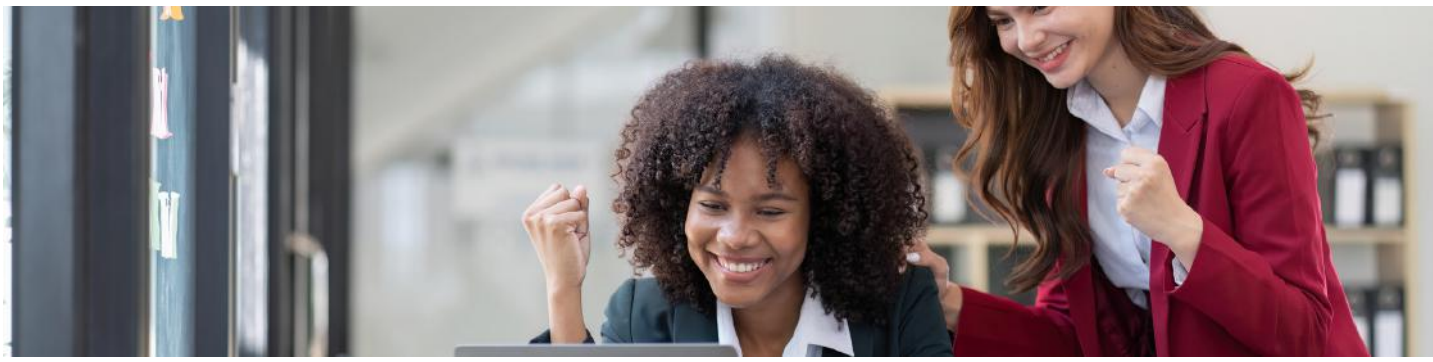
As participants work with case studies, group activities, and guided exercises, they begin to understand how sustainability principles translate into practical choices — whether in business models, prototype development, material use, or community engagement. They learn to collaborate with others, communicate ideas clearly, and recognise the value of diverse perspectives in addressing complex environmental issues. The experiential nature of the programme strengthens critical thinking, systems awareness, adaptability, and resilience — abilities increasingly recognised as essential for navigating a rapidly transforming world.

Importantly, the training also supports the development of confidence and agency. As participants engage in prototyping activities and receive mentor feedback, they shift from theoretical understanding to practical application and begin to see themselves as capable contributors to environmental solutions. This shift — from awareness to action — is central to the GreenX learning philosophy and to the wider purpose of the BBX programme: empowering young people to shape a future that aligns with sustainability, innovation, equity, and collective wellbeing.

2. Training Overview

Agenda & Learning Modules

The GreenX training is structured as an intentional learning pathway that gradually builds knowledge, confidence, and practical capability in sustainability, environmental thinking and green innovation. The agenda is carefully sequenced so that each activity builds onto the next, allowing participants to transition smoothly from understanding environmental issues to engaging in solution-focused experimentation and finally developing their own project concepts.



Learning is delivered through a blend of methodologies including experiential workshops, analytical discussions, design challenges, case studies, reflection exercises, and collaborative prototyping. This dynamic learning approach ensures that participants remain engaged intellectually, emotionally, and socially, reflecting best practices from European non-formal learning models and innovation education frameworks.

The programme includes four main modules, each addressing a core dimension of sustainability education, entrepreneurship skills and future-oriented thinking. Together they form a holistic curriculum that does not simply teach about sustainability, but demonstrates how participants can shape it in their daily lives, communities, and potential professional futures.

Module 1: Introduction to Sustainability

The first module establishes the conceptual and emotional foundation of the programme. Participants are introduced to sustainability not as a trend or theoretical subject, but as a living system that connects environmental protection, social wellbeing, economic resilience and intergenerational justice. This module draws upon global frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to demonstrate how environmental issues intersect with poverty, inequality, education, public health, and human rights. Participants explore key topics such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, resource depletion, and environmental justice — helping them recognise the scale and urgency of current challenges.

Beyond global context, participants engage with European priorities such as the European Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy, and the vision of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. These policies demonstrate that sustainability is not only a personal value, but a systemic commitment shaping future industries, infrastructure, and societal priorities. Through guided reflection and group dialogue, participants are encouraged to express their own perspectives, concerns, and hopes. This emotional connection is crucial: many young people begin the programme feeling overwhelmed or anxious about environmental crises, yet by the end of the module, they report feeling informed, grounded, and ready to engage.

Module 2: Circular Economy & Green Business Models

The second module transitions participants from awareness to system-level understanding. The circular economy model is presented as an alternative to the traditional linear "take–make–use–dispose" economy. Through examples, demonstrations and case analysis inspired by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, participants learn how circular thinking prioritises repairability, reuse, upcycling, regeneration and closed-loop design. In this stage, participants begin to understand that waste is not inevitable — it is the result of design choices.

Hands-on activities help participants analyse real products and systems — from clothing to packaging to electronics — and identify where resource loops break. Through this process, participants begin to see that sustainability challenges are not merely environmental failures, but design challenges. They explore green business models built on shared access models, digital repair platforms, circular retail concepts, refill solutions, or modular product systems. This module empowers participants to see sustainability as an opportunity space for creativity, industry transformation and entrepreneurship — not a limitation.

Module 3: Green Technologies and Innovation

The third module focuses on the role of innovation and technology in supporting environmental transformation. Participants learn that innovation exists across a spectrum — from high-tech solutions like renewable energy, smart agriculture systems, climate data tools, and carbon capture technologies, to low-tech and nature-based solutions such as composting systems, regenerative farming, wetland restoration, or biomimicry-inspired materials. This balance helps participants understand that innovation is not exclusive to engineers or scientists — anyone can contribute through creativity, critical thinking and collaboration.

Participants also explore how innovation is expanding career landscapes across Europe. Policies such as the European Climate Law and funding programmes like Horizon Europe have accelerated the creation of green jobs and sustainable industry sectors. The module highlights growing opportunities in environmental consulting, clean technology, circular product design, sustainability strategy, eco-entrepreneurship, and regenerative industries. In guided exercises, participants reflect on personal interests and strengths to imagine future professional paths connected to the green transition.

Module 4: From Idea to Green Project

The final module guides participants through the process of transforming ideas into structured project concepts or early prototypes. Using tools inspired by design thinking, lean innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship methodologies, participants work in teams to refine concepts, define user needs, map potential impact, and explore feasibility. Prototyping becomes a key pedagogical tool, allowing participants to test ideas without pressure to be perfect.

Mentors play an active role in this module, offering feedback, raising strategic questions, and connecting participants to real-world examples. This process helps participants understand that innovation is iterative — ideas grow through testing, reflection, feedback and revision. The module concludes with short presentations, where participants share their progress, challenges and next steps with peers and mentors. This milestone builds communication confidence and reinforces the belief that every idea has the potential to evolve into impactful change.

Agenda for the training:

ABOUT THE MOBILITY

The 5-day training of **GreenX** which will be held in **Munich, Germany**, aims to encourage in-person participation and local networking, providing participants with the opportunity to discuss their business ideas and receive guidance on how to develop them further and later submit them to the program. **45 participants** in total will be trained in Genmany on the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully develop and launch their ideas through the skills development outline that has been generated. Participants can be students, recent graduates, or young professionals who want to turn their ideas into successful startups.

Overall, the activities are designed to promote entrepreneurship, encourage green innovation and creativity, and provide young people with the skills and resources they need to build successful businesses. By achieving these objectives, the activity will help to drive economic growth and green development in the partner cities and beyond.

ACTIVITY PROGRAMME

11:00 – 11:15	Registration & Welcome Coffee
11:15 – 11:30	Opening Ceremony & Keynote on Green Entrepreneurship & Sustainability
11:30 – 12:30	Final Business Idea Pitches (GreenX Teams)
12:30 – 12:45	Jury Q&A & Feedback
12:45 – 13:15	Panel Talk: The Future of Green Startups in Europe
13:15 – 13:45	Award Ceremony & Graduation
13:45 – 14:00	Closing Remarks & Group Photo

PREPARATION OF PARTICIPANTS

The mobility will be in English and therefore participants should be able to communicate in English.

All participants are expected to participate fully in all activities, except in the case of illness. Unauthorised absence from activities is not permitted. The activities will be designed and conducted in such a way that all participants have the opportunity to contribute their points of view. We expect you to participate and contribute.

Before your travel, participants should check the documents they need to cross the border into Greece and whether they have them. Pay attention to the expiry date!

Participants are encouraged to promote the project, share the results achieved and carry out dissemination activities.

Intercultural Night: Participants are requested to present their home country and its culture to the group (no use of presentations, etc.) by telling a short story about it, bringing some traditional food, perform a dance, or some other tradition.

Youthpass Certificates: All participants will receive a Youth pass certificate at the end of the mobility.

Trainers and Mentors Involved

The successful delivery of GreenX is grounded in the collaboration between skilled trainers and experienced mentors, each contributing complementary roles that enrich the learning experience. Rather than functioning as traditional instructors, the GreenX training team operates as facilitators, guides, and catalysts — supporting participants in building their own interpretations, solutions, and personal connection to sustainability and innovation.

Their presence reflects a fundamental belief embedded in Erasmus+ methodology: learning becomes meaningful when expertise meets dialogue, curiosity, and lived experience.

Trainers lead the core learning journey and ensure that each participant feels supported, included, and able to meaningfully engage with the programme. They introduce key sustainability concepts such as lifecycle thinking, climate adaptation, regenerative systems, environmental justice, and green entrepreneurship in ways that are accessible, youth-friendly, and grounded in real-world relevance. Instead of presenting sustainability as a rigid academic field, they transform it into a practical and explorative space — one where questions are as important as answers and where creativity is seen as an essential form of intelligence.

A core responsibility of trainers is to shape the learning environment. They cultivate a space where participants feel safe sharing ideas — even those that are unfinished or experimental. Through methods such as participatory facilitation, group dialogue, reflective questioning, and hands-on experimentation, trainers encourage participants to take ownership of their learning.

They help participants recognise that sustainability is not something external or separate from their lives, but a lens through which they can understand and shape their daily choices, future careers, and role within society.

While trainers provide structure and learning scaffolding, mentors contribute depth, authenticity, and connection to real-world practice. Each mentor brings experience rooted in applied sustainability — whether through environmental research, circular business development, eco-innovation, climate activism, community projects, or work aligned with the European Green Deal, UN Sustainable Development Goals, or national green strategies. Their involvement signals to participants that sustainability is not only a theoretical field — it is an active, expanding professional ecosystem with diverse pathways and emerging opportunities.

Mentors play multiple roles throughout the programme. During discussions, they offer insight from practice, real case examples, and sector-based challenges that enrich the learning context. During workshops and creative exercises, they support participants in exploring feasibility, assessing environmental impact, strengthening assumptions, and identifying potential partners or user groups. In the prototyping stage, mentors provide constructive feedback — not by judging ideas, but by helping participants strengthen them, refine their thinking, and imagine how concepts could live beyond the training environment.

One of the most significant contributions of mentors is their role in supporting confidence-building. Many participants enter sustainability education with uncertainty — unsure whether they know enough, whether their ideas matter, or whether they have a role in such a complex field. Through conversation, empathy, and encouragement, mentors help participants recognise that innovation grows through mistakes, curiosity, collaboration, and iteration — not perfection. This emotional shift is often a turning point, transforming sustainability from something intimidating into something empowering.

Their involvement also ensures continuity beyond the formal training timeline. Mentors serve as a bridge between learning and future opportunity — offering access to professional networks, relevant platforms, green youth initiatives, and future-oriented innovation spaces. This approach aligns with priorities outlined in the EU Youth Strategy 2022–2027, which emphasises long-term empowerment, mentorship, and the role of supportive adults in creating pathways into green transition fields.

Together, trainers and mentors create a learning ecosystem that mirrors the values GreenX aims to instill: collaboration, innovation, responsibility, and collective action. Their combined presence ensures that participants are not only informed — they are strengthened, encouraged, and inspired to see themselves as capable contributors to Europe's transition toward a sustainable and climate-neutral future. Through their guidance, sustainability becomes more than knowledge — it becomes possibility.

3.Core Topics

Climate Challenges and Local Environmental Issues

Understanding climate challenges begins with acknowledging the scale, complexity, and urgency of environmental change occurring around the world. Climate systems are interconnected, and disturbances in one area often trigger cascading effects elsewhere — a reality confirmed through decades of scientific assessment from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). These reports consistently demonstrate that rising levels of human-made greenhouse gas emissions — primarily from burning fossil fuels, large-scale agriculture, industrial production, and deforestation — are accelerating global warming at a pace unprecedented in human history. The consequences are visible: record-breaking heatwaves, prolonged droughts, devastating floods, intensified wildfires, and rapid species extinction. Unlike earlier generations who heard climate change described as a distant future threat, young people today inherit a world where environmental disruption is already reshaping ecosystems, economies, and ways of life.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a global framework to respond to these realities. SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land) highlight the interconnectedness of environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and human wellbeing. These goals are not only technical targets but also ethical commitments — reminding governments, institutions, and communities that safeguarding the planet is fundamental to equity, health, and long-term prosperity.

Similarly, European legislation — including the European Climate Law, the EU Adaptation Strategy, and the European Green Deal — reinforces this responsibility at regional and policy levels. Together, these frameworks support the transition to a climate-neutral and climate-resilient Europe, signaling that environmental transformation is both a scientific necessity and a societal priority.

However, climate challenges become meaningful to young learners not only through statistics or policy frameworks but through lived experience and local observation. When environmental issues are examined through familiar surroundings — a polluted stream, a heat-stressed city park, empty recycling bins, energy-inefficient buildings, or the absence of public transport — sustainability stops feeling abstract and begins to feel personal. This localisation of learning is critical because studies in environmental psychology show that youth are more likely to act, innovate, and stay engaged when climate issues connect directly to their own identity, community, and sense of place. In this training, participants are encouraged to map environmental realities in their hometowns, observe seasonal changes, interview local actors, or explore municipal climate strategies to deepen this connection.

Many environmental challenges are also deeply rooted in social structures. Communities with fewer financial resources, limited access to green spaces, or inadequate public infrastructure often bear the heaviest burden of climate impacts — whether through polluted air, degraded ecosystems, or vulnerability to extreme weather. This intersection between environmental and social Systems introduces participants to the concept of climate justice — the principle that environmental benefits and burdens should be shared fairly. The European Green Deal underscores this commitment through its Just Transition Mechanism, ensuring that climate transformation uplifts rather than marginalises communities. Understanding this reinforces that sustainability is not only about protecting nature — it is also about protecting people, dignity, fairness, and opportunity.

To help participants make sense of these complex dynamics, the training introduces systems thinking — a framework commonly used in sustainable innovation. Systems thinking invites learners to look beyond symptoms and identify interconnected causes, relationships, and patterns. For example, air pollution is not solely a transportation issue; it intersects with urban planning, energy systems, behavioural norms, socioeconomic access, and policy enforcement. By analysing the relationships between these variables, participants learn to identify leverage points where innovation, design or collective action can produce meaningful improvement.

This perspective prepares young innovators to approach sustainability challenges not as fixed problems, but as evolving systems where strategic intervention can generate widespread, regenerative change.

Throughout this topic, participants are encouraged to reflect not only on environmental facts but also on their emotional responses. It is common for young people to experience frustration, sadness, or overwhelm when confronting environmental degradation. Instead of suppressing these feelings, the programme validates them and transforms them into motivation and agency. By engaging in dialogue, imagining solutions, and exploring potential actions, participants shift from a passive sense of worry to an active belief that their contribution matters.

Ultimately, exploring climate challenges — both globally and locally — lays the foundation for meaningful engagement in the remaining modules. Rather than perceiving environmental issues as distant, immovable, or exclusively political, participants begin to recognise that they are dynamic, interconnected, and open to innovation. This mindset shift is essential because it prepares young people to move from awareness to responsibility, from concern to creativity, and from observation to active participation in shaping a more sustainable future.

Circular Economy and Eco-Design Thinking

After establishing a foundational understanding of global climate challenges, the GreenX learning journey moves into a more solution-focused framework by introducing participants to the circular economy — a transformative model that challenges the traditional assumptions of how societies design, consume, and value resources. The circular economy represents a fundamental shift away from the dominant linear industrial system, which for decades has followed a predictable but extractive logic of take → make → use → waste. This linear approach has contributed significantly to environmental degradation, resource depletion, pollution, and increased pressure on ecosystems. As global populations grow and finite resources become scarcer, this linear system is proving economically outdated, environmentally destructive, and socially inequitable.

In contrast, the circular economy promotes regeneration, resilience, and long-term environmental stewardship. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, one of the leading voices in the movement, the circular economy is built on three core principles: eliminating waste and pollution, circulating products and materials at their highest value, and regenerating natural systems. Instead of designing products for short-term use and eventual disposal, circular approaches prioritise durability, repairability, modularity, reuse, refurbishment, and safe material cycling. This shift redefines the role of waste — not as an inevitable outcome of production, but as a design flaw that can be prevented.

Participants explore how the circular economy is increasingly positioned not only as an ecological necessity but as an economic opportunity.

Reports from the European Commission, for example, highlight that adopting circular practices may generate new business models, create high-quality jobs, strengthen industrial resilience, and reduce dependency on imported raw materials. Under the EU Circular Economy Action Plan (2020), industries such as textiles, electronics, packaging, construction, and food systems are being encouraged — and in some cases required — to transition to circular design principles. These policies demonstrate that sustainability is not a niche movement—it is becoming a central driver of Europe's economic, innovation, and industrial strategy.

A critical framework embedded in this training is eco-design thinking, a design philosophy that challenges innovators to consider environmental impacts from the earliest concept stages rather than as an afterthought. Eco-design thinking integrates environmental criteria into the creation of products, services, and systems, ensuring that decisions regarding materials, manufacturing processes, energy use, transportation, and end-of-life pathways are intentional and responsible. Participants learn that the most powerful environmental decisions occur before a product even exists. Choices about materials (biodegradable vs. synthetic), structure (modular vs. welded), ownership models (service-based vs. consumer-owned), and user pathways (repairable vs. disposable) can dramatically reduce environmental impact.

To make these ideas tangible, participants engage with lifecycle thinking, exploring the full journey of materials—from raw extraction and manufacturing to use, maintenance, and eventual reintegration into natural or industrial cycles. Tools such as Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), impact mapping, and systems visualisation support learners in understanding how seemingly simple design decisions can have long-term consequences. For example, adding glue instead of screws to a product may improve aesthetics but prevents separation of materials and makes repair nearly impossible. Something as small as this design choice can determine whether a product becomes part of a circular loop — or ends up in landfill.

Throughout the module, participants analyse real examples of circular innovation to demonstrate how these concepts are already reshaping markets.

These may include repair-based digital platforms like iFixit, clothing take-back programmes in sustainable fashion brands, plant-based material alternatives replacing petroleum-based plastics, urban composting networks transforming food waste into agriculture input, or "product-as-a-service" models where consumers lease items such as electronics, bicycles, or furniture rather than owning them. Observing these initiatives allows participants to see that circularity is not hypothetical — it is happening, scaling, and becoming increasingly integrated into everyday systems.

However, the circular economy is not simply a technological transition — it is a cultural evolution. This requires rethinking ideas about ownership, convenience, identity, and success. For many young people, this shift feels intuitive: swapping, sharing, repairing, or upcycling already align with emerging generational values around sustainability, creativity, and minimalism. As participants reflect on consumption habits — fast fashion dependency, single-use culture, or rapid product obsolescence — they begin to recognise how personal choices are shaped by broader systems of marketing, economics, and cultural norms. Understanding this dynamic empowers them to see that shifting toward circularity is also a process of questioning assumptions, exploring values, and redesigning behaviours.

By the end of this topic, participants have experienced a mindset shift—from seeing sustainability as a restriction to understanding it as a space of possibility and innovation. Circular economy thinking becomes not just a theory, but a lens for imagining new economies, new services, and new societal models. Participants recognise that circularity has the potential to reshape manufacturing, employment, education, policy, and community life — and importantly, that they themselves can contribute to shaping this transition through creativity, collaboration, and responsible decision-making.

Green Business Ideas: From Concept to Prototype

The final core topic of the GreenX curriculum marks a crucial turning point in the learning journey: it is the moment where understanding, awareness, and values are transformed into concrete ideas and early-stage solutions. Throughout the previous modules, participants have explored climate challenges, mapped local environmental issues, discovered the principles of the circular economy, and engaged with eco-design thinking. In this final step, they are invited to bring everything together and step into the role of green innovators and sustainable entrepreneurs. This stage emphasises that environmental transformation is not only about regulation and policy; it is also about the creative, practical work of designing new ways of producing, living and interacting that are aligned with ecological limits and social wellbeing.

At the beginning of this topic, participants are introduced to the idea that "green business" is about much more than adding a recycling logo, planting a symbolic tree, or using the word "eco" in marketing material. They explore the difference between superficial "greenwashing" and genuine sustainable entrepreneurship. A truly green business is one that integrates environmental and social responsibility into its core structures and decision-making processes.

This means considering the environmental footprint of raw material extraction, production methods, transport, energy use, packaging, product life cycle, and end-of-life pathways. It also includes the human dimension: fair working conditions, ethical supply chains, community benefit, transparency, and long-term commitment rather than short-term optics. Through examples and critical discussion, participants begin to recognise sustainable entrepreneurship as a rigorous, holistic and values-driven approach, not a communication strategy.

This module explicitly connects these ideas to the wider European context. Frameworks such as the European Green Deal, the European Climate Law, and associated strategies make clear that the EU's economic future is inseparable from environmental responsibility. Innovation, and particularly green innovation, is recognised as a cornerstone of Europe's transition toward climate neutrality. Participants explore how legislation, public investment, green finance mechanisms and research programmes are opening space for new sustainable business models in areas such as renewable energy, circular products, low-carbon transport, nature-based solutions, eco-tourism, sustainable food systems, and green digital innovation. Seeing how policy and innovation interact helps them understand that their ideas do not develop in a vacuum; they exist in a larger ecosystem that is actively searching for new solutions.

Idea development in this topic is carefully structured so that participants are not left alone with vague inspiration. Instead, they are guided step by step through a creative and analytical process. The training introduces design thinking as a core methodology: a human-centred innovation approach that begins with empathy and context, then moves through ideation, prototyping, and testing. Participants are encouraged to start by understanding who is affected by the problem they want to address and how it is experienced in real life. Instead of jumping directly to solutions, they consider the lived reality of users, communities, stakeholders or environments impacted by a specific challenge — for example, small businesses struggling with waste, residents impacted by air pollution, young people with limited access to sustainable fashion, or farmers facing soil degradation.

From there, participants explore what environmental or social need truly exists. They learn to distinguish between surface symptoms and deeper causes. For example, the problem may not be only that "there is too much plastic waste," but that systems are designed around single-use convenience, lack of refill options, and poor infrastructure for reuse. They then begin to articulate how value could be created for both people and the planet: what kind of solution could reduce environmental impact while making life easier, healthier, fairer, or more meaningful for the people involved? This might lead them to ideas such as repair-based services, community sharing initiatives, new material innovations, awareness-raising digital tools, local food distribution platforms, or circular subscription models.

As participants refine their ideas, they also engage with the reality that every solution exists within constraints. They examine what opportunities and barriers exist in real contexts: Are there legal constraints? Are there financial limitations? Are people ready to adopt the solution? Is infrastructure available? Where might resistance emerge and what partnerships could help? This structured thinking helps ideas evolve from abstract desire into purpose-driven concepts with clear potential pathways.

A central, transformative part of this topic is prototyping. Participants are reminded that no idea begins perfect — and that waiting for perfection often prevents action altogether. Prototypes are framed as early, rough, but powerful tools that make ideas visible and open to dialogue. Depending on the nature of their idea, a prototype might be a hand-drawn interface, a mock-up of a product made from cardboard and simple materials, a short role-play of how a service might work, a storyboard that visualises a user journey, or a basic digital model. The important element is not sophistication, but intention: a prototype answers the question, “What would this look and feel like in real life?”

Through this process, participants learn to see feedback not as criticism, but as a resource. They are encouraged to test their prototypes with peers, trainers, mentors, and — when possible — potential users. They listen carefully: What do people understand? What seems confusing? What excites them? What concerns arise? They then refine their ideas, adjusting design, communication, target group, or delivery method. This cyclical process of build → test → reflect → improve mimics how innovation operates in real entrepreneurial and design environments.

Mentors support this entire journey. They help participants locate blind spots, connect ideas to real market or community needs, and ensure environmental integrity is not sacrificed for convenience. For example, a mentor might help a group investigate whether a proposed material is truly sustainable across its life cycle, or whether a service model unintentionally excludes certain groups. They may also share personal experiences from launching or working in green ventures, highlighting the emotional realities of entrepreneurship: uncertainty, failure, resilience, and breakthrough moments.

As this topic comes to a close, participants often describe experiencing a deep shift in how they see themselves and their future options. Environmental entrepreneurship no longer feels like something reserved for experts, investors, or established companies; instead, it appears as a living, evolving field that welcomes new ideas, diverse backgrounds, and unconventional perspectives.

Even if the ideas developed during the training are at an early stage, they still represent meaningful beginnings — seeds of real potential. Some of these ideas may eventually grow into projects implemented in schools, communities or local organisations; others may influence future study choices, professional aspirations, or activism efforts.

Most importantly, this topic reinforces a powerful message: in a world facing significant environmental and social challenges, innovation must be guided by responsibility, empathy and long-term thinking. Young people are not only inheritors of a climate-affected future; they are also designers of the alternatives. Through GreenX, they experience what it feels like to start shaping those alternatives — moving from awareness to agency, and from concern to creative, thoughtful, and impactful action.

4.Interactive Activities & Workshops

Green Hackathon / Challenge-Based Learning

The Green Hackathon stands as one of the most transformative components of the GreenX programme because it allows participants to step beyond theoretical understanding and directly experience the realities of sustainable innovation. Rather than learning about solutions, participants learn by attempting to create them. The hackathon becomes a living ecosystem of energy, uncertainty, creativity, collaboration, and experimentation — mirroring real-world environments where climate-related innovation currently takes place, including university accelerators, grassroots initiatives, innovation labs, and European start-up ecosystems aligned with the European Green Deal.

To create the right conditions for engagement, the hackathon begins with a carefully facilitated introduction — a moment designed to shift participants from passive learners to active problem-solvers.

The challenge framing is intentional: the environmental problem introduced must be urgent enough to inspire action yet accessible enough for young people to imagine solutions. Facilitators may present climate data visualisations from the IPCC, environmental maps from the European Environment Agency, or case stories of communities affected by climate change. This grounding step is emotionally important. It ensures that participants do not enter the hackathon as individuals simply performing an exercise, but as emerging innovators responding to a real societal need. Many participants report that this opening stage is where abstract environmental concerns become personal and motivating.

Once the problem is understood, the room transitions into a space of active ideation. Teams begin brainstorming in an open-ended manner, generating as many ideas as possible without judgement. This method intentionally suspends criticism or feasibility concerns — acknowledging that innovation requires space for imagination before evaluation. The atmosphere during this phase is dynamic and energetic: post-it notes accumulate, diagrams and sketches appear on tables, and discussion grows animated as participants explore possibilities. Some ideas may feel naive, ambitious, humorous, or unexpected — but often, breakthrough thinking emerges from precisely these moments of creative freedom. The room becomes what innovation researchers call a creative collision space, where diverse perspectives interact to form ideas no single person could have imagined alone.

As teams build momentum, the next step introduces structured frameworks to focus that creativity. Participants may use tools such as problem mapping, environmental impact mapping, stakeholder identification grids, or circular design canvases. These frameworks help transform broad concepts into more focused, viable starting points. Teams discuss questions such as: Who would use this? Why does this matter? What system does this sit within? What assumptions are we making? This gradual shift from divergent to convergent thinking helps participants refine their ideas without losing the imaginative energy that initiated them.

Throughout this process, mentors circulate and support teams — not as authority figures delivering answers, but as facilitators of deeper thinking. Their contribution models an essential truth of modern sustainability leadership: questions are often more valuable than instructions. Mentors challenge teams with prompts such as:

- “What unintended environmental impacts might this generate?”
- “Who benefits — and who might be excluded?”
- “How does this solution live beyond the first year?”
- “Has someone already tried something similar — and what can you learn from them?”

These questions encourage young innovators to adopt systems thinking, anticipate complexity, and refine ideas into realistic, thoughtful proposals.

Once ideas gain structure, teams move into prototyping, one of the most transformative phases of the hackathon. Prototyping embodies a shift from thought to action. Participants create physical or visual representations of their ideas: simple models made from scrap materials, sketches of app interfaces, service journey maps, mock policy proposals, or community programme structures. The materials may be simple, improvised, or experimental — and that is the point. Prototyping teaches participants that innovation is not about perfection; it is about clarity, learning, and iteration. By making ideas tangible, participants gain a clearer understanding of what works, what doesn’t, and what could be improved.

Prototypes are then tested, either through peer-to-peer feedback, mentor review, or simulated user interaction. This part of the hackathon is often emotional. Some ideas are strengthened; others are challenged or reshaped entirely. Participants develop resilience, adaptability, and humility — essential qualities for innovators working with complex environmental issues where solutions rarely succeed on the first attempt. They learn that feedback is not rejection — it is refinement. Innovation researcher and executive educator Tim Brown describes this process as "failing forward," and participants begin to understand that visible failure is actually progress disguised as discomfort.

The final stage of the hackathon is the presentation round, which is often one of the most memorable elements of the experience. Teams gather, sometimes nervous, often excited, and present their prototypes to the group using storytelling, pitch formats, or demonstrations. The room shifts in tone — from energetic experimentation to shared celebration. The presentations are not evaluated with the traditional metrics of correctness or error but are instead appreciated for creativity, intention, environmental relevance, feasibility, and courage.

Many participants describe this closing moment as personally transformative — a moment that shapes confidence and internal identity. Hearing applause, thoughtful feedback, and encouragement affirms that their ideas matter and that they are capable of contributing meaningfully to climate solutions. The psychological shift is profound: "I can't do this" evolves into "Maybe I can" — and ultimately into "I can, and I will."

More importantly, the hackathon plants something deeper: a sense of agency. Participants leave not just with a prototype, but with a living memory of problem-solving, collaboration, resilience, and creativity — a memory that may shape future academic paths, career choices, or community involvement. Many alumni from programmes like this continue projects independently, join climate innovation networks, or apply to sustainability accelerators — demonstrating the longer-term impact of experiential learning.

In conclusion, the Green Hackathon is not just a workshop — it is a catalyst experience. It reshapes how young people perceive themselves, their capabilities, and their role in shaping a sustainable future. It equips them not only with ideas — but with belief.

Group Exercises on Circular Economy Models

Following the momentum and confidence gained from the hackathon, participants engage in a series of structured group exercises designed to help them internalise the principles of the circular economy and apply them in practical, meaningful ways. These exercises play a central role in bridging theory and applied understanding.

While the hackathon sparks creativity and idea generation, these activities refine thinking, deepen systems understanding, and anchor participants in the practical realities of redesigning products, business models, and systems.

The structure of these group exercises is intentionally immersive and experiential. Rather than presenting the circular economy as a distant policy concept or a technical industry model, the activities encourage participants to engage directly with real materials, familiar products, consumer habits, and existing systems. This method reflects the core principles of experiential learning frameworks and aligns strongly with guidance promoted by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, UNESCO sustainability education models, and EU circular economy education pilots. The process gives participants the opportunity to observe, question, experiment, and co-create — transforming passive understanding into active skill-building.

The session typically begins with a visual warm-up: participants are presented with images or physical samples of products commonly encountered in daily life — such as smartphones, fast fashion garments, coffee cups, food packaging, or electronics accessories. Without explanation, participants are first asked to reflect on how they believe these products are made, used, and disposed of. This initial reflection is intentionally intuitive and unstructured. Many participants initially underestimate the environmental footprint of these products or assume that recycling alone solves the issue. These early assumptions form the basis of critical reflection later in the activity.
Next, participants engage in life-cycle analysis mapping, tracing the journey of each product through extraction, manufacturing, transport, retail, user phase, and end-of-life pathways. They identify key materials (e.g., rare earth metals, cotton, petroleum-based plastics), energy demands, labour conditions, transport distances, repairability obstacles, and waste destinations. At this stage, participants begin to grasp the human and environmental cost embedded in everyday objects — a shift that often generates emotional reactions such as discomfort, frustration, or surprise. This emotional response is pedagogically significant: environmental behaviour research shows that emotional connection, combined with agency, is one of the strongest motivators for sustainable behaviour and innovation.

Once participants understand product life cycles and systemic inefficiencies, they are introduced to the Circularity Hierarchy Ladder — an approach that prioritises refusal, reduction, and reuse before recycling. In earlier learning journeys, many view recycling as the most sustainable option; however, this exercise helps participants recognise that recycling is one of the last strategies in a truly circular system. The hierarchy helps reframe design logic and encourages participants to think boldly: What if the product didn't need to exist at all? What if the function could be achieved without ownership or physical materials? What if repair and reuse were the default, not the alternative?

After internalising this framework, participants are divided into teams to complete the most transformative stage of the exercise: redesigning products and services based on circular economy principles.

Each team selects a product analysed earlier and begins exploring how to redesign it so that it conserves resources, reduces waste, supports regenerative systems, and aligns with circular economy policy frameworks outlined in documents such as the EU Circular Economy Action Plan and the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR).

During this stage, participants explore:

- Circular business model redesign (subscription, sharing, repair networks, deposit schemes)
- Alternative materials (biodegradable composites, recycled polymers, bio-based alternatives)
- Modular and repairable product architecture
- Product reuse and take-back logistics
- Community behaviour transformation strategies

This is where creativity meets constraints — and where participants learn that circular innovation requires a delicate balance of environmental logic, feasibility, equity, and design thinking.

Throughout the activity, mentors circulate, asking questions that push reasoning beyond surface-level solutions:

- What cultural behaviours must change for this to work?
- Who controls the current system and who would control the redesigned version?
- How does this design support fairness and accessibility?
- Could unintended consequences create new environmental impacts?

These questions encourage participants to explore the circular economy as a system, not merely a technical redesign challenge. They learn that green innovation is not only about better materials — it is about shifting behaviours, infrastructures, incentives, ownership models, and economic patterns.

The session concludes with a group reflection circle and presentations. Each team shares its redesigned product or business model and explains how circular economy principles influenced decisions. This closing moment is often filled with pride, curiosity, and renewed motivation. Participants reflect on what surprised them, what challenged them, and what shifted in their thinking. Many express a newfound appreciation for how deeply embedded linear consumption patterns are — and how powerful circular approaches can be when applied intentionally.

By the end of this expanded exercise, participants do not simply understand the circular economy — they have practised it. They leave the session feeling more skilled, more informed, and more empowered to question the systems they participate in. Most importantly, they recognise that circularity is not a distant policy concept, it is a mindset — one that can be applied in businesses, communities, homes, and future careers.

Hands-On Project: Designing a Green Solution

The hands-on project is the culminating activity of the GreenX training journey and is deliberately positioned as the moment where participants cross a threshold: from reflection to action, from understanding to creation, from learning about sustainability to actively designing it. All the previous phases — understanding climate challenges, exploring local environmental issues, analysing circular economy models, learning eco-design principles, and experimenting with ideas in hackathon conditions — ultimately converge here. This activity brings everything together in a way that is concrete, personal, and deeply empowering.

The process begins with a guided reflection session in which participants are invited to revisit what has moved them most throughout the programme. Instead of immediately choosing an idea, they are asked to slow down and connect with their own values, emotions, and lived experiences. Trainers may prompt them with questions such as: Which environmental issue feels closest to your heart? What situation makes you feel frustrated or inspired? Where do you see a gap between how things are and how they could be? This structured reflection is intentional. It recognises that real, sustainable commitment comes not only from knowledge but from feeling personally invested in a problem. When participants choose a challenge that genuinely matters to them — such as plastic waste in their neighbourhood, food waste in schools, lack of green spaces, fast fashion habits, or energy poverty — they are more likely to care about the solution beyond the duration of the training.

Once each participant or team has identified a focal challenge, the group transitions into problem framing and systems exploration. Using tools such as systems mapping, problem trees, and stakeholder diagrams, they dig into the deeper structure of the issue they have chosen. For example, a team working on food waste may explore how habits, supermarket marketing, storage practices, cultural attitudes, municipal policies, and infrastructure all influence waste levels. A team focusing on textile waste may look at fast fashion cycles, social pressures, supply chains, pricing, and lack of repair culture. This step prevents the project from becoming a superficial or one-dimensional response. Instead, it anchors ideas in a realistic understanding of how environmental problems are embedded in wider social, cultural, and economic systems.

With this systemic understanding in place, participants move into solution-oriented design. At this stage, the energy of the room begins to shift again — from analysis to creation. Teams start generating solution ideas that could realistically intervene in the system they have mapped. Some might move toward product-focused ideas (such as a reusable packaging prototype, a repair toolkit, or an upcycled item), while others may lean toward services and systems (like a sharing platform, an awareness campaign, a community initiative, a school-based programme, or a local partnership model). Trainers and mentors encourage participants to remain open, playful, and experimental at this stage, reminding them that ideas do not need to be perfect to be valuable — they simply need to be explored.

To structure this exploration, participants work with design thinking stages: empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test. They revisit who their primary users or beneficiaries are: Who exactly are we helping with this? What does their daily reality look like? What constraints do they face? What would motivate them to engage with this solution? This user-centric approach ensures that projects are not designed in isolation from the people and communities they aim to serve. It also helps participants understand that even the most sustainable solution will fail if it does not make sense for the people expected to adopt it.

Once ideas begin to take shape, the focus shifts to prototyping — the heart of the hands-on project. Prototyping is introduced not as a final step, but as an iterative process of learning by doing. Participants are encouraged to build the simplest possible version of their idea that can still be tested. This might mean creating a visual storyboard showing how a zero-waste school initiative would work; constructing a physical object using recycled materials; sketching the interface of an app that helps users track sustainable behaviours; building a mock “repair corner” layout; or designing sample communication materials for a campaign.

The prototype is not expected to be polished or technically perfect. Instead, it functions as a conversation tool: something concrete that allows others to interact with, critique, and understand the concept.

Throughout this phase, mistakes, confusion, and revisions are treated as normal and valuable. Participants often discover that certain elements of their idea do not work as expected when they try to prototype them. Maybe a system is too complex, a message isn't clear, a material is not available locally, or an assumption about user behaviour doesn't hold up. Trainers and mentors encourage participants to see these moments not as failures, but as information: signals that something needs to be adjusted, clarified, simplified, or reimagined. This normalisation of iteration is a key pedagogical goal — it prepares young people for the reality of green innovation work, where trial-and-error, resilience, and adaptation are constant companions.

Mentors are highly active in this stage. Their expertise brings real-world realism into the creative process. They may share insights from their own work in environmental NGOs, social enterprises, green start-ups, design studios, or public sector innovation roles. They ask targeted questions such as:

How would this project be implemented in practice? Who would you need as a partner? What approximate costs or resources might be involved? Is there a risk that your solution unintentionally creates another environmental problem? What simple version could you test first, within your current means?

These questions help participants refine their ideas until they stand on a more solid foundation, even if they are still at an early stage. At the same time, mentors play an emotional role — they validate participants' creativity and remind them that sustainability careers and projects are not abstract dreams but real possibilities, especially in a European context where green policies, funding schemes, and innovation initiatives are actively supporting such efforts.

As the project phase approaches its conclusion, participants prepare for a final presentation or showcase. This is not framed as a competition, but as a collective celebration and a moment of self-recognition. Teams prepare to explain not only what their solution is, but why it matters and how they arrived at it. They are encouraged to talk about their learning journey: the challenge they chose, the obstacles they encountered, the insights they gained, and the changes they made along the way. This reflective narrative reinforces the idea that the process — research, iteration, collaboration — is just as important as the outcome.

The presentation itself often feels like a rite of passage. Standing in front of peers, trainers, and mentors, participants speak from a different place within themselves than when they entered the programme.

They no longer position themselves only as learners, but as emerging changemakers. Many report feeling nervous at first, but also proud and energised. The feedback they receive is framed constructively — affirming strengths, suggesting improvement points, and, importantly, encouraging continuation beyond the project space. In some cases, ideas are strong enough that mentors may suggest concrete next steps, such as testing the project in a school, connecting with a local organisation, or applying to a youth innovation call.

The impact of this activity extends well beyond the formal end of the training. For some participants, the project planted a seed of an idea they want to keep nurturing; for others, it helped clarify that they want to study or work in sustainability, design, entrepreneurship, or public policy. Even for those who do not continue the exact project they created, the experience leaves a strong internal imprint: they have lived through the cycle of sensing a problem, analysing it, imagining alternatives, building a prototype, receiving feedback, and revising. They know what it feels like to move from frustration to constructive action — and that is a powerful, transferable skill.

Ultimately, the hands-on project is designed to show young people that sustainability is not a finished story written by others; it is an ongoing process that they are invited to take part in. By the time this activity concludes, participants have experienced themselves not only as students of the green transition, but as authors and actors within it. That shift — from watching the future happen to helping shape it — is at the heart of what GreenX aims to achieve.

5. Mentoring & Feedback

Role of Mentors During and After the Training

Mentoring is not a supporting detail in the GreenX training experience – it is one of its core pillars. It is through the mentoring component that the programme stops being "just a training" and starts functioning as an entry point into the wider world of sustainability, green innovation, and socially responsible entrepreneurship. Trainers provide the pedagogical backbone, coordinating activities and delivering content, but mentors bring the field to life.

They embody the realities, challenges, and opportunities of working within the green transition, and they demonstrate in a very concrete way that sustainability is not just an academic subject or a policy keyword – it is a living, evolving professional and civic landscape that young people can actively join. The mentors engaged in GreenX are intentionally diverse in background, field and experience.

Some come from environmental sciences, working on topics such as biodiversity protection, climate adaptation or ecosystem restoration. Others are founders or team members of green start-ups operating in areas like circular product design, renewable energy, sustainable mobility or eco-tourism. Some work in social enterprises, NGOs or community initiatives focused on local resilience, circular systems or youth empowerment. Others contribute from policy, education, or advocacy roles linked to frameworks such as the European Green Deal, the European Climate Law or the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This diversity serves an important purpose: it helps participants see that there is no single "correct" way to contribute to sustainability. Instead, it opens up a landscape of possibilities – technical, social, creative, entrepreneurial, scientific, and community-based.

During the training, mentors act first and foremost as reflective guides. They join discussions, listen to participants' early ideas, and help them articulate what they are trying to achieve. Rather than giving step-by-step instructions or imposing their own solutions, mentors pose open questions that encourage deeper thinking. When a team proposes a solution, a mentor might ask them why this problem matters to them, whose needs they are prioritising, who might be unintentionally excluded, or what assumptions they are making about behaviour or access.

These questions invite participants to slow down, examine their own reasoning, and refine their responses to complex environmental challenges. In this way, mentors help participants move from instinctive reactions or vague ideas to more grounded, thoughtful and realistic proposals, without taking ownership away from them.

Mentors also play a crucial role in normalising the emotional reality of innovation. Many young people feel intimidated entering a space that talks about climate solutions, environmental entrepreneurship or green technologies. They may assume that only "experts" or people with years of experience are allowed to lead or design new approaches. Mentors challenge this narrative by sharing their own journeys honestly – including the moments of uncertainty, the projects that did not work, the funding they did not receive, the prototypes that failed, and the lessons they had to learn through trial and error. Hearing these stories, participants begin to understand that imperfection and failure are not signs of weakness, but essential parts of the innovation process. This transparency helps reduce fear of mistakes, encourages experimentation, and builds resilience – all of which are essential for those who wish to work in fields related to environmental transformation.

Another core function of mentoring in GreenX is exposure to real ecosystems and opportunities.

Through conversations, examples and references, mentors help participants see beyond the walls of the training room and recognise that there is a growing infrastructure designed to support green transition work. They might mention youth fellowships, local or European innovation challenges, green entrepreneurship incubators, Erasmus+ opportunities, regional sustainability networks, or digital platforms that connect young people to climate action initiatives. These references are not abstract; they are actionable entry points. When a participant hears a mentor say, “There is a programme that supports exactly the type of project you are thinking of,” the idea of continuing beyond the training becomes more tangible and realistic. In this way, mentors function as connectors – linking participants’ early ideas, talents and motivations to broader structures that can help them grow.

As participants develop their hands-on projects during the later phases of GreenX, mentors begin to operate more like strategic partners. They help teams think through the practical aspects of implementation: Who would need to be involved? What permissions would be required? What basic resources would be necessary to run a pilot? What is a small, realistic first step? They also support participants in considering long-term implications and impact. For example, a mentor might ask how a proposed solution ensures that it does not create new environmental problems elsewhere in the system, or how the project could remain inclusive and accessible across different social groups. This kind of critical, long-range thinking is essential for responsible innovation and is often new for young people who have not previously been involved in this type of reflective project design.

The importance of mentors, however, does not end when the formal training hours are over. A defining characteristic of the GreenX approach is its recognition that sustainability engagement is a long-term journey, not a two-day or one-week event. For this reason, mentoring is envisioned as something that can continue informally beyond the “official” end of the programme. Some mentors remain available to participants for follow-up questions or feedback. Others may review revised project ideas, help with applications for youth competitions or calls, or provide references or letters of support when participants apply to related initiatives. In some cases, mentors may introduce motivated participants to colleagues, partner organisations or networks where their ideas could find further support or collaboration opportunities. This ongoing, light-touch support reinforces the message that the programme is not an isolated episode, but a starting point in a broader trajectory of learning and contribution.

On a deeper level, the presence of mentors in GreenX supports an important psychological and social shift. For many young people, sustainability and entrepreneurship can feel distant, “adult-only” spaces – places where decisions are made by older experts, institutions or corporations. Mentors disrupt this perception simply by being present, approachable, and engaged in dialogue.

When a young participant asks a question and an experienced professional listens carefully and responds thoughtfully, a powerful signal is sent: your perspective matters, your curiosity is valid, and you belong in this conversation. Over time, these interactions contribute to a stronger sense of self-efficacy – the belief that one can act, influence, and contribute meaningfully to society.

In the context of European policy, this approach is strongly aligned with the EU Youth Strategy 2022–2027, which stresses the importance of meaningful youth–adult partnerships, intergenerational learning, and sustained support for youth engagement in civic and green transition processes. Mentoring in GreenX is exactly this in practice: a concrete expression of the belief that youth must not only be consulted but equipped, encouraged and accompanied as they step into roles as active shapers of the environmental future.

Ultimately, the role of mentors in GreenX goes beyond project feedback or technical advice. They help create a culture of possibility. They demonstrate, by example, that working for sustainability can be a career, a vocation, a life path – not just a hobby or a concern. They show that it is normal to ask big questions, to care deeply about environmental and social issues, and to seek solutions that are both creative and responsible. Through their presence, guidance and authenticity, mentors help young people move from seeing themselves as individuals who are simply "learning about sustainability" to recognising themselves as emerging actors in Europe's green transition, with the capacity and the right to participate, shape and lead.

Summary of Online Mentoring Sessions & Presentations

After the completion of the in-person training experience, the GreenX programme continues with a structured series of online mentoring and follow-up sessions designed to sustain momentum and prevent the common post-training drop in engagement. This online component is essential because innovation and confidence grow gradually, and meaningful sustainability work requires continued reflection, adaptation, and support. The transition from face-to-face learning to ongoing digital guidance reflects modern pedagogical approaches used in climate innovation accelerators, European youth leadership programmes, and blended learning models supported by Erasmus+, where learning is not confined to a single event but unfolds across time through sustained interaction.

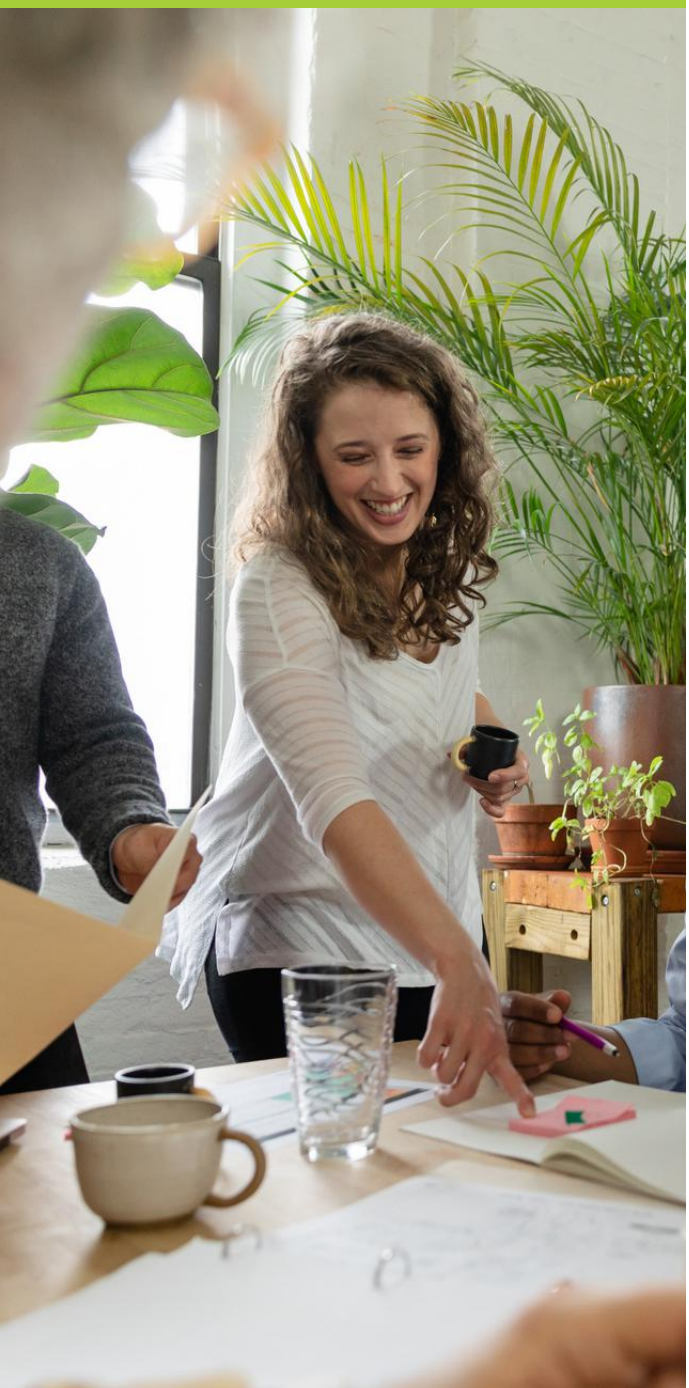
These online sessions serve as a bridge between structured learning and independent implementation. The period after an intensive training can be a vulnerable one: participants may feel motivated but unsure of how to take concrete next steps, or they may encounter challenges that feel overwhelming when faced alone. The online mentoring cycle helps counter that uncertainty by offering continuity, accountability, and a sense of shared purpose. It reinforces the idea that the learning process is not finished, but evolving — that participants are not "closing" a programme, but beginning their personal development as emerging green innovators.

The structure of the online mentoring programme is intentionally phased. Early sessions focus on grounding participants again in their initial ideas, motivations, and problem statements. This prevents premature solutions and helps participants refine clarity. Mentors guide youth through reflective conversations that revisit the emotional and environmental relevance of their chosen challenge: why it matters, what change they hope to see, and who is affected by the problem. Sometimes, new insights emerge, prompting participants to slightly redefine or expand their focus. This early refinement is an important developmental step, demonstrating the iterative nature of innovation and the importance of alignment between purpose and design.

As participants gain renewed clarity, subsequent sessions introduce increasingly advanced dimensions of applied sustainability innovation. Mentors walk participants through strategic considerations such as feasibility analysis, stakeholder engagement, resource mapping, testing environments, and long-term sustainability of the project. Participants may explore frameworks such as the Theory of Change, social impact canvases, or basic circular business model templates — tools that mirror methods used in real-world green innovation programmes across Europe. This exposure helps participants develop a more comprehensive understanding of how ideas evolve into viable initiatives, and it fosters systems-level thinking that goes beyond individual creativity.

Throughout all online sessions, peer exchange plays a critical role. Participants are encouraged to share updates on their progress, articulate struggles, celebrate breakthroughs, and offer mutual support. This shared learning environment builds emotional safety and reinforces the notion that innovation is collaborative, not competitive. When participants witness others facing similar questions or uncertainties, feelings of isolation decrease and collective confidence increases. In this sense, the mentoring space becomes more than a technical learning environment: it becomes a community of emerging changemakers where vulnerability and exploration are welcomed.

One of the most transformative elements of the online mentoring cycle is the structured presentation component. At multiple points — early, midpoint, and final — participants present their evolving prototypes or project concepts. These presentations are not formal assessments but developmental milestones.



The early-stage presentations help participants practise articulating ideas when they are still rough and uncertain, teaching them that clarity emerges through expression rather than perfection. Midpoint presentations allow participants to receive targeted feedback while there is still time to make changes. Final presentations help crystallise learning and reinforce confidence, echoing pitching environments found in climate hackathons, EU youth competitions, entrepreneurship incubators, and sustainability forums.

During presentations, mentors and peers offer feedback framed through a constructive and future-oriented lens. Comments highlight strengths, identify opportunities for refinement, and occasionally introduce new perspectives or resources. Rather than asking, “Is this right?”, the framing becomes, “What could strengthen this?” or “What is the next natural step?”. This approach honours each participant’s autonomy and reinforces that innovation is developmental — a fluid process of iteration rather than a binary evaluation of success or failure.

The online format also supports inclusivity and accessibility — key values embedded within Erasmus+ and European youth policy frameworks. By offering remote engagement, the programme ensures that participants from different geographic locations, socioeconomic contexts, or personal circumstances can remain connected. This digital element helps remove barriers related to travel, time availability, or location, demonstrating that meaningful learning does not need to be limited by physical constraints. It also models modern sustainability work, which increasingly relies on collaboration across borders and virtual networks.

By the conclusion of the mentoring cycle, participants experience a noticeable transformation — individually and collectively. Their ideas are more refined, but equally important, their confidence has grown. They have practised key transferable competencies such as critical thinking, communication, public speaking, design iteration, teamwork, problem-solving, and long-term planning. They have gained familiarity with real-world expectations in sustainability innovation, and many begin to identify personal pathways forward — whether continuing the project, seeking formal support, applying to youth innovation funds, proposing the idea to a school or municipality, or integrating sustainability into future study or career pursuits.

Perhaps the most meaningful outcome of the online mentoring phase is the sense of belonging it generates. Participants leave not only with developed ideas but with the feeling that they are part of something larger — a movement of young people across Europe who are learning, experimenting, and acting in alignment with environmental responsibility and social values. This sense of community extends beyond the programme, forming a foundation of support, motivation, and connection that may continue to grow long after the final presentation ends.

6. Participant Reflections

Reflection is a vital component of the GreenX learning journey because it transforms the programme from a sequence of activities into a meaningful personal experience. Rather than being treated as an afterthought or a simple evaluation exercise, reflection in GreenX is woven throughout the process as a continuous opportunity for participants to pause, make sense of what they are experiencing, and recognise how they are changing. It allows them to look beyond what they learned and focus on how that learning has reshaped their beliefs, emotions, confidence, and future intentions. In a field as emotionally charged and complex as sustainability, this reflective space is essential: it gives young people the time and language they need to process the scale of environmental challenges and their own evolving role within them.

From the very beginning of the programme, participants are encouraged to see themselves not just as students absorbing content, but as active agents in their own development. Trainers invite them to share expectations, worries, and hopes.

Some participants admit feeling anxious about climate change, uncertain about their abilities, or sceptical that their contribution could ever make a real difference. Others arrive highly motivated but unsure how to channel their interest into concrete action. These early reflections set a starting point, a kind of “before” snapshot, that makes later personal growth more visible. As the programme unfolds, reflection sessions provide moments of comparison — opportunities to notice how perspectives have shifted, how skills have strengthened, and how fears have evolved into motivation.

Reflection activities are intentionally varied so they can accommodate different personalities and comfort levels. Some are quiet and introspective, such as written journaling or private prompts inviting participants to describe key moments of insight, difficulty, or pride. Others are collective and social, such as open debriefs after the Green Hackathon, group circles following circular economy exercises, or guided conversations after prototype presentations. In these spaces, participants share what surprised them, what felt challenging, and what they learned about themselves while working on sustainability problems. These conversations often reveal that many participants share similar feelings — uncertainty, frustration, hope, curiosity — which in turn reduces isolation and fosters a stronger sense of community.

One of the most powerful patterns emerging from participant reflections is the emotional shift from eco-anxiety to eco-agency. Early in the training, when participants are first exposed to scientific evidence on climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and resource depletion, many express feelings of heaviness or concern. They recognise the seriousness of the situation and, in some cases, admit they previously avoided thinking too deeply about it because it felt overwhelming. However, as they begin engaging in interactive tasks — brainstorming solutions, redesigning products and systems, creating prototypes, and working within supportive teams — the tone of their reflections starts to change. While the challenges remain serious, participants increasingly describe feeling energised by the idea that their knowledge and creativity can be part of the solution. They begin to view environmental problems not as walls, but as doors into innovation and collaboration.

Another strong theme in reflections concerns the role of collaboration and relationships. Many participants note that one of the most meaningful aspects of GreenX was the opportunity to work with peers who were equally interested in sustainability, even if they came from different backgrounds, countries, or fields of study. They describe the team-based structure as both challenging and rewarding. At times, differing opinions forced them to negotiate, listen actively, and find common ground; at other times, diversity in the group sparked unexpected ideas and better solutions. In their reflections, participants frequently mention how working with others helped them become more confident speakers, better listeners, and more flexible thinkers. They also report feeling less alone in their concerns about the planet — a feeling that can be deeply relieving in the face of global crises.

Mentorship is also a recurring reference point in participant reflections. Many describe their first interactions with mentors as turning points in their perception of sustainability as a possible career or life direction. Hearing real stories from professionals working in areas connected to the European Green Deal, social entrepreneurship, circular business models or environmental policy made the field feel more concrete and accessible. Several participants note that mentors did not simply give answers, but asked questions that helped them think more clearly, see blind spots, and refine their ideas. This style of support — respectful, curious, and empowering — left a strong impression on participants, who often wrote that they felt "taken seriously" and "treated as equals in conversation." For young people, being listened to and challenged in this way can be a deeply validating experience.

Toward the end of the programme, reflection takes on a more structured form through an anonymous Google Forms evaluation. This tool allows participants to express their thoughts freely, without fear of judgement, and provides the programme with valuable insight into its impact. The responses collected paint a consistent picture of strong positive engagement. Many participants describe the training as "transformative," "practical," or "a turning point" in how they see sustainability and their own role in it. They highlight that the combination of theory, hands-on activities, mentoring and peer collaboration helped them understand topics such as the circular economy and green innovation in a way that felt real and applicable, rather than abstract or purely academic.

The evaluation also shows that participants valued the practical orientation of GreenX. Rather than focusing only on concepts, the programme asked them to apply what they learned to real projects and prototypes. In their reflections, participants mention that this practical application helped them retain knowledge better and built confidence that they could act on what they had learned. Some reported that they left the programme with concrete plans: presenting their project in their school, exploring local partnerships, participating in environmental volunteering, or researching degrees and jobs related to sustainability, circular design, or social innovation. Others described feeling more attentive in their everyday life to environmental issues — noticing waste patterns, questioning how things are designed, or thinking twice before making consumption choices.

Beyond individual feedback, the collective tone of participant reflections underscores a crucial outcome: a strengthened sense of identity and purpose. Many participants express that GreenX helped them see themselves not just as young people living in a time of environmental crisis, but as emerging actors capable of participating in the transformation required. This does not mean that all doubts are erased or that every participant will choose a career in sustainability. Rather, it means that they discovered a new inner narrative: "I can play a role in this. My choices, creativity, and voice matter." This kind of narrative shift is often considered one of the most important long-term impacts of youth empowerment initiatives.

In summary, participant reflections reveal that GreenX achieved more than the transmission of information. It facilitated emotional processing, nurtured self-confidence, strengthened collaboration skills, and opened up new pathways of possibility. Through reflective practice, participants were able to recognise their own growth — from uncertainty to clarity, from anxiety to action, and from passive awareness to active, thoughtful engagement with the green transition. These reflections act as a mirror of the programme's deeper impact: the development of young people who are better prepared, more confident, and more motivated to contribute to a sustainable and just future.

Quotes, Highlights, and Key Takeaways

To deepen the understanding of the programme's impact and provide a more personal narrative dimension, participants were invited — both during and after the learning experience — to share short quotes, reflections, and meaningful statements summarising what GreenX represented for them. These contributions offered a powerful window into the emotional resonance and transformative nature of the training. While each participant expressed themselves in a unique voice, common threads, shared sentiments, and repeated themes emerged, reinforcing the programme's collective value and emotional impact.

The tone of the submitted reflections was overwhelmingly positive and deeply personal. Many participants described GreenX not simply as a workshop or educational experience, but as a milestone — a shift in how they perceive sustainability, innovation, and their own potential role in environmental change. Their words captured a blend of inspiration, transformation, empowerment, and renewed hope. For example, one participant wrote, "I never realised sustainability could be creative. GreenX helped me see the future differently — and myself differently." Another explained, "This programme gave me hope. Now I know there are solutions, and I can help build them." Others reflected on the cultural and emotional shifts they experienced, such as, "Before GreenX, sustainability felt intimidating. Now it feels like a career path — and a responsibility."

Such expressions reflect a key outcome of the programme: GreenX helped participants bridge the gap between awareness and agency. For many, sustainability had previously felt intangible or confined to global institutions, scientific reports, or specialised experts. Through the hands-on and collaborative learning approach, participants discovered that sustainability is not only global; it is also personal, local, practical, and creative.

Several noted that what once felt overwhelming became manageable when broken down into clear processes, collaborative tasks, and prototype-based problem-solving experiences. This shift — from feeling powerless to feeling capable — represents one of the most meaningful and lasting impacts of the programme.

Confidence building emerged as another widespread highlight. Across reflections, participants shared how the structured speaking moments — from team discussions to hackathon pitches and final presentations — helped them overcome fears of speaking publicly or sharing ideas that felt incomplete. Many described initially feeling hesitant, afraid of being wrong, or uncertain how their ideas would be perceived. Yet, as the programme evolved, they noticed themselves becoming more comfortable communicating, debating, and defending their ideas.

One participant described this journey meaningfully: “I learned that ideas do not need to be perfect to be valuable — they just need to be shared.” The hackathon and prototype showcase moments were especially influential, marking visible milestones where participants not only presented their ideas but experienced pride, validation, and recognition from mentors and peers.

Another reflection theme centred on how participants’ understanding of sustainability expanded beyond environmental protection into a more holistic worldview. Before GreenX, many saw sustainability primarily as recycling, reducing waste, or protecting nature. After the programme, participants expressed a much broader perspective, recognising sustainability as a systems-based approach connected to social equity, responsible business models, circular design, ethical innovation, and long-term community wellbeing.

Participants frequently referenced how the exploration of circular economy principles shifted their thinking — encouraging them to see waste as a design flaw rather than an unavoidable outcome, and viewing products not as disposables but as cyclical systems that should be regenerative by design. This conceptual shift reflected a deepened awareness not only of environmental impacts, but of the interconnectedness between how societies design, produce, consume, and dispose of resources.

A number of participants also shared that GreenX introduced them to new academic or professional pathways they had never previously considered. For some, the programme sparked interest in fields such as circular product design, sustainability consulting, climate research, or environmental policy. Others realised that entrepreneurship could be a meaningful and realistic avenue for creating environmental impact. Several participants mentioned that before GreenX, they had never imagined themselves working in sustainability sectors — while afterward, they felt encouraged to explore internships, volunteer initiatives, local green projects, or university programmes connected to emerging green economy sectors supported by the European Green Deal, EU Climate Policy, and international sustainability frameworks.

Perhaps one of the most meaningful takeaways shared across reflections was the importance of community and belonging. Participants repeatedly described the learning atmosphere as supportive, motivating, and energising. Many expressed appreciation for being surrounded by peers who cared deeply about similar issues and shared similar concerns about the planet's future. For some, it was the first time they felt understood in their environmental interests and values. The collaborative nature of the programme helped participants recognise that climate action and sustainability innovation are not solitary paths — they are collective, relational, and dependent on cooperation, empathy, and the willingness to listen and co-create. One participant summarised this beautifully: "Working with others showed me that innovation grows when we share ideas, not when we protect them."

When taken together, all reflections reveal several core takeaways that extend beyond the programme's duration. First, learning did not stop at knowledge — it evolved into confidence and capability. Participants did not only learn about sustainability; they began to see themselves within it. Second, environmental innovation became accessible and tangible. Sustainability shifted from theory into practice, something they could design, test, and iterate rather than simply observe. Third, community shaped growth. Working alongside peers and mentors accelerated learning and nurtured a sense of shared purpose and belonging. Finally, the programme ignited long-term engagement.

Many participants expressed a clear desire to continue exploring sustainability in their studies, careers, activism, or daily lives — demonstrating that GreenX inspired momentum rather than short-lived motivation.

In conclusion, participant reflections demonstrate that GreenX achieved far more than skill development or information delivery. It served as a catalyst — expanding worldviews, building confidence, strengthening identity, and cultivating a belief that young people are not simply observers of environmental change, but capable contributors shaping its direction. Through this reflective process, participants recognised not only what sustainability demands of the world, but also what the world may now expect — and welcome — from them.

7. Resources & Tools

Ensuring that learning continues beyond the structured GreenX programme is essential to the long-term success of the initiative. The resources and tools provided to participants are not merely supplementary materials — they are carefully curated instruments designed to support ongoing curiosity, encourage further exploration, and sustain momentum after the training experience concludes. In a field as dynamic and rapidly evolving as sustainability, access to credible, diverse, and future-focused resources helps young people remain connected to the broader movement of environmental innovation and continue growing as informed, confident contributors to the green transition. In alignment with Erasmus+ principles of lifelong learning, the GreenX resource suite ensures that participants leave not only with knowledge, but with pathways, structure, and support to continue engaging meaningfully with sustainability.

One core element of this resource ecosystem is a set of practical templates and guided frameworks. These templates act as scaffolding for innovation — structured enough to provide direction, yet flexible enough to adapt to different contexts, project scopes, and learning styles. Participants receive tools such as sustainability challenge briefs, circular redesign canvases, systems mapping guides, stakeholder mapping grids, prototype development templates, and environmental impact reflection sheets. Many participants described these tools as confidence-building, because they transform abstract concepts like “design thinking” or “circular innovation” into step-by-step processes that feel achievable. By returning to these templates over time, participants are able to strengthen early project ideas, refine versions based on feedback, or explore entirely new initiatives as their understanding evolves. In this way, the templates are not static worksheets — they are reusable instruments for personal and professional growth.

Complementing these tools is a curated library of recommended reading and reference material, intentionally selected to provide a rich, balanced, and engaging entry point to sustainability knowledge.

The reading collection includes foundational texts grounded in policy and science — such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals framework and summaries from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — alongside practical resources like the European Commission's materials on the European Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan. Participants also receive access to case studies and storytelling-based resources from organisations such as the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, which highlight practical examples of companies, communities, and young innovators already applying circular and regenerative principles. This blend of conceptual and applied resources allows participants to understand sustainability not only as a global challenge, but also as a field full of emerging solutions.

In today's digital era, high-quality online resources are essential to ensuring accessible and inclusive learning. For this reason, GreenX provides participants with a curated list of online platforms, digital toolkits, open learning hubs, and youth innovation portals.

These digital pathways connect participants to free online courses, climate literacy modules, interactive design tools, and global youth networks dedicated to sustainability, green entrepreneurship, and environmental leadership. Many of these resources offer certifications, micro-credentials, or participation badges, enabling participants to build their confidence as learners while also documenting their developing expertise — something increasingly valuable as employers and universities recognise skills related to sustainability, systems thinking, and climate action. The accessibility of free online learning also ensures equity: every participant, regardless of location or economic background, can continue deepening their skills and exploring new interests at their own pace.

Beyond learning platforms, the resource suite introduces participants to opportunity-focused networks, including youth accelerators, European environmental initiatives, green innovation incubators, online collaboration spaces, and student-led climate forums. These networks provide a sense of belonging and continuity. Many participants expressed that before joining GreenX, they cared about environmental issues but felt isolated — unsure where to find peers, mentors, or platforms that shared their interests. By providing structured access to communities where young people exchange ideas, collaborate on projects, and apply for funding or challenges, the programme ensures that no participant walks away feeling alone in their commitment to sustainability. Instead, they become part of a growing ecosystem of young Europeans working toward the same collective goal: a fairer, greener, and more resilient future.

Another defining strength of the resource package is its adaptability over time. Sustainability is not a static field; it evolves as new technologies emerge, policies change, innovation practices mature, and scientific understanding deepens. The tools and platforms included in GreenX support this reality by encouraging a mindset of continuous learning. Participants are not expected to master everything at once; rather, they are encouraged to return to the materials when they feel ready, curious, or inspired to take their next step. Some may return when applying to university; others when starting a sustainability-linked volunteer project; others still when preparing to turn an idea from GreenX into a funded initiative. The resources become anchors participants can return to across different stages of their personal and professional journeys.

Importantly, the resources provided are intentionally designed not only for consumption, but for activation. Participants are encouraged to use the templates for new ideas, share readings with peers, and contribute back to digital communities as their own expertise grows. In this way, the resource ecosystem supports a shift from passive learner to active participant — reinforcing the belief that sustainability is not a subject one studies and leaves behind, but an evolving practice one embodies over time.

Ultimately, the resources and tools offered through GreenX serve as an enduring bridge between the structured learning environment of the programme and the wider world of opportunity beyond it. They allow participants to continue exploring, questioning, designing, and collaborating long after the formal training ends. Through accessible knowledge sources, practical frameworks, community access points, and digital learning pathways, the GreenX resources create a solid foundation for young people to continue moving forward with confidence. Most importantly, they reinforce the programme's underlying message: the journey does not end here — it begins here.

Participants are not only prepared to continue learning; they are equipped, supported, and encouraged to shape their role in the green transition with curiosity, resilience, and purpose.

References

- Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (2013). Towards the circular economy: Economic and business rationale for an accelerated transition. Ellen MacArthur Foundation.
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (2019). Higher education resources: Circular economy learning resources for universities. Ellen MacArthur Foundation. https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/resources/education-and-learning/higher-education-resources
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (n.d.). Circular economy education & learning resources. Ellen MacArthur Foundation. https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/resources/education-and-learning/overview
- European Commission. (2018). EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027: Engaging, connecting and empowering young people. Council Resolution of 26 November 2018 on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2019–2027). https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en
- European Commission. (2019). The European Green Deal (COM(2019) 640 final). Publications Office of the European Union. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0640
- European Commission. (2020). A new Circular Economy Action Plan: For a cleaner and more competitive Europe (COM(2020) 98 final). Publications Office of the European Union. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0098
- European Parliament, & Council of the European Union. (2021). Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 (European Climate Law). Official Journal of the European Union, L 243, 1–17. http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1119/oj
- European Parliament, & Council of the European Union. (2021). Regulation (EU) 2021/695 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and laying down its rules for participation and dissemination. Official Journal of the European Union, L 170, 1–68. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/695/oj
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2021). Climate change 2021: The physical science basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC. Cambridge University Press. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023). Climate change 2023: Synthesis report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. IPCC. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/
- United Nations. (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1). United Nations General Assembly. https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1

Become Busy Xelerator

Training Guide 4 – Young People: GreenX

Project number: 2023-1-EL02-KA220-YOU-000160907

WWW.BECOMEBUSY.EU

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation (INEDIVIM). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.