

The GET-AHED project: Co-creating the University Greening Toolbox Part I

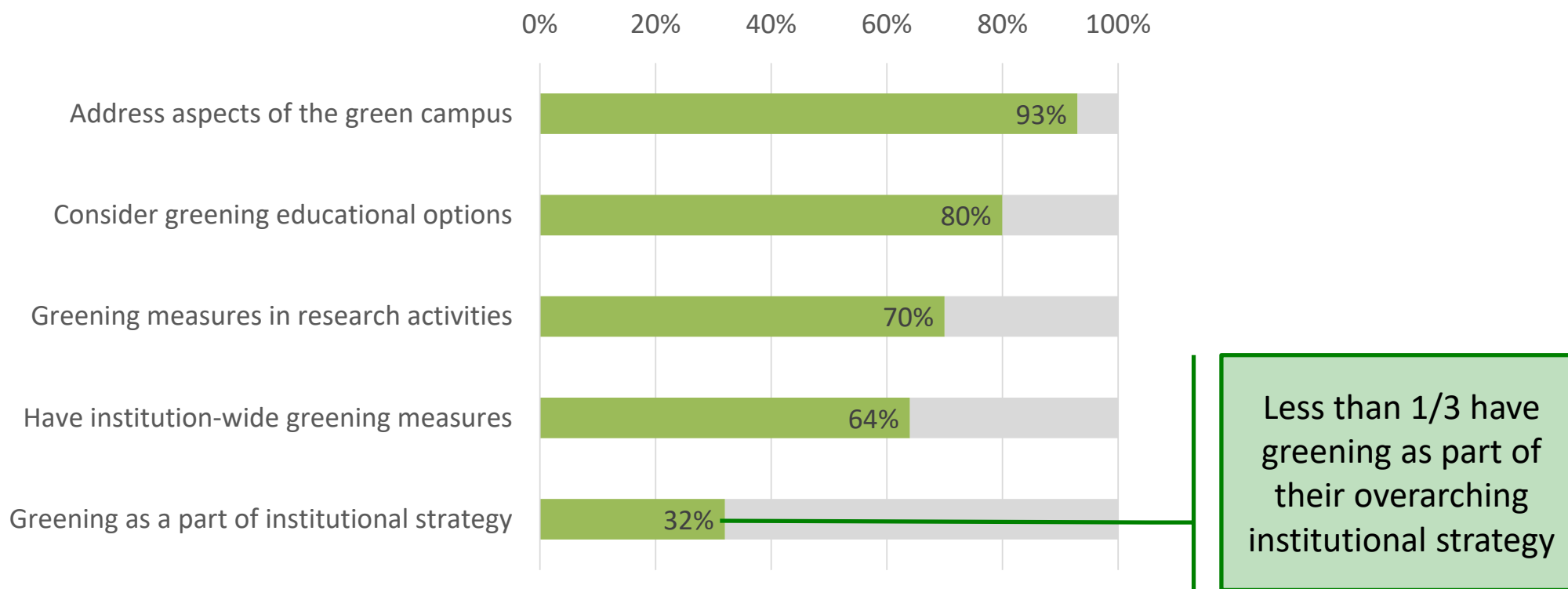
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HEIs play a key role in the green transition

- 🌱 HEIs are “priority agents of change” (e.g. Findler et al., 2019; Prieto-Jiménez et al., 2021)
- 🌱 Critical role in supporting **the diffusion of sustainable solutions** (EC, 2022), notably through their 3 missions (Guitérrez-Mijares et al., 2023)
- 🌱 HEIs as **one of the key players in climate change** next to political decision makers and companies/investors (long-term time-span, highest potential in producing knowledge, innovation and education) (Kekäle & Pinheiro, 2025)

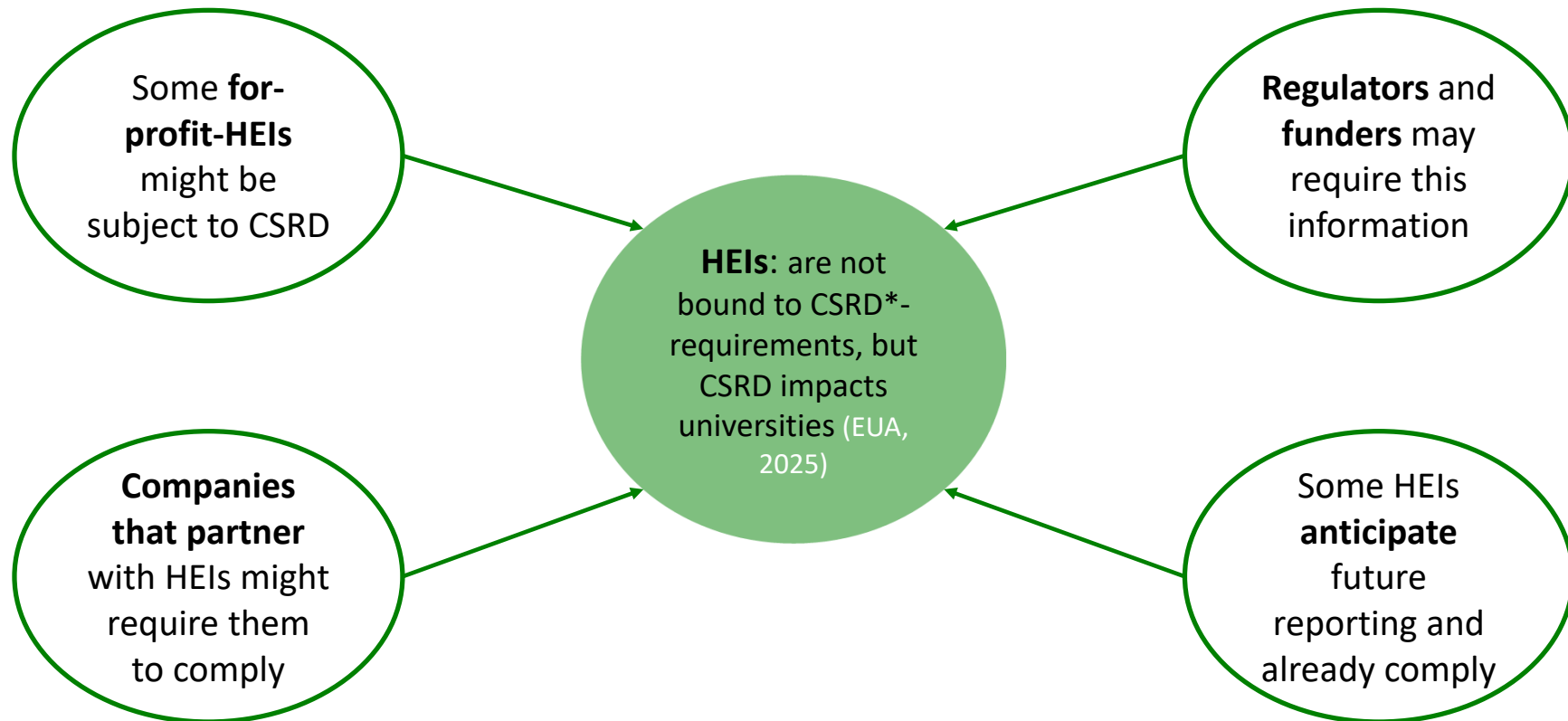


HEIs advance sustainability, with emphasis on operations



Source: EUA's 1st greening survey (2021), n =372

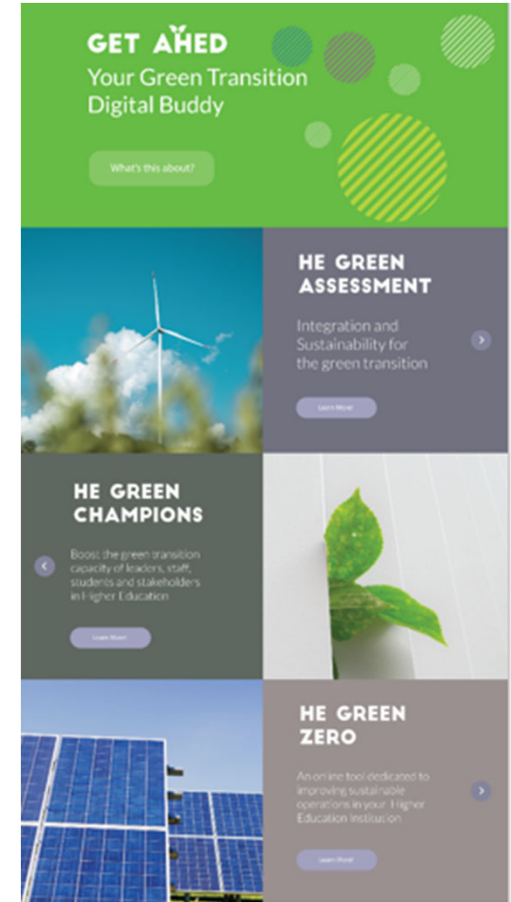
Sustainability reporting in HEIs



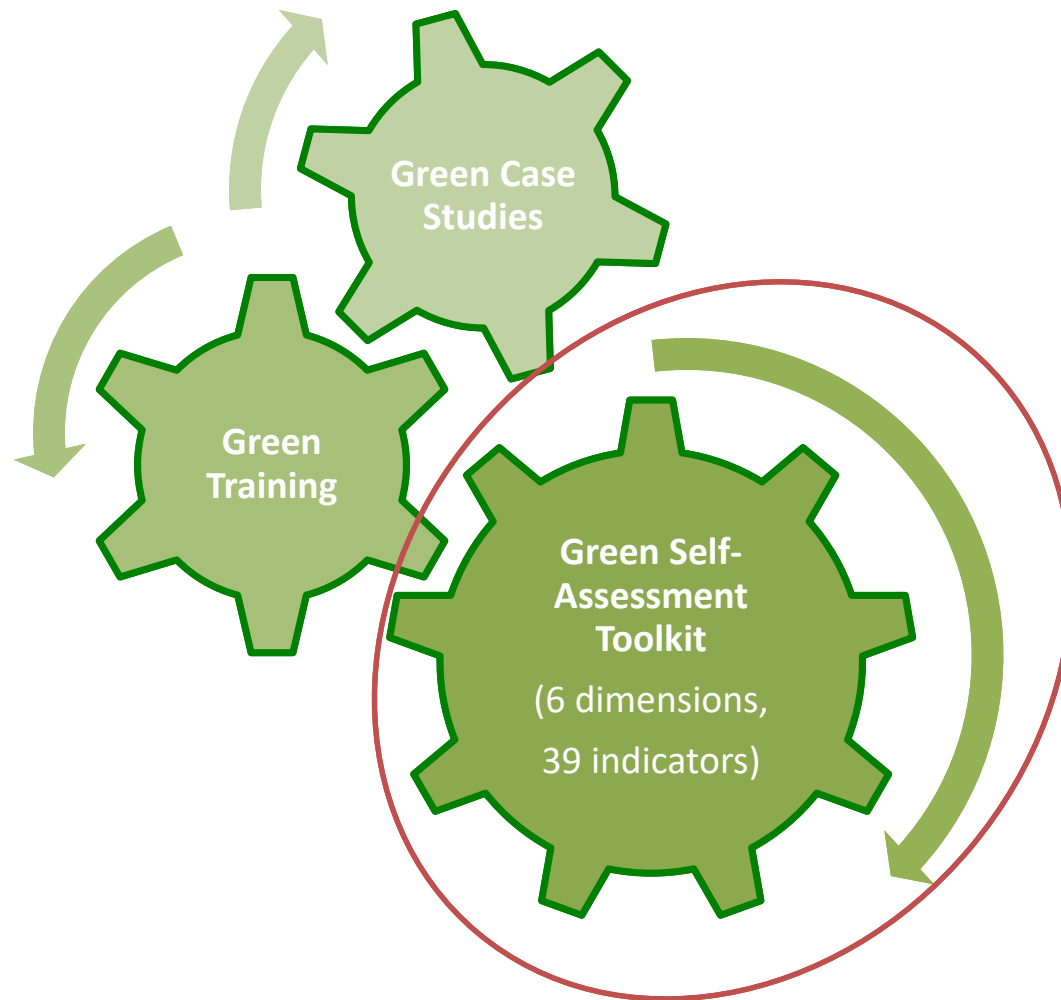
What is GET-AHED?

Green Education & Transition – A Higher Education Digital buddy


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

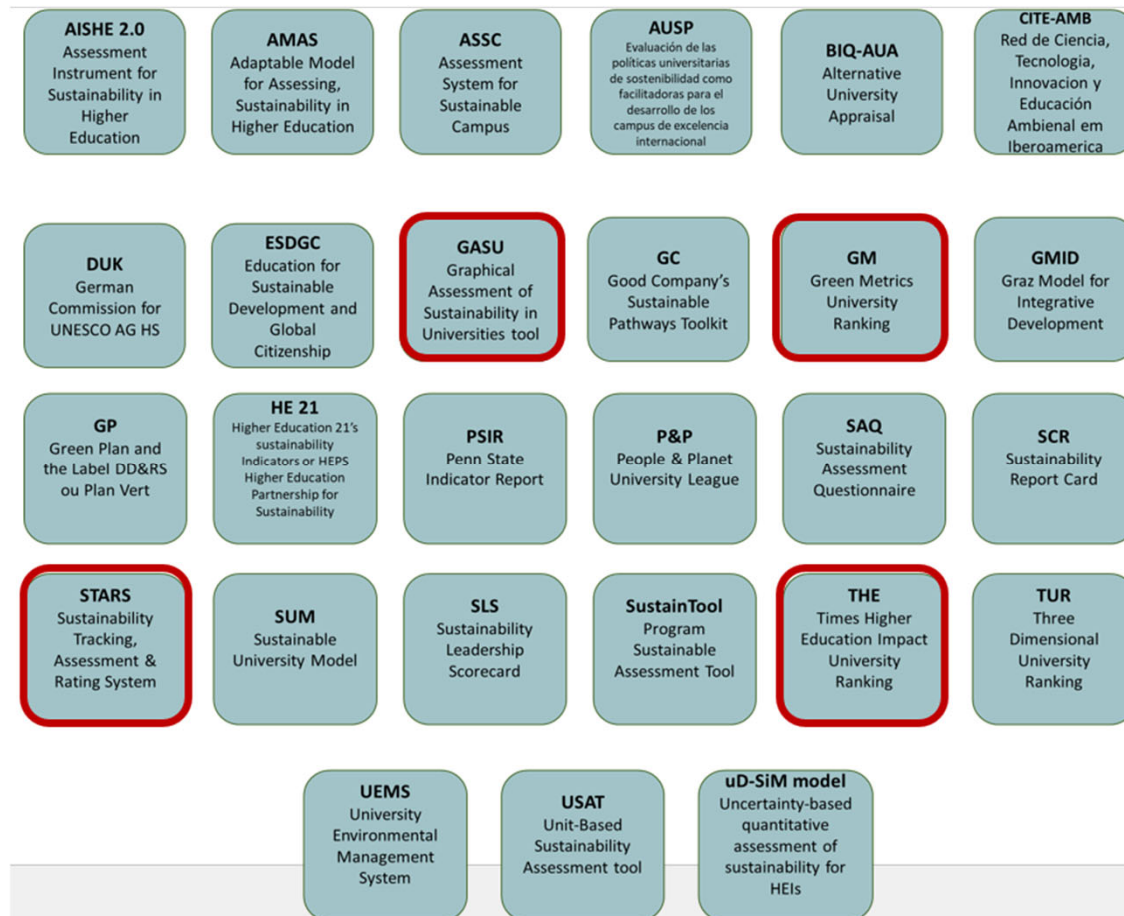


The GET-AHED platform: “University Greening Toolbox”



Existing sustainability self-assessment tools for HEIs

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



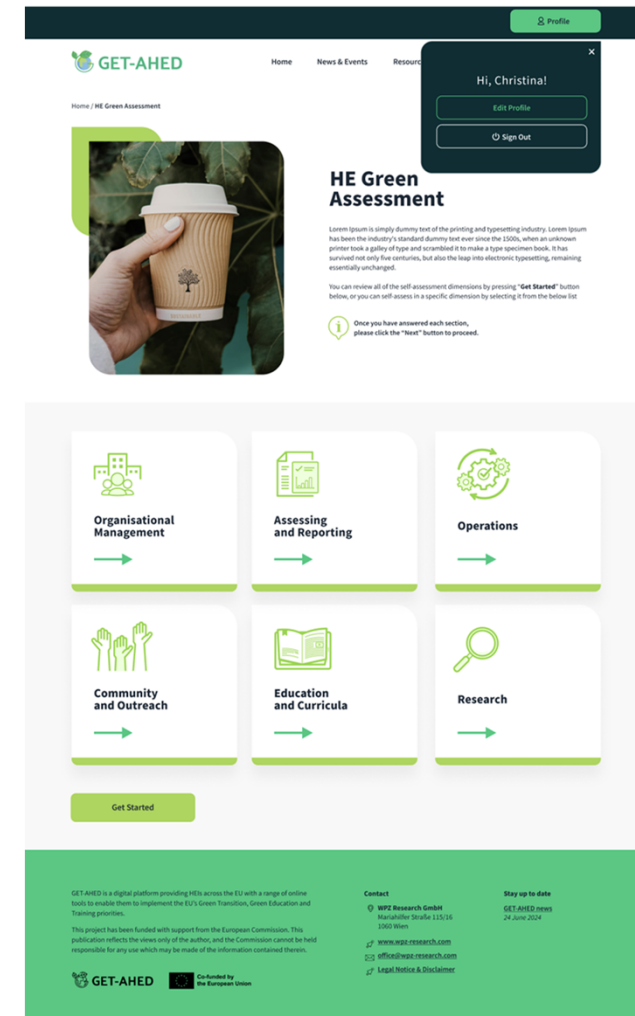
Why another SAT?

- 🌍 Meta-studies of existing tools (e.g. Tumbas et al., 2015, Mapar et al., 2020) find:
 - In parts: Poor applicability for the HE-context
 - Strong focus on operations
 - Core activities (education, research and third mission) underrepresented
 - Qualitative indicators are widespread, but difficult to interpret
 - Strong focus on outcomes
- 🌍 The prevalence of sustainability reporting/sustainability assessment in the HE sector has increased in recent years, but different levels of implementation can be seen (Leal-Filho et al., 2022)
- 🌍 But: if well-tailored, SATs have the potential to enhance HEI sustainability (Singh et al., 2023)

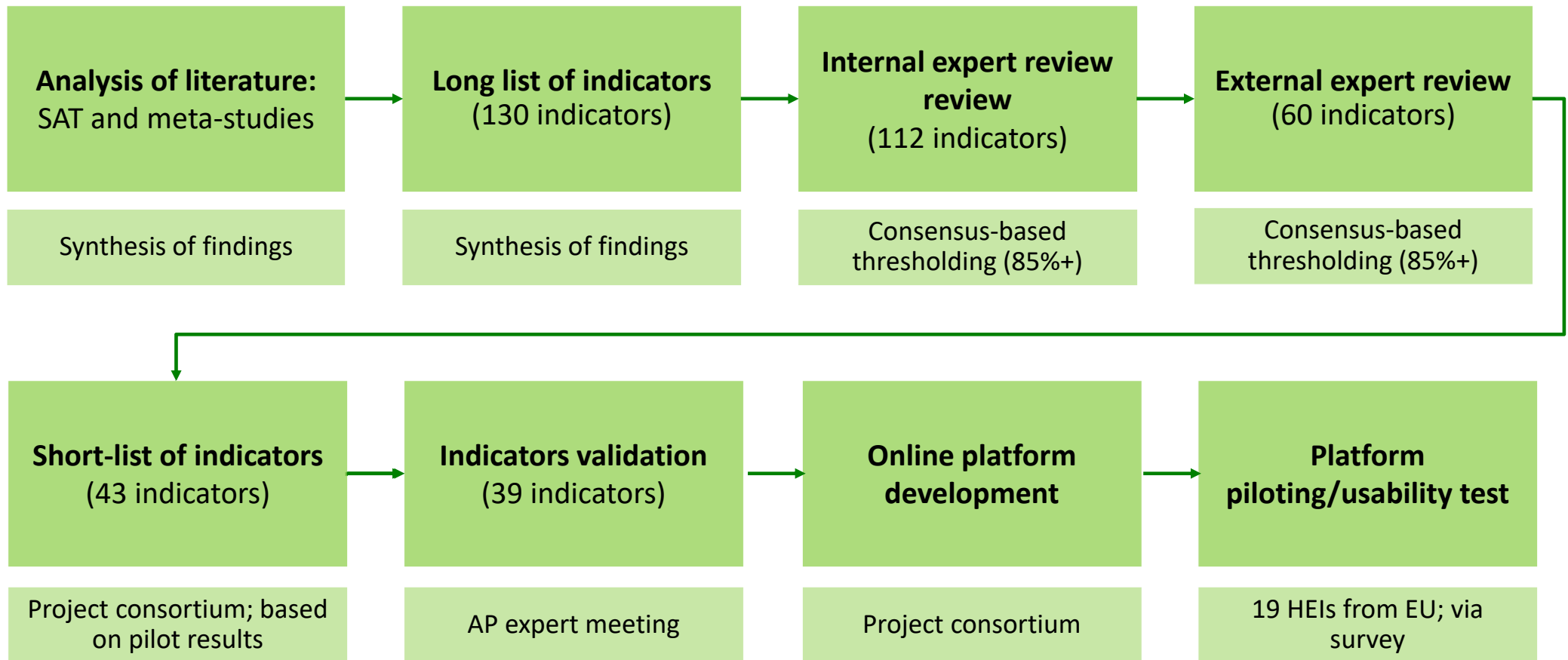
Green Self-Assessment

How Green Self-Assessment wants to fill the gap:

- 🌱 Draws on the strengths of existing SATs while overcoming their weaknesses
- 🌱 Built under strong involvement of HEIs (**participatory approach**)
- 🌱 Green Self-Assessment follows a **whole-university approach**
- 🌱 It fosters **intra-institutional collaboration** by involving different HEI-missions and activities
- 🌱 The tool is **process-oriented** much rather than results-oriented (no benchmarking etc.)
- 🌱 It serves an **educational purpose**, promoting awareness and encouraging the generation of new ideas



Methodology: Indicator development



Participatory approaches

Leadership by HEIs: Partner HEIs in the consortium took leading roles in developing the tool



Initial insights: 12 qualitative interviews with HEIs at the start of the project identified conditions for SAT-use in HE



Indicator development: A long list of **130** potential indicators was reduced to a short-list of **43** through surveys with HEI representatives (from both GET-AHED partners and 32 external pilot institutions)



Validation: Final **39** indicators were agreed upon in a validation workshop with associate partners, including HEI associations and ministries



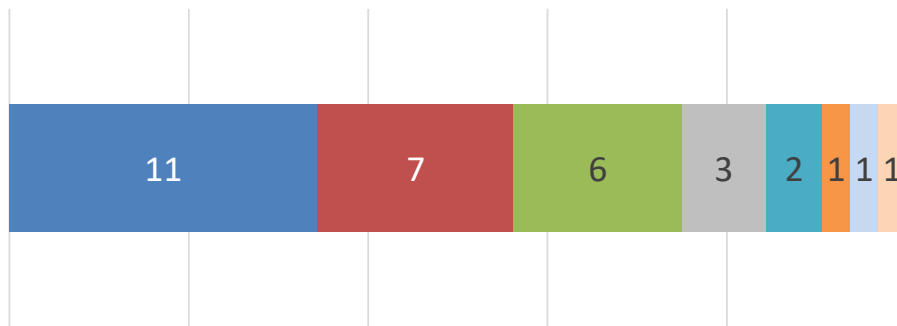
Usability testing: The full platform was tested by 19 pilot HEIs, leading to final minor adjustments



Next steps: A usability test with GET-AHED HEIs

Findings from external pilot institutions survey (1)

- Participating institutions (n = 32) from all over Europe



- University of Applied Sciences
- Technical University
- General University
- Graduate school of teacher education (or similar)
- Other University
- Medical University
- Private University
- University of Arts

Job titles of participating HEI representatives (examples)

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

Findings from external pilot institutions survey (2)

- 50% of participating HEIs have a dedicated **Sustainability Unit**
- Only 28% engage in **sustainability reporting**
- 37% are **familiar with SAT**
 - Out of those familiar with SAT, less than 1/3 use them for their sustainability reporting

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

Piloting results: Short-listing the indicators

Dimension	# Indicators initially	# Short-listed indicators	“Retention rate”
Organisational management	12	5	42%
Operations	12	9	75%
Education and curricula	5	5	100%
Research, development, innovation	11	8	73%
Community and outreach	13	7	54%
Assessment, reporting, evaluation	7	5	71%

Examples of indicators

Dimension: Research, development, innovation

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

Description:

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

To score highly, HEIs should:

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

B2.11

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

Description:

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

To score highly, HEIs should:

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

Dimension: Operations

Questions for discussion

What could the future of GET-AHED look like? – some considerations from our side:

- 🌱 Follow-up projects (e.g. adapting GET-AHED indicators for CSRD compliance)
- 🌱 Sustainable business models (e.g. use in HEI advisory, licensing to HEI associations, integration into consultancy services)
- 🌱 Open science approach (making data and findings accessible to researchers and practitioners)
- 🌱 Capacity-building and training (using the platform as a tool in workshops or curricula)
- 🌱 Adaptation to other education institutions (e.g. schools, vocational training centers, or non-university research institutes)
- 🌱 Community-driven governance (involving HEIs, associations, and ministries in long-term stewardship of the platform)

➔ Any ideas, advice, ambitions for collaboration? Please share it with us!

Thank you for your attention!

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