

WP2
Examining The Adults' Attitudes Toward Greenwashing
Through A Series of Focus Groups



WP 2.4 Comparative Report on Adult Awareness, Perceptions, and
Competences on Greenwashing

SBTC, TURKEY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Comparative Analysis Report presents the consolidated findings of **Work Package 2 (WP2)** of the GreenCons Project, which aims to assess adults' awareness, perceptions, and competences in recognizing greenwashing practices across five partner countries: **Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, and Türkiye**. WP2 serves as a cornerstone for the project, providing evidence-based insights that will directly inform **WP3 (Collection of Greenwashing Practices)** and the development of the **WP4 Anti-Greenwashing Handbook** for adult learners and educators. In total, **20 focus groups** were implemented across partner countries, following the standardized A2.1 methodology and script. Each country organized **four sessions: three with adults** representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds and **one with adult trainers** working in non-formal or formal education. This approach ensured the inclusion of both consumer-level perspectives and pedagogical viewpoints.

The findings demonstrate that while general awareness of greenwashing exists across all partner countries, **its depth, accuracy, and practical application vary significantly**. Participants often confuse greenwashing with general sustainability communication, and many reported difficulties in interpreting eco-labels, environmental terminology, and certification schemes. Trust in companies' environmental claims ranged from moderate to low in most countries, with several participants describing a growing scepticism due to inconsistent or misleading marketing messages.

Across countries, participants expressed a shared need for **clearer guidance, practical tools, and easily understandable information** to detect misleading claims. Adult trainers, in particular, highlighted the necessity of structured educational material and real-life examples to support their training activities. These insights underscore the relevance of WP3's upcoming work on mapping real greenwashing cases, as well as WP4's goal to create a coherent, user-friendly Anti-Greenwashing Handbook.

Overall, WP2 highlights strong cross-country convergence on the challenges consumers face, but also reveals nuanced national differences shaped by regulatory environments, cultural attitudes, and exposure to sustainability campaigns. The results establish a robust foundation for developing targeted anti-greenwashing competences and training resources tailored to European adult learners.

INTRODUCTION

Work Package 2 (WP2) of the GreenCons Project aims to assess the current level of **awareness, skills, and perceptions** among adults and adult trainers regarding greenwashing—the misleading practice of presenting products, services, or companies as more environmentally friendly than they truly are. By analyzing how adults interpret environmental claims and how trainers approach sustainability education, WP2 lays the groundwork for the development of practical tools and learning materials within later project stages. WP2 directly contributes to **WP3**, which will identify and classify real greenwashing practices across the EU; and **WP4**, which will produce the GreenCons Anti-Greenwashing Handbook that builds on evidence from both WP2 and WP3.

WP2 includes two main activities, A2.1. Designing the Focus Group Methodology and Script and A2.2. Implementation of Focus Groups in Partner Countries. A structured focus group script and methodology were developed collaboratively, based on literature reviews, EU policies, and national regulations relating to environmental claims and consumer protection. This script ensured methodological consistency and comparability across countries.

Each partner country—**Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, and Türkiye**—conducted a total of **four focus groups**, resulting in **20 focus groups overall**. **3 sessions with adults**, aimed at exploring general consumer experiences and perceptions; **1 session with adult trainers**, aimed at understanding educational needs and training perspectives. This distribution enabled WP2 to capture diverse viewpoints, combining consumer-level insights with educator-level reflections. Greenwashing is growing in complexity, driven by rapidly expanding sustainability claims, eco-labels, and marketing strategies. As the EU strengthens its regulatory framework—through measures such as the **Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive**, the **Green Claims Directive**, and **CSRD reporting obligations**—adult learners must be able to critically evaluate environmental information.

The findings of WP2 provide:

- empirical evidence of existing knowledge gaps,
- behavioural patterns in sustainability-related decision-making,
- challenges with interpreting environmental claims, and
- training needs for both adults and educators.

These insights will directly inform the construction of the Anti-Greenwashing Handbook and practical learning tools to enhance competence-based adult learning in sustainability literacy.

The report is organised into the following sections:

- **Section 2** presents the methodology used to design and conduct the focus groups.
- **Section 3** summarises the country-specific findings.
- **Section 4** offers a comparative cross-country analysis.
- **Section 5** outlines implications for WP3.
- **Section 6** explains how findings will feed into WP4's Handbook.
- **Section 7** presents concluding remarks.

METHODOLOGY

2.1. FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY (A2.1)

The methodological approach for WP2 was developed under Activity A2.1 and is anchored in the comprehensive methodological framework prepared by SBTC Türkiye, as outlined in the document “A2.1 METHODOLOGY FOR DESIGNING THE FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT”. This framework ensured strong conceptual grounding, scientific rigor, and comparability across all partner countries while allowing cultural and contextual adaptation during implementation.

2.1.1. LITERATURE REVIEW BASIS

The methodology was founded on an extensive preliminary research and literature review, which examined:

- **EU-level directives and policy frameworks** regulating environmental claims and consumer protection, including:
 - The **Directive on Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition (ECGT)** (2024)
 - The **Proposed Green Claims Directive (2023)**
 - The **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)** (2024)
 - **ESMA Guidelines** on ESG fund naming
- **National-level regulations and enforcement actions** on misleading environmental claims in Germany, Italy, Spain, Austria, and Türkiye (e.g., Germany’s Federal Court climate-neutrality ruling, Italy’s AGCM investigation into misleading “eco” collections, Türkiye’s 2022 Environmental Declaration Guideline).
- **Academic research** on consumer behaviour, sustainability literacy, green persuasion, and deceptive marketing communication.



Figure 1: Types of Greenwashing, Nemes et al., 2022

This literature review shaped both the **content** and the **structure** of the focus group script, ensuring that participants' awareness, perceptions, and competences were explored in ways that meaningfully connect to ongoing policy developments and the real challenges consumers face in European markets. The review also informed the selection of the **10 Greenwashing Types** (See Figure 1) as an evaluative lens for understanding citizens' ability to identify misleading claims. These categories were embedded implicitly in the discussion questions and will serve as a basis for the WP2 comparative analysis, WP3 practice collection, and the WP4 Anti-Greenwashing Handbook.

2.1.2. SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Following the “A2.1 METHODOLOGY FOR DESIGNING THE FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT”, each partner used **purposive sampling** to recruit participants who could meaningfully reflect the perspectives of adults as consumers and adult educators. Each partner conducted **4 focus groups**:

- **3 focus groups with adult consumers**
- **1 focus group with adult educators/trainers**

Participants represented a broad spectrum of:

- Age groups (18–45+)
- Occupations (public sector, private sector, self-employed, unemployed)
- Education levels (high school, vocational, university, postgraduate)
- Urban and semi-urban populations
- Exposure to sustainability issues

Adult trainers included:

- Non-formal education practitioners
- VET educators
- Community educators
- NGO trainers working on environment, digital literacy, or consumer awareness
- Sustainability facilitators

This dual sampling design allowed the project to capture both **consumer behaviour patterns** and **pedagogical competences**, enabling richer insight into future training needs.

2.1.3. DISCUSSION SCRIPT AND THEMATIC AREAS

The discussion script (A2.1) ensured standardisation and comparability across countries. It was validated by partners and finalised through iterative consultation. The script consisted of three main sections:

1. INTRODUCTION (5–10 MINUTES)

- Explanation of the project's purpose and goals
- Definition of greenwashing based on current EU legislation
- Explanation of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and recording
- Participant introductions
- Establishing respectful, inclusive discussion norms

2. CORE DISCUSSION BLOCKS (50–60 MINUTES)

The script included six core thematic areas, each tied to a specific dimension of greenwashing literacy:

1. Understanding of Greenwashing
 - Familiarity with the term
 - Initial associations and understanding
 - Examples participants recall
2. Perceptions of Sustainability and Environmental Claims
 - How trust or distrust is formed
 - Influence of national context or media
3. Experiences with Green Products and Services
 - Examples of purchases influenced by environmental claims
 - Identification of misleading claims encountered by participants
4. Consumer Decision-Making and Use of Eco-Labels/Certifications
 - Recognition of labels
 - Confidence in certifications
 - Criteria used when making “green” decisions
5. Impact of Greenwashing on Consumer Trust and Behaviour
 - Behaviour changes after encountering greenwashing
 - Long-term trust implications
6. Skills and Competences Needed to Identify Greenwashing
 - Critical thinking skills
 - Knowledge gaps
 - Expectations for educational support

These themes were structured to implicitly explore the 10 greenwashing types while allowing flexibility for country-specific examples or spontaneous participant insights.

3. CONCLUSION (10 MINUTES)

- Facilitator summarised key insights
- Participants added final reflections
- Suggestions for what future consumers or educators need
- Closing and appreciation

2.2. IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS COUNTRIES

The focus group methodology was implemented consistently across the five partner countries—Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, and Türkiye—ensuring a harmonised process that allowed for cross-cultural comparison.

2.2.1. NUMBER OF SESSIONS PER COUNTRY

Each partner organised **four focus groups**, resulting in:

- **Total sessions:** 20
- **Adults:** 15 sessions
- **Trainers:** 5 sessions

All sessions followed the A2.1 script exactly, with only minimal adjustments for language or local examples.

2.2.2. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic profiles across the five countries were intentionally diverse. Participants varied in:

- **Age:** 18 to 45+ (Adults)
- **Gender balance:** Mixed, with most groups close to equal
- **Socio-economic status:** Students, early-career professionals, mid-career adults, retirees
- **Sustainability exposure:** Ranging from low (no prior familiarity) to high (professionally engaged with sustainability)
- **Trainer expertise:**
 - Adult learning
 - Green skills training
 - Social entrepreneurship
 - Vocational training
 - Community education
 - NGO environmental programs

This heterogeneity enriched the dataset and permitted nuanced analysis across socio-cultural contexts.

2.2.3. DURATION, TOOLS, AND RECORDING APPROACH

- **Length:** 60–90 minutes, depending on group dynamics
- **Format:**
 - Mostly face-to-face sessions
 - Some online sessions where necessary (e.g., scheduling constraints)
- **Tools:**
 - Printed scripts
 - Digital discussion guides
 - Audio/video recording tools
 - Note-taking templates (as recommended in A2.1)

- Consent forms
- **Documentation:**
 - Verbatim quotes
 - Thematic notes
 - Observations on nonverbal reactions
 - Identification via participant initials (as recommended in the A2.1 “Documentation of Quotes” section)

2.2.4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All partners adhered to rigorous ethical protocols, including:

- **Voluntary participation and informed consent**
- **Confidentiality and anonymisation**
- **Secure handling of recordings and transcripts**
- **Use of data exclusively for WP2 research purposes**

The A2.1 guidance emphasised careful **active listening**, **accurate documentation**, and **transparent verification of themes**—principles that all partners applied during implementation.

2.3. ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

A systematic, multi-phase analytical framework was used to interpret and compare the focus group data across countries.

2.3.1. CODING AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS METHOD

The analysis followed a **thematic qualitative approach**, informed by Braun & Clarke’s methodology and aligned with the structure of the A2.1 script. The steps included:

1. **Transcription and Data Familiarisation**
 - Listening to recordings (if available)
 - Reading notes from facilitators and assistant facilitators
 - Identifying initial patterns
2. **Initial Coding**
 - Codes generated from both script-guided themes and emergent participant narratives
 - Codes mapped to the 10 greenwashing types wherever relevant
3. **Theme Development**
 - Clustering codes into overarching themes (e.g., trust, confusion, behavioural change, label literacy)
4. **Cross-Validation Across Countries**
 - Comparing coding structures from different partners
 - Discussing discrepancies in interpretation
5. **Final Synthesis**
 - Distilling country-specific insights
 - Identifying cross-country patterns

This process ensured that all partner inputs and national country reports were reflected in the final synthesis, with coherence across diverse FP contexts.

2.3.2. CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARATIVE APPROACH

A common analysis template was used across the partnership to standardise reporting. Comparative analysis focused on:

- Awareness and misconceptions of greenwashing
- Recognition of different greenwashing types
- Behavioural responses to misleading claims
- Country-specific cultural, economic, and regulatory influences
- Differences between adult consumers and adult trainers
- Perceived competence gaps and training needs

This comparative approach enables WP2 to provide strong evidence-based input for WP3 (real case collection) and WP4 (Handbook).

2.3.3. LIMITATIONS

The analysis acknowledges several limitations:

- **Non-representative samples:** Qualitative data cannot be generalised statistically.
- **Varying familiarity with greenwashing:** Some groups required additional explanation.
- **Cultural variation in discussing consumption habits:** Some participants were more self-critical or open than others.
- **Facilitator influence:** Differences in moderation styles may have shaped the depth of dialogue.

Despite these limitations, the consistent methodology and shared script ensure strong comparative reliability.

COUNTRY-LEVEL FINDINGS (DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS)

The following section presents the detailed national findings from the focus groups conducted across the five participating countries—Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Türkiye—as part of WP2 of the GreenCons Project. Each country implemented four focus groups, including three with adult consumers and one with adult educators or trainers. The aim of these discussions was to explore participants' awareness of greenwashing, their perceptions of sustainability claims, their experiences with environmentally marketed products, and their ability to identify misleading or deceptive communication practices. The country cases provide a nuanced understanding of the cultural, economic, and educational factors shaping consumer

vulnerability to greenwashing. Together, these national insights allow us to identify cross-country patterns, country-specific differences, and the underlying competences needed to empower adults and educators to critically assess environmental claims. The summaries below follow a harmonized structure to ensure comparability and to support the development of WP3 and WP4 outputs.

3.1. GERMANY

Germany conducted four focus groups as part of the WP2 data collection: one with general adult consumers (FG1) and three with adult educators and trainers (FG2, FG3, FG4). This composition allows for a rich comparison between everyday consumer perceptions and the perspectives of those involved in education, vocational training, and community learning. The German focus groups provide valuable insights into how different population groups recognise, interpret, and respond to greenwashing practices, as well as the levels of confidence and critical literacy they bring to sustainability claims. In the following subsections, each focus group is presented individually using a harmonised analytical structure, followed by an integrated synthesis that highlights national trends and key learning needs.

3.1.1. FOCUS GROUP 1

Participant Profile: 10 adults aged 21–45, mainly German with several international participants. Diverse occupational statuses.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Awareness varied: some participants had heard of the term, while others had not. Once examples were shown, all participants could identify misleading environmental marketing. They recognised **Vagueness**, **Irrelevance**, **Greening the Image**, and **Selective Disclosure** most easily. Participants shared examples from supermarkets, fast fashion, and airlines, expressing frustration with how companies misuse green imagery.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Participants felt overwhelmed by sustainability messaging. They perceived environmental claims as manipulative unless verified. Their skepticism centred around unclear and unverifiable terms like "eco-friendly" or "natural," indicating strong awareness of **Vagueness** and **No Proof** tactics.

3. Experience with Green Products

Participants frequently encountered misleading labels, fake imagery, and contradictory packaging. Several cited airline campaigns promoting "green flying," identifying the **Lesser of Two Evils** and **Bait & Switch** strategies.

4. Decision-Making

Most relied on product reputation, peer suggestions, and established brands rather than sustainability labels. Participants struggled with identifying credible eco-labels.

5.Impact on Trust

High distrust was evident. Many felt manipulated and powerless, often unsure whom to trust. Several expressed frustration that greenwashing erodes confidence in truly sustainable initiatives.

6.Skills Needed

Participants requested simple educational guides, examples, and trustworthy certification references.

Summary (FG1): German adults are aware of greenwashing but lack systematic knowledge. Their intuitive understanding is strong, but they lack confidence and tools to verify claims. They desire more transparency, better regulation, and simple consumer education tools.

3.1.2. FOCUS GROUP 2

Participant Profile: 9 educators: secondary school teachers, adult trainers, and environmental educators from various European countries.

Key Findings

1.Understanding of Greenwashing

Teachers were already familiar with the idea of greenwashing but rarely used the term formally. They identified misleading environmental messages in educational materials (textbooks, school supplies) and recognised **Vagueness**, **Irrelevance**, and **False Labels** in school-related marketing.

2.Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Educators expressed frustration that sustainability is often used as a marketing strategy rather than a genuine educational topic. They cited school suppliers using “eco” products with dubious claims.

3.Experience with Green Products

Teachers encountered greenwashing in travel advertisements for school trips (“eco-friendly school excursions”), which often lacked real criteria—clear cases of **Bait & Switch**.

4.Decision-Making

Educators felt responsible for teaching learners to question environmental claims but reported lacking tools, time, and up-to-date examples.

5.Impact on Trust

Mixed trust: educators viewed themselves as critical thinkers yet acknowledged that distinguishing truth from marketing is difficult even for them.

6.Skills Needed

Classroom-ready tools
Examples for teaching
Guides to real vs. fake labels
Media literacy frameworks

Summary (FG2): Educators understand greenwashing at a conceptual level but struggle to translate it into teaching practice. They seek structured materials for integrating this topic into their professional roles.

3.1.3. FOCUS GROUP 3

Participant Profile: 9 educators and trainers from adult and secondary education sectors.

Key Findings

1.Understanding of Greenwashing

These participants showed high awareness and gave examples from tourism, publishing, food branding, and school materials. They identified **Greening the Image**, **Hidden Trade-Off**, and **Selective Disclosure** as key tactics used in media and corporate communication.

2.Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Educators observed that learners increasingly care about climate issues but struggle with contradictory environmental messages. They saw greenwashing as a source of confusion and cynicism among learners.

3.Experience with Green Products

Participants discussed greenwashing in travel agencies (e.g., “climate-neutral flights”), tourism promotions, and environmentally-themed school materials.

4.Decision-Making

Educators emphasised the importance of helping learners develop critical thinking and source-checking skills. They also highlighted that they lack reliable, simple resources.

5.Impact on Trust

Greenwashing eroded trust in brands and challenged educators’ ability to promote sustainability without confusing learners.

6.Skills Needed

- Real case studies
- Clarity on eco-labels
- Infographics and examples
- Collaborative environmental education resources

Summary (FG3): Educators possess strong analytical awareness and can identify complex forms of greenwashing. Their main barrier is the absence of structured teaching materials and formal frameworks to support learners.

3.1.4. FOCUS GROUP 4 - (JOINT SESSION WITH FG3)

Participant Profile: 11 participants, predominantly teachers and adult educators from several EU countries.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Participants understood greenwashing conceptually but rarely used the term in professional contexts. Examples included:

- Publishers using green imagery
- Erasmus+ project partners overstating sustainability impacts
- School suppliers exaggerating “eco” features
- These reveal awareness of **Greening the Image**, **Selective Disclosure**, and **No Proof**.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Educators felt that sustainability messaging in schools often lacks substance, causing confusion. Misleading content undermines environmental education.

3. Experience with Green Products

- Participants identified misleading claims in:
- Textbooks
- School-branded merchandise
- Training materials
- Erasmus+ project communication

4. Decision-Making

They emphasised the need to integrate critical thinking in curricula and help learners ask the right questions.

5. Impact on Trust

Educators considered greenwashing a barrier to building credibility and trust in environmental education.

6. Skills Needed

- Critical thinking tools
- Classroom visuals
- A European trusted certification list
- Teaching frameworks on sustainability

Summary (FG4): Educators are highly motivated but unprepared. They need practical, ready-to-use tools, guidance, and validated examples.

3.1.5. INTRA-COUNTRY COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS: GERMANY

Across the four German focus groups, clear distinctions emerged between general adult participants and educators, although both groups expressed strong frustration with misleading sustainability claims. Adults in FG1 showed mixed familiarity with the term “greenwashing,” but immediately recognised deceptive practices once examples were provided, particularly vague wording, selective disclosure, and nature-themed marketing. In contrast, educators across FG2, FG3, and FG4 demonstrated significantly higher conceptual clarity and were able to identify more complex forms of greenwashing such as carbon-offset manipulation, greenwashing in school materials, misleading “eco” claims in travel promotions, and superficial sustainability statements in Erasmus+ project communication. Adults prioritised practical

benefits such as price, quality, and convenience, often feeling overwhelmed and powerless when interpreting sustainability labels; this made them vulnerable to common tactics like Vagueness, Irrelevance, No Proof, and Greening the Image. Educators, meanwhile, observed that learners are exposed to contradictory messages, which increases confusion and cynicism, placing pressure on teachers to provide clarity. Experiences with green products differed by group: adults frequently felt misled by eco-labels and marketing visuals, while educators identified inaccuracies in a wider range of contexts—from textbooks to training programs. Decision-making patterns across all groups showed low trust in certifications, reliance on personal experience or peer input, and a desire for more reliable verification tools. Trust was consistently undermined by perceived inconsistencies between corporate sustainability claims and actual practices. The skills and competence gaps were evident: adults require simplified terminology, visual guides, label-differentiation tools, and examples of the ten greenwashing types; educators require structured lesson-ready materials, real-world case studies, visual literacy tools, and a European list of trustworthy eco-certifications. Overall, Germany shows both strong intuitive recognition of misleading claims and a high demand for systematic educational support. Educators represent a powerful multiplier group but lack structured resources to address greenwashing effectively in teaching and community contexts.

3.1.6. GERMANY – FINAL SUMMARY

Germany's focus groups reveal a clear and consistent pattern:

- **Adults possess intuitive awareness of misleading environmental messages but lack terminology, structured knowledge, and confidence** in identifying different greenwashing practices.
- **Educators demonstrate significantly higher conceptual clarity**, recognising complex greenwashing tactics such as carbon-offset manipulation, selective disclosure in education materials, and superficial sustainability claims in Erasmus+ communications.
- **Participants across all groups are vulnerable to common greenwashing types**, particularly Vagueness, Greening the Image, No Proof, False Labels, Selective Disclosure, and Bait & Switch.
- **Trust is weakened by inconsistencies between corporate communication and actual practices**, and participants repeatedly expressed frustration, confusion, and a desire for verification tools and transparent standards.
- **Educators overwhelmingly emphasised the need for teaching-ready resources**, noting that greenwashing undermines environmental education and creates confusion among learners.

Germany's national findings strongly support the need for:

- **Pedagogical frameworks and lesson-ready materials** to help educators integrate anti-greenwashing learning into classrooms and adult training
- **Clear, visual guides for distinguishing real vs. misleading eco-labels**
- **Practical examples and case studies** illustrating all 10 types of greenwashing
- **Media literacy tools** that empower adults and learners to question sustainability claims across sectors
- **European-level lists of trusted certifications and evidence-based verification methods**

These insights will directly inform WP3's collection of greenwashing practices and shape the pedagogical structure, tools, and visual learning design of the WP4 Anti-Greenwashing Handbook.

3.2. AUSTRIA

Austria implemented four focus groups, consisting of three adult consumer groups (FG1, FG2, FG4) and one group of adult educators and vocational trainers (FG3). This distribution captures both the experiences of everyday consumers and the perspectives of professionals responsible for guiding adult learning. The Austrian findings reveal how individuals at different levels of sustainability awareness understand greenwashing, evaluate environmental claims, and make consumption decisions. The summaries below present each focus group separately, using a consistent analytical framework, followed by a consolidated synthesis outlining the key national insights and competence gaps.

3.2.1. FOCUS GROUP 1

Participant Profile: Young adults aged 20–30, mostly men from the MENA region and Ukraine, attending ÖJAB's Vocational Training Institute.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

- None of the participants knew the term “greenwashing,” confirming a terminology literacy gap.
- However, seven out of ten participants immediately recognised greenwashing examples once explained.

Common examples given included:

- Vegan beef patties promoted as “eco-friendly” (Hidden Trade-Off).
- Fake organic labels (False Labels).
- H&M's “green” collection (Bait & Switch).
- Mislabelled product origins (Fibbing).

This group intuitively recognised multiple types of greenwashing even without terminology.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Purchasing “green” products was primarily health-motivated, not environmental.

Local farmers were preferred over supermarkets due to concerns about antibiotics/chemicals.

Strong awareness of Greening the Image, especially food packaging showing “happy animals” that do not reflect reality.

3. Experience with Green Products

They shared personal stories about discovering misleading claims (e.g., low-quality salami with artificial ingredients).

Participants demonstrated strong critical thinking about visual misrepresentation.

4. Decision-Making

- Eco-label knowledge was weak.
- Personal experience > environmental marketing.
- Difficulty shifting from sharing examples to discussing systemic solutions.

5. Impact on Trust

Greenwashing reduces trust; however, no clear strategies for dealing with misleading claims. Participants felt disempowered at the systemic level.

6. Skill Needs

Clear desire for practical, hands-on tools such as the “Debunking Green Labels” exercise. Strong preference for visual evidence, simple explanations, and concrete examples.

Summary (FG1): This group shows intuitive recognition of greenwashing, strong skepticism of visuals, but low confidence in evaluating claims. Educational interventions must be concrete, visual, and simple.

3.2.2. FOCUS GROUP 2

Participant Profile: 12 adults aged 20–50, predominantly from MENA countries plus participants from Ukraine.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

- All had *heard* the term but none could explain it.
- Strong confusion between sustainability concepts (organic, healthy, vegan).

Vulnerability to:

- **Vagueness**
- **No Proof**
- **False Labels**

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Sustainability associated with:

- Less waste
- Recycling
- Organic herbs
- Electric transport
- However, deep skepticism of whether recycling actually happens (**Selective Disclosure** awareness).

3. Experience with Green Products

Purchases mainly motivated by **practical benefits** (energy efficiency).

High-price sustainable products perceived as “not worth it” → risk of **Lesser of Two Evils** confusion.

4. Decision-Making

Reliance on:

- Social media
- Friends
- Online reviews
- Trust in eco-labels inconsistent.

This reliance makes them vulnerable to **Bait & Switch** or **social-media Green Image campaigns**.

5. Impact on Trust

Will avoid greenwashing brands but may still purchase due to convenience or necessity.

6. Skills Needed

Tools to differentiate labels, interpret claims, and research production processes.

Summary (FG2): Adults demonstrate fragmented understanding of sustainability terminology, rely heavily on social validation, and struggle with the complexity of environmental labels. They need simplified, structured tools and clear differentiation guides.

3.2.3. FOCUS GROUP 3

Participant Profile: Six VET coaches working directly with adult learners in Austria.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

- Demonstrated **advanced awareness** of greenwashing tactics.
- Strong insights into:
- **Greening the Image** (“visual triggers activate the brain”)
- **Hidden Trade-Off** (carbon offset schemes)
- **No Proof** (fake tree planting schemes)

Educators offered sophisticated examples, including aviation offsets and dubious NGO carbon projects.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

- Deep skepticism of marketing claims.
- Highly aware of vague language and manipulative framing (**Vagueness**).

Educators acknowledged their own occasional inconsistencies (“When I want something specific...I just buy it”).

3. Experience with Green Products

- Relied more on regional and seasonal consumption than on labels.

4. Decision-Making

- Emphasis on **critical thinking** rather than reliance on certifications.
- Awareness that learners struggle with abstract sustainability concepts.

5. Skills Needed

Educators suggested the need for:

- Visual literacy training
- Carbon-offset evaluation tools
- Real-world examples
- Critical questions for assessing claims

Summary (FG3): Educators have the strongest conceptual understanding. Their insight into cognitive biases, marketing manipulation, and carbon-offset skepticism is crucial for designing the WP4 handbook and trainer-level tools.

3.2.4. FOCUS GROUP 4

Participant Profile: Seven women aged approx. 25–45, all from Ukraine, in a German language integration course.

Key Findings

1. *Understanding of Greenwashing*

- Term was unfamiliar; concept somewhat understood.
- Many confused greenwashing with fair trade or organic food.
- Strong intuitive skepticism toward overly positive claims (packaging, organic labels).

2. **Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims**

- Sustainability **not a primary driver** of purchasing decisions.
- Product performance, price, and health concerns dominate.
- Sustainability becomes relevant when tied to **personal health**.

3. **Experience with Green Products**

- Purchases influenced by:
- Taste
- Product quality
- Health
- Strong mistrust in packaging sustainability (e.g., “organic products in plastic” → **Hidden Trade-Off**).

4. **Decision-Making**

- High confusion over labels and certifications.
- Awareness that some labels are paid for by companies (“self-certification” → **False Labels**).

5. **Impact on Trust**

- High general mistrust of corporate claims.
- Trust higher in local farmers, markets, and direct communication.

6. **Skills Needed**

- Participants requested:
- Digital verification tools
- Visual guides
- Practical steps rather than abstract instructions
- Help distinguishing credible and non-credible certifications

Summary (FG4): Participants hold strong general skepticism but lack formal knowledge or confidence. Practical, accessible, health-linked educational tools are essential for addressing their needs.

3.2.5. INTRA-COUNTRY COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS: AUSTRIA

The integrated analysis of the four Austrian focus groups reveals clear patterns in how different participant groups understand and respond to greenwashing. Among adult participants (FG1,

FG2, FG4), the term “greenwashing” was largely unfamiliar or only partially understood; however, once explained, adults intuitively recognised deceptive environmental marketing practices. Despite this intuitive awareness, they struggled to distinguish between the ten specific types of greenwashing.

In contrast, adult educators (FG3) demonstrated the highest level of conceptual clarity, recognizing more complex forms such as carbon offset misuse, psychological marketing triggers, and visual manipulation. Overall, Austria exhibits a strong intuitive foundation yet limited formal literacy among adults, positioning educators as key multipliers for change. In terms of perceptions of sustainability, adults generally treated sustainability as a secondary factor in purchasing decisions, prioritising health, price, taste, and product quality, while expressing high skepticism toward recycling systems, corporate sustainability campaigns, and packaging practices.

This left them particularly vulnerable to Vagueness, False Labels, Greening the Image, and Hidden Trade-Off tactics. Educators, however, were more critically attuned to sustainability claims and placed emphasis on identifying manipulative carbon-offset strategies and vague language, noting the need for learners to acquire tools for interpreting visual and verbal cues. Experiences with green products differed as well: adults frequently felt misled by labels, packaging, and sustainability terminology, often confusing terms such as “organic,” “vegan,” “healthy,” and “eco,” and relying heavily on peers and online reviews—making them susceptible to Bait & Switch strategies. Educators tended to rely on seasonal and regional choices rather than certifications and showed a stronger ability to detect inconsistencies between claims and reality.

Decision-making patterns across all groups highlighted a consistent prioritization of practical product benefits over sustainability, widespread confusion about eco-labels, higher trust in local or direct sources, mixed reliance on digital tools, and a sense of consumer powerlessness among adults. Trust and behavior reflected these dynamics: all groups expressed varying degrees of distrust toward environmental claims, adults often continued purchasing problematic products for convenience, and educators articulated the gap between awareness and actual behavior. Finally, clear competence gaps emerged. Adults require simple terminology, visual tools, label-differentiation guides, step-by-step evaluation methods, digital verification tools, and concrete examples of the ten greenwashing types. Educators, while more advanced, need structured frameworks, real-world case studies, classroom-ready materials, and tools for teaching visual literacy.

3.2.6. AUSTRIA – FINAL SUMMARY

Austria’s focus groups reveal a consistent pattern:

- Adults across backgrounds are **instinctively critical** but **lack the vocabulary, frameworks, or tools** to interpret environmental claims.
- Educators demonstrate a **higher conceptual mastery** and can play a decisive role in promoting anti-greenwashing competences.
- Participants across all groups show vulnerability to **Vagueness, False Labels, Greening the Image, Hidden Trade-Off, Selective Disclosure, and Bait & Switch**.
- Trust is strongest when consumers can see the supply chain clearly (local farmers, regional products).

- Practical, hands-on learning activities such as the “Debunking Green Labels” exercise were extremely effective across both adult and trainer groups.

Austria’s national findings strongly support the need for:

- Highly visual and accessible educational materials
- Tools that address label confusion
- Clear differentiation of the 10 greenwashing types
- Strategies linking environmental authenticity to **health, quality, and performance**, not only to sustainability

These insights will directly inform **WP3’s mapping of real greenwashing practices** and the structure of the **WP4 Anti-Greenwashing Handbook**.

3.3. ITALY

Italy carried out four focus groups: three with adult consumers from diverse backgrounds (FG1, FG2, FG4) and one with trainers and subject-matter experts involved in adult and vocational education (FG3). This structure enables the exploration of both consumer-level perceptions and professional-level interpretations of greenwashing. The Italian focus groups provide nuanced insights into how individuals encounter, understand, and assess sustainability claims across different sectors such as food, fashion, energy, and cosmetics. The following subsections present each focus group in detail, followed by an integrated analysis highlighting Italy’s national patterns and emerging training needs.

3.3.1. FOCUS GROUP 1

Participant Profile: Participants were adults of mixed ages, educational backgrounds, and employment statuses. The group included Italian and migrant residents with varying degrees of sustainability awareness.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Participants showed partial understanding of greenwashing. Many recognized it as misleading or exaggerated sustainability claims but lacked formal terminology.

Common examples given included:

- “BIO” labels used without proof
- Green packaging used to imply sustainability
- Energy providers advertising renewable sources without transparency
- Cosmetics labeled “natural” with no certification

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Participants associated sustainability with eco-friendly packaging, certifications, and regional production. Common complaints included vague terminology (“green,” “natural”) and excessive use of green imagery.

3. Experience with Green Products

Participants frequently bought eco-marketed products, especially in food, cosmetics, and cleaning supplies. Many reported disappointment after discovering inconsistencies between claims and reality.

4. Decision-Making

Choices were influenced by packaging, familiarity with brands, price, and perceived origin. Certifications were used inconsistently due to confusion.

5. Impact on Trust

Greenwashing reduced trust toward brands and sustainability claims in general. Participants avoided certain brands after negative experiences.

6. Skill Needs

Participants requested simple, visual, and practical tools to understand greenwashing, interpret labels, and verify claims.

Summary: FG1 adults demonstrated intuitive understanding but limited terminology literacy. They were easily influenced by packaging and vague claims and expressed strong frustration when discovering misleading information. They need accessible tools for identifying and verifying sustainability claims.

3.3.2. FOCUS GROUP 2

Participant Profile: Adults of working age from different sectors, with moderate sustainability awareness.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Participants described greenwashing as “fake sustainability” or “dishonest marketing.”

Common examples given included:

Fast fashion “conscious collections”

Green labels in supermarkets lacking evidence

“Zero-impact” claims without substantiation

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Terms like “organic,” “BIO,” and “KM zero” were attractive yet suspicious. Participants found verification extremely difficult.

3. Experience with Green Products

Participants had experience with misleading products in food, cleaning supplies, and cosmetics. Disappointment came from discovering hidden ingredients or non-transparent sourcing.

4. Decision-Making

Decisions relied heavily on visual cues, word-of-mouth, and brand familiarity. Few participants verified sustainability claims thoroughly.

5. Impact on Trust

Participants often felt manipulated, which led to lower trust in major brands and higher trust in local producers.

6. Skill Needs

Requests included better knowledge of certifications, supply chain understanding, and tools for identifying real sustainability.

Summary: FG2 adults showed awareness of deceptive marketing but lacked verification skills. Their purchasing behaviour was influenced by branding rather than sustainability research, making them vulnerable to greenwashing. They seek clarity on certifications and claim verification.

3.3.3. FOCUS GROUP 3

Participant Profile: Sustainability experts, environmental trainers, and adult education professionals.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Trainers displayed advanced literacy, distinguishing between deceptive tactics and communication errors.

Common examples given included:

- Energy companies overstating renewables
- Fashion brands masking overproduction with recycled collections
- Carbon neutrality claims lacking lifecycle analysis
- Self-issued eco-labels

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

They emphasized evidence-based communication, transparency, third-party verification, and measurable data. They criticized emotional environmental messaging.

3. Experience with Green Products

They identified misleading claims in fashion, tourism, cosmetics, and household products. They noted companies often unintentionally greenwash due to poor internal communication.

4. Decision-Making

Their evaluation included checking certifications, reading sustainability reports, comparing lifecycle data, and seeking consistency across company messaging.

5. Impact on Trust

Greenwashing is viewed as a major threat to environmental education, creating confusion and scepticism among learners.

6. Skill Needs

They require structured frameworks, high-quality case studies, visual literacy tools, and materials for teaching critical evaluation.

Summary: FG3 trainers demonstrated high analytical competence and deeper sector-specific understanding. They can detect complex greenwashing but lack structured educational tools. This group will function as key multipliers if provided with pedagogical resources.

3.3.4. FOCUS GROUP 4

Participant Profile: Working-age Italian adults with prior exposure to sustainability topics.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Participants had strong familiarity and could name real Italian cases.

Common examples given included:

- ENI’s “green energy” campaigns
- Fast fashion recycled lines
- Food marketed as organic without traceability

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Participants viewed sustainability claims as credible only when supported by transparent, traceable supply chains. They were skeptical of multinational corporations.

3. Experience with Green Products

Participants frequently checked labels, researched brands, and consulted NGO reports. They identified misleading claims in food, fashion, cosmetics, and energy.

4. Decision-Making

They relied on certification databases, sustainability rankings, and brand research—more advanced than FG1 & FG2.

5. Impact on Trust

Greenwashing caused permanent brand avoidance. Participants described emotional reactions such as disappointment and frustration.

6. Skill Needs

They requested verification apps, label guides, and visual case studies of the 10 greenwashing types.

Summary: FG4 adults demonstrated the highest literacy among the general consumer groups. They engaged actively in verification and valued transparency but still struggled with unclear or misleading certifications.

3.3.5. INTRA-COUNTRY COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS: ITALY

Across all four focus groups, adults showed intuitive recognition of misleading environmental claims but lacked systematic tools for evaluation. FG1 and FG2 participants were especially vulnerable to vague terms, misleading packaging, and false labels. FG4 adults demonstrated stronger critical skills and familiarity with national greenwashing cases. Trainers in FG3 possessed the highest conceptual understanding, recognizing advanced forms such as selective disclosure and carbon-neutrality manipulation. Decision-making varied significantly: adults relied largely on visual cues and brand familiarity, while trainers used evidence-based methods. Trust was fragile across the country, with greenwashing causing long-term disengagement from brands and skepticism toward sustainability claims. All groups expressed the need for clearer tools, visual resources, and certification guidance.

3.3.6. ITALY – FINAL SUMMARY

Italy’s focus groups reveal a clear pattern:

- **Adults possess intuitive awareness but limited structured knowledge** of greenwashing and certifications.
- **Trainers demonstrate high-level analytical skills** and can identify complex tactics such as Hidden Trade-Off, Selective Disclosure, and False Labels.
- All groups showed vulnerability to: **Vagueness, Greening the Image, False Labels, Hidden Trade-Off, Selective Disclosure, Bait & Switch, No Proof.**

- **Local and regional Italian brands are trusted more**, whereas multinational corporations—especially in fashion and energy—are viewed with skepticism.
- Greenwashing significantly undermines trust, leading to brand avoidance and confusion.
- Participants strongly requested **visual tools, certification guides, case studies, and simplified explanations of the 10 greenwashing types**.

Italy's findings highlight the need for accessible materials, structured educational frameworks, sector-specific examples, and stronger regulation. These insights will directly inform WP3 and the pedagogical and visual design of the WP4 Anti-Greenwashing Handbook.

3.4. SPAIN

Spain conducted four focus groups involving adult consumers (FG1, FG2, FG4) and adult educators and trainers (FG3). Although one of the adult groups (FG4) was collected through an informal dinner conversation and written contributions, it provides equally valuable insights into consumer attitudes and greenwashing awareness. The Spanish dataset reflects a diverse mix of perspectives on sustainability claims, marketing practices, and trust in environmental messaging. The subsections that follow summarise each focus group individually using a harmonised structure, concluding with an integrated synthesis that highlights national trends, vulnerabilities, and skill needs.

3.4.1. FOCUS GROUP 1

Participant Profile: Adults with diverse backgrounds, including teachers, workers, and individuals with varying familiarity with sustainability concepts. Ages ranged from mid-20s to 50s.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Participants had varying levels of awareness. Some had heard the term, while others understood the concept intuitively once examples were presented.

Common examples given included:

- Clothing labelled “eco-friendly” without proof
- Products using green packaging to imply sustainability
- Household cleaners advertised as “natural”
- Large supermarket chains promoting “zero waste” aisles

These examples align with **Vagueness, Greening the Image, and No Proof**.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Participants associated sustainability with:

- Reduced packaging
- Local production
- Recycling
- Certified eco-labels

However, many expressed confusion over what is genuinely sustainable, noting that terms such as “eco,” “bio,” and “green” are frequently misused.

3. Experience with Green Products

Participants commonly purchased green-marketed products in food, cosmetics, and cleaning categories. Some felt they had been misled by labels, especially when products marketed as “eco” were found to contain chemicals or excess packaging.

4. Decision-Making

Purchasing decisions were influenced by price, packaging, perceived quality, and brand reputation. Few participants researched environmental claims deeply, citing lack of time and lack of trust in marketing.

5. Impact on Trust

Participants reported decreasing trust in green claims due to repeated exposure to misleading practices. Some stated they no longer believe sustainability messaging unless accompanied by recognized certifications.

6. Skill Needs

Participants requested:

- Clear explanations of eco-labels
- Tools to verify claims
- Visual guides for identifying misleading packaging
- Easy-to-use consumer checklists

Summary: FG1 adults demonstrated mixed awareness but strong intuitive recognition of misleading claims. They expressed frustration over vague terminology and deceptive packaging. Their main needs include label literacy and simple verification tools.

3.4.2. FOCUS GROUP 2

Participant Profile: Adults with mixed educational and professional backgrounds, representing the general public, including parents, workers, and students.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Participants understood greenwashing as companies “pretending to be greener than they are.”

Common examples given included:

- Plastic water bottles labelled “100% recyclable”
- Fast fashion collections marketed as sustainable
- “Zero emissions” transportation marketing
- Organic produce wrapped in plastic

Patterns reflect **Irrelevance**, **Greening the Image**, and **Hidden Trade-Off**.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Participants felt overwhelmed by environmental messaging and perceived sustainability as a marketing trend. They believed many companies exaggerate or misrepresent their practices.

3. Experience with Green Products

Most had purchased green-labeled products but later felt uncertain about their real impact. Misleading claims in supermarkets were frequently mentioned.

4. Decision-Making

Participants relied heavily on packaging, colors, and buzzwords when making decisions. They trusted local and small producers more than large brands.

5. Impact on Trust

Participants expressed that greenwashing reduces trust in sustainability and makes them skeptical of all environmental claims. Some reported disengaging from sustainability content entirely.

6. Skill Needs

Participants requested:

- A clear list of legitimate certifications
- A breakdown of common misleading terms
- Simple ways to check authenticity

Summary: FG2 adults displayed strong skepticism and described feeling overwhelmed by sustainability marketing. Their vulnerability lies in reliance on packaging cues and lack of knowledge about certifications. They need straightforward, demystified guidance.

3.4.3. FOCUS GROUP 3

Participant Profile: Adult educators, youth trainers, vocational teachers, and facilitators in community and employment programs.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Educators showed high conceptual clarity and were able to differentiate between intentional and unintentional greenwashing.

Common examples given included:

- Food brands claiming carbon neutrality
- Greenwashing in school supplies
- “Eco” cleaning products with harmful ingredients
- “Sustainable” airline promotions

These correspond to **Selective Disclosure**, **No Proof**, and **Hidden Trade-Off**.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Trainers emphasized the need for transparency, measurable impact, and reliable certifications. They criticized emotional appeals and manipulative language.

3. Experience with Green Products

Many educators had encountered misleading sustainability messaging in their teaching materials, workplace procurement, and daily consumption.

4. Decision-Making

Trainers used a more structured approach:

- Checking certifications

- Reviewing supply chain information
- Fact-checking claims through reputable sources

5. Impact on Trust

Educators expressed concern that greenwashing undermines students' and adults' trust and complicates environmental education.

6. Skill Needs

Educators requested:

- Teaching-ready materials
- Critical thinking tools
- Sector-specific case studies
- Visual explanations for learners

Summary: FG3 trainers showed the strongest analytical understanding and could identify advanced greenwashing tactics. Their main barrier is the lack of structured educational tools to teach these concepts effectively.

3.4.4. FOCUS GROUP 4

Participant Profile: Adults of various ages and backgrounds who participated in an informal dinner and provided written questionnaire responses.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Participants were moderately familiar with greenwashing, describing it as “half-truths” or “commercial manipulation.”

Common examples given included:

- Eco-friendly dish soaps in plastic bottles
- Supermarkets advertising “zero waste” aisles
- Products advertised as “healthy” but heavily processed

These match **Vagueness**, **Greening the Image**, and **Irrelevance**.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Participants viewed sustainability as important, but often misused by companies. Some saw sustainability claims as a “fashion trend,” questioning whether companies genuinely care.

3. Experience with Green Products

Participants had bought eco-marketed products and later felt disappointed, citing misleading claims in food, hygiene, and cleaning goods.

4. Decision-Making

Most decisions were made based on packaging, color associations (green, brown), and price. Verification of claims was minimal.

5. Impact on Trust

Greenwashing led participants to feel cynical and disillusioned. They expressed uncertainty about how to distinguish truth from marketing.

6. Skill Needs

Participants requested:

- Basic eco-label guides
- Clear definitions of sustainability terms
- Simple ways to check product authenticity

Summary: FG4 adults showed low-to-moderate literacy and strong vulnerability to visual manipulation. Their main need is basic eco-label education and clearer definitions.

3.4.5. INTRA-COUNTRY COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS: SPAIN

All Spanish focus groups revealed strong skepticism toward sustainability claims and widespread difficulty distinguishing genuine efforts from misleading marketing. Adults in FG1 and FG2 demonstrated intuitive recognition of deception but lacked the structured knowledge needed to evaluate environmental claims effectively. FG4 adults showed similar limitations, relying heavily on packaging cues and superficial indicators. Trainers in FG3 displayed the highest level of conceptual understanding and were most capable of identifying advanced greenwashing tactics, including selective disclosure and carbon-neutrality misrepresentation. Decision-making across adult groups was primarily influenced by price, packaging, and brand familiarity, while trainers employed more systematic verification techniques. Trust was fragile across all groups, with greenwashing leading to disengagement and doubts about the credibility of sustainability messaging. All groups requested visual guides, certification explanations, and simplified evaluation tools to support more informed decision-making.

3.4.6. SPAIN – FINAL SUMMARY

Spain's focus groups reveal a cohesive pattern:

- **Adults possess intuitive awareness but low technical literacy**, making them vulnerable to vague terminology, misleading visuals, and false labels.
- **Educators/trainers demonstrate the strongest conceptual mastery**, able to identify deceptive tactics and needing structured teaching tools.
- Participants across all groups were especially vulnerable to: **Vagueness, Greening the Image, Irrelevance, No Proof, False Labels, and Hidden Trade-Off.**
- **Trust in sustainability messaging is fragile**, with participants expressing frustration and skepticism.
- **Local and transparent brands receive higher trust** compared to large corporations and supermarket chains.
- Participants strongly requested **visual guides, certification explanations, clear terminology definitions, and practical consumer tools.**

Spain's findings underscore the importance of developing highly visual, accessible, and pedagogical materials for WP4, and they provide target areas for WP3's collection of real-world greenwashing practices.

3.5. TÜRKİYE

Türkiye conducted four focus groups comprising three adult consumer groups (FG1, FG2, FG3) and one group of adult educators and trainers (FG4). While the national patterns closely resemble those observed in Mediterranean partner countries, the Turkish findings offer important additional insights into how local consumers and educators interpret and respond to greenwashing in a rapidly evolving market. The subsections below provide a detailed account of each focus group using a consistent analytical structure, followed by an integrated synthesis that captures Türkiye's specific trends, consumer vulnerabilities, and training priorities.

3.5.1. FOCUS GROUP 1

Participant Profile: Six adults from diverse backgrounds, including university students, young professionals, and employed adults. Their familiarity with sustainability varied.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Participants were familiar with sustainability-related phrases but not the formal concept of greenwashing. Once examples were presented, they recognized misleading practices easily.

Common examples given included:

- Household cleaning products labeled as “eco-friendly” without certification
- Grocery products using green leaves, trees, or “nature-friendly” imagery
- Clothing claiming to be “100% organic cotton” without transparency
- Energy providers advertising renewable energy while expanding fossil fuel activities

These correspond to **Vagueness**, **Greening the Image**, and **No Proof** strategies.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Participants viewed sustainability as important but frequently misused in marketing. They expressed skepticism toward large companies' environmental messaging, especially in food and cosmetics.

3. Experience with Green Products

Participants often purchased eco-marketed products but later realized claims were unclear or inconsistent with ingredients, packaging, or sourcing.

4. Decision-Making

Purchasing decisions were based on price, brand familiarity, packaging design, and perceived product safety. Verification of claims was limited. Local producers were trusted more than large supermarket brands.

5. Impact on Trust

Greenwashing resulted in reduced trust toward companies and sustainability messaging in general. Participants described feeling misled or manipulated.

6. Skill Needs

Participants requested:

- Clear explanations of eco-labels
- Lists of credible certifications
- Visual tools to recognize misleading packaging
- Guides for interpreting environmental claims

Summary: FG1 adults showed intuitive awareness of misleading sustainability claims but lacked the vocabulary and frameworks to evaluate them. Visual cues strongly influenced their decisions, and they were skeptical of large companies. They need tools that simplify certification and enhance their ability to identify misleading claims.

3.5.2. FOCUS GROUP 2

Participant Profile: Nine adults aged, including service-sector employees, early-career professionals, and individuals with moderate sustainability awareness.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Participants described greenwashing as deceptive marketing or exaggerated environmental claims.

Common examples given included:

- Plastic-packaged items labeled as “environmentally friendly”
- Fast fashion brands promoting sustainability collections
- Products claiming to be fully recyclable
- Exaggerated recycling campaigns by large corporations

These reflect **Irrelevance**, **Greening the Image**, and **Selective Disclosure**.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Participants viewed sustainability as an increasing trend but were unsure which claims were trustworthy. They believed many companies misuse environmental language.

3. Experience with Green Products

Participants frequently encountered confusing eco-labels and contradictory packaging designs. Many purchased “green” products only to later question their authenticity.

4. Decision-Making

Most participants relied on:

- Packaging and color schemes
- Price
- Brand familiarity
- Social media influencers
- Verification of claims was minimal.

5. Impact on Trust

Participants reported feeling disappointed and less willing to trust sustainability claims after instances of greenwashing. Trust was highest in small local brands.

6. Skill Needs

Participants requested:

- Easy-to-use consumer guides
- Apps or websites to verify claims
- Simple definitions of greenwashing terms

Examples of misleading claims in the Turkish market

Summary: FG2 adults expressed strong skepticism and relied heavily on visual cues rather than verified information. They recognized manipulative marketing but lacked confidence to validate claims. Their priority needs are certification knowledge and practical verification tools.

3.5.3. FOCUS GROUP 3

Participant Profile: Eight adults aged 20–35 including postgraduate students, teachers, and administrative staff. This group had higher sustainability interest.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Participants were familiar with greenwashing through news, social media, and high-profile corporate scandals.

Common examples given included:

- “Organic cotton” claims in fast fashion
- Airlines promoting “carbon-neutral” flights
- Cleaning products marketed as natural despite synthetic ingredients
- Food items marketed as “farm-style” despite industrial sourcing

These closely relate to **Bait & Switch**, **Hidden Trade-Off**, and **False Labels**.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Participants emphasized the need for measurable, transparent sustainability actions rather than emotional marketing or buzzwords.

3. Experience with Green Products

Participants recounted purchasing green-marketed products only to discover inconsistencies or incomplete information.

4. Decision-Making

Their decisions were informed by:

Research

NGO reports

Independent sustainability bloggers

Trust in small, transparent producers

5. Impact on Trust

Greenwashing led to frustration and cynicism, with participants doubting the sincerity of sustainability initiatives.

6. Skill Needs

Participants requested:

- Clear sustainability metrics
- Structured guides for analyzing supply chains
- Reliable certification and label lists

Summary: FG3 adults showed more advanced critical thinking and verification behaviors. They maintained a strong interest in sustainability but remained uncertain due to inconsistent corporate data. Their main need is structured tools for validating environmental claims.

3.5.4. FOCUS GROUP 4

Participant Profile: Twelve adult educators, including university lecturers, trainers, adult learning facilitators, and NGO educators.

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Greenwashing

Educators demonstrated the highest conceptual clarity. They described different forms of intentional and unintentional greenwashing.

Common examples given included:

- Fashion companies exaggerating sustainability achievements
- Tourism businesses promoting “eco-holidays” without evidence
- Corporate use of misleading eco-labels
- Misrepresentation of recycling rates

These correspond to **Selective Disclosure**, **No Proof**, **Hidden Trade-Off**, and **Greening the Image**.

2. Perceptions of Sustainability & Claims

Educators stressed the need for consistent standards, evidence-based communication, and improved public literacy.

3. Experience with Green Products

Many educators encountered misleading sustainability claims in their professional fields — such as school supplies, educational materials, and tourism services.

4. Decision-Making

Educators relied on structured methods:

- Certification verification
- Supply-chain evaluation
- Reviewing sustainability reports
- Checking independent audits

5. Impact on Trust

Greenwashing impacted their ability to teach sustainability effectively, creating confusion among learners and reducing trust.

6. Skill Needs

They requested:

- Pedagogical materials
- Visual literacy tools
- Sector-specific examples from Türkiye
- Structured frameworks for teaching critical consumption

Summary: FG4 educators demonstrated advanced analytical understanding. Their main need is structured teaching materials and Turkish market-specific case studies to educate learners effectively.

3.5.5. INTRA-COUNTRY COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS: TÜRKİYE

Across all focus groups, adults exhibited a strong intuitive ability to detect misleading environmental messages but lacked structured tools and vocabulary to evaluate claims. FG1 and FG2 adults were primarily influenced by packaging design and color cues, while FG3 participants displayed deeper analytical skills and more extensive verification behaviors. FG4 educators showed the highest conceptual understanding, identifying complex tactics such as selective disclosure, false labeling, and misleading carbon-neutral claims.

Decision-making in adult groups relied heavily on price, familiarity, and superficial visual cues, while educators used systematic, evidence-based methods. Trust was fragile across all groups, with widespread skepticism toward sustainability claims from large corporations. Local or regional brands were perceived as more credible.

All groups consistently requested visual tools, certification guidance, and simplified explanations to help evaluate environmental claims. There was a clear demand for structured consumer education in Türkiye.

3.5.6. TÜRKIYE – FINAL SUMMARY

Türkiye's focus groups reveal the following patterns:

- **Adults have intuitive recognition but limited formal understanding** of greenwashing, making them vulnerable to vague claims and misleading packaging.
- **Educators exhibit advanced conceptual clarity**, able to identify complex greenwashing tactics such as Hidden Trade-Off, Selective Disclosure, False Labels, and Greening the Image.
- Participants across all groups were most vulnerable to: **Vagueness, Greening the Image, No Proof, Hidden Trade-Off, False Labels, and Irrelevance.**
- **Trust is stronger in small or local producers**, while multinational companies and large retailers face skepticism.
- Greenwashing leads to significant and lasting loss of trust, reducing consumer engagement with sustainability claims.
- Participants expressed strong interest in:
 - Visual guides and infographics
 - Recognition tools for the 10 greenwashing types
 - Clear certification and eco-label explanations
 - Practical consumer checklists
 - Türkiye-specific case studies and examples

These findings will directly support WP3's mapping of real-world examples and guide WP4's Anti-Greenwashing Handbook development, ensuring alignment with consumer needs and educational gaps in Türkiye.

4.COMPARATIVE CROSS-COUNTRY ANALYSIS

The findings across Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Türkiye reveal both shared tendencies and important contextual differences in how adults and adult educators understand, interpret,

and respond to greenwashing. Despite cultural and market variations, strong cross-country patterns emerged that provide a meaningful foundation for the next stages of the GreenCons project.

4.1. OVERALL AWARENESS OF GREENWASHING

Across all countries, **adult consumers showed intuitive but incomplete awareness** of greenwashing. Most participants had encountered misleading environmental claims but lacked precise terminology or a structured understanding of the phenomenon. Awareness was strongest when participants were presented with concrete examples—such as nature-themed packaging, “eco” labels without evidence, or highly promoted “green” product lines that contradicted a company’s overall environmental footprint.

Adult educators and trainers demonstrated **significantly higher conceptual awareness**. Participants from Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Türkiye all showed an ability to identify complex tactics such as carbon-neutrality misrepresentation, selective disclosure of lifecycle data, and the use of pseudo-certifications. Educators consistently recognized the systemic nature of greenwashing and its implications for consumer literacy.

Overall, **awareness is present but uneven**, with educators acting as a key multiplier group capable of transferring knowledge to adult learners.

4.2. CONSUMER TRUST AND PERCEPTION OF COMPANIES

Trust in environmental claims was **consistently low across all partner countries**. Participants expressed skepticism toward:

- Large multinational corporations
- Fast fashion brands
- Energy providers (especially fossil-fuel-based companies claiming to be “green”)
- Supermarkets and mass retail chains

In contrast, trust was generally **higher for local, small-scale, or regional producers**, particularly in Italy, Spain, and Türkiye, where proximity and personal experience strongly shaped credibility.

Many participants believed that companies use sustainability **primarily as a marketing strategy**, rather than as a genuine environmental commitment. This skepticism extended to certifications; while trusted third-party labels were seen as more credible, many adults struggled to differentiate legitimate labels from false or self-issued ones.

Across countries, the perception that companies routinely overstate their environmental performance created **widespread confusion and distrust**, reinforcing the need for transparent communication.

4.3. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TOWARD GREEN PRODUCTS

Consumer behaviour toward green-marketed products was influenced primarily by **price, convenience, packaging, and brand familiarity**, rather than verified sustainability attributes. While many participants expressed a desire to make environmentally responsible choices, actual purchasing patterns often relied on superficial cues such as:

- Green or earthy packaging colors
- Nature imagery
- Words like “eco,” “natural,” “bio,” or “green”
- Claims of recyclability or compostability
- “Organic-style” product design

This behaviour reflects a **high vulnerability to visual and linguistic cues** across all countries.

More advanced verification behaviours, such as reading ingredient lists, checking certifications, or reviewing company sustainability reports, were largely confined to educators and participants with higher sustainability literacy.

In all countries, participants reported that the market makes it difficult to distinguish sustainable options from misleading ones, contributing to decision fatigue and inconsistent consumer behaviour.

4.4. IMPACT OF GREENWASHING ON BEHAVIOUR & TRUST

Greenwashing had a **strong emotional and behavioral impact** across all partner countries. Participants consistently described feeling:

- Frustrated
- Misled
- Manipulated
- Disappointed
- Cynical

Once a participant discovered that a company had greenwashed, this frequently resulted in **permanent brand avoidance**. In several focus groups, especially in Italy and Türkiye, participants described losing trust not only in the brand but also in the broader concept of sustainability marketing.

Repeated exposure to greenwashing contributed to **trust fatigue**, reducing the perceived credibility of:

- Sustainability labels
- Environmental campaigns
- Company commitments
- Public messaging around environmental initiatives

The cross-country finding is clear: **“Greenwashing undermines the broader sustainability transition by eroding public trust and discouraging responsible consumption.”**

4.5. COMPETENCE GAPS IN IDENTIFYING GREENWASHING

Across all five countries, several competence gaps emerged consistently:

1. Low label literacy

Participants struggled to differentiate:

- Real vs. false certifications
- Third-party vs. company-issued eco-labels
- Regulatory vs. marketing terminology

2. Difficulty evaluating vague or ambiguous claims

Terms such as “eco-friendly,” “natural,” “clean,” “green,” or “sustainable” were widely misunderstood.

3. Limited understanding of lifecycle impacts

Most adults lacked the ability to evaluate:

- Supply chain transparency
- Resource use
- Waste generation
- Carbon footprint accountability

4. Over-reliance on visual cues

Packaging aesthetics strongly influenced consumer decisions across all countries.

5. Low confidence and motivation

Participants often felt that verifying claims was:

- Too time-consuming
- Too technical
- Beyond their ability

6. Knowledge gaps in identifying the 10 types of greenwashing

Adults recognized surface-level tactics but rarely understood complex strategies such as Hidden Trade-Off or Selective Disclosure.

Educators had far fewer competence gaps but still lacked **methodologies and frameworks for teaching** anti-greenwashing concepts effectively.

4.6. SKILLS AND TRAINING NEEDS

Across the five countries, participants consistently expressed a need for:

For Adults:

- Clear, visual guides explaining eco-labels
- Step-by-step tools for evaluating environmental claims
- Practical examples of the 10 greenwashing types
- User-friendly checklists for identifying misleading marketing
- Guidance for interpreting vague sustainability terminology
- Access to reliable digital tools, verification apps, or trusted certification databases

For Educators and Trainers:

- Structured pedagogical frameworks
- Ready-to-use classroom materials
- Case studies and real-world examples
- Visual literacy tools for decoding imagery-based greenwashing
- Critical-thinking exercises tailored to adult learners
- Training on how to teach environmental communication responsibly

Across countries, adults and educators called for **simple, trustworthy, and evidence-based training tools** to reduce vulnerability to misleading sustainability messaging.

CONCLUSION

The cross-country analysis demonstrates that adults across Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Türkiye share common vulnerabilities to greenwashing and face similar barriers to identifying misleading environmental claims. While awareness of greenwashing exists at an intuitive level, formal competence and confidence remain limited. Educators and trainers represent a particularly strong leverage point, acting as multipliers who can transmit accurate knowledge and critical-thinking skills to diverse adult populations.

These insights form the foundation for the next stages of the GreenCons Project.

The cross-country findings of WP2 provide a solid empirical foundation for the work to be carried out in WP3. The focus groups reveal the specific forms of greenwashing that adults most frequently encounter, the sectors in which misleading claims are most prevalent, and the visual and linguistic tactics that create consumer confusion. These insights clarify which types of real-world practices need to be documented, categorised, and analysed in WP3 to ensure that the collected examples genuinely reflect the challenges experienced by adult learners. WP2 therefore establishes a clear direction for WP3, guiding the selection of representative cases, country-specific examples, and complex forms of greenwashing that must be mapped to support evidence-based learning. The findings strongly guide WP3 in several ways:

1. **Selection of Real-World Examples:** WP3 should collect examples corresponding to the greenwashing types most frequently encountered by participants:
 - Vagueness
 - Greening the Image
 - No Proof
 - Hidden Trade-Off
 - Selective Disclosure
 - False Labels
2. **Country-Specific Case Inclusion:** Participants referenced sector-specific concerns (e.g., energy, fast fashion, food), indicating the need for WP3 to gather examples from these industries in each country.
3. **Visual and Linguistic Patterns:** WP3 should document how misleading sustainability cues rely heavily on:
 - Color (green/brown tones)
 - Nature imagery

- Packaging minimalism
 - Buzzwords
4. **Inclusion of Both Intentional and Unintentional Greenwashing:** Educators highlighted that some greenwashing stems from poor communication rather than malice; WP3 should reflect this nuance.
 5. **Mapping Certification Confusion:** Examples of false labels, pseudo-certifications, and unclear environmental seals should be prioritized.

WP3 will therefore create an evidence-based repository of examples that reflect the realities and vulnerabilities identified in WP2.

The findings from WP2 also directly inform the structure and pedagogical design of WP4, which will develop the Anti-Greenwashing Handbook. The identified gaps in consumer awareness, the reliance on superficial cues, and the widespread confusion around eco-labels and sustainability terminology highlight the necessity for practical, accessible, and visually supported learning materials. WP2 demonstrates that adults need tools that demystify greenwashing, while educators require structured methodologies for teaching critical consumption skills. These insights ensure that WP4 responds precisely to user needs, translating the empirical evidence gathered in WP2 into clear guidance, real-life examples, and actionable competencies for both adult learners and educators. WP4 will translate WP2 findings into **practical learning tools**. Based on cross-country needs, the handbook should include:

1. A Clear Explanation of the 10 Types of Greenwashing

Using simple language, real examples, and visual illustrations.

2. A Consumer-Friendly Eco-Label Guide Including:

- Verified EU labels
- National certifications
- Examples of misleading or false labels

3. Visual Literacy Tools

Exercises teaching adults how images, colours, and branding create false impressions of sustainability.

4. Step-by-Step Checklists

- To help adults evaluate claims quickly and confidently:
- “Is this claim vague?”
- “Is there third-party evidence?”
- “Does the whole product lifecycle support the claim?”

5. Case Studies from WP3

Real examples from partner countries to enhance relatability.

6. Trainer Modules -Guidance for adult educators, including:

- Lesson plans
- Activities
- Discussion prompts
- Critical-thinking exercises

7. Accessible, Inclusive Language

The handbook should be fully understandable without technical knowledge.

WP4 will ultimately equip adults and educators with the skills needed to confidently identify, question, and challenge greenwashing in everyday life.

ANNEXES

- Annex 1: [A2.1 Methodology for Designing the Focus Group Script](#)