

Acknowledgements

This handbook aims to support education and advocacy for a sustainable future through values-based dialogues on and explorations of sustainability, relying on tests and experiments conducted by the ten partners in the Urban Age Ethics and Social Inclusion (URGE) project. The project members most directly involved in the development of the method hold a multitude of linguistic, cultural, national, and regional backgrounds, and professionally represent diverse fields such as social work, social work education, pedagogy, social design, photography, psychology, and yoga amongst others. This invaluable diversity has greatly enriched the development of the process and its method. In addition, the participants in the pilot tests and experiments have consisted of students, social workers, service users, and other stakeholders in urban social work and urban development, many of whom have also contributed to the research within the URGE project and the community of support surrounding the project.

Animated illustrations in this handbook originate from the URGE project animated film, *Undrowned: Stewart's Journey Towards Eco-Social Work* (2026).

For more information and open-source resources on education and advocacy, please visit www.urbanurge.eu.

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Introduction

VISION is a method intended for use in education and advocacy aimed at creating a sustainable future. Through reflective dialogues on and explorations of the values related to sustainability, VISION urges participants to turn towards what is important to them. Furthermore, by systematically mirroring and reflecting on these values from different angles, participants listen deeply to each other and learn together. This reflective process works to create a more solid foundation for participants—a form of ‘self-gravity’ to their values base, supportive both in educational settings and when taking part in change processes more broadly. At the same time, VISION aims to protect the complexity and diversity of a group during such processes, given that these qualities are under extreme pressure in our increasingly polarised world. The overarching idea is that change for a more sustainable future can emerge from reflecting on one’s values and, consequently—over time—participants will think and act accordingly. VISION does not dictate to individuals what they should think nor what they should do. Instead, it insists that reflection is greatly needed and that we, as human beings, must relate actively to the kind of future we wish for ourselves and for all living beings on our planet.

Consequently, the tools outlined in this handbook are designed to cultivate stronger voices in relation to sustainability, including those often underrepresented. This is achieved not only by enabling individuals to articulate their thoughts and values more clearly, but also by fostering an environment in which respect and active listening are prioritised, allowing for meaningful collective reflections to take hold. The VISION method can be used to strengthen and build togetherness in a group or community already engaged with each other. It was also developed to create opportunities for dialogue amongst people who would otherwise not have listened to nor learnt from each other. Moreover, such individuals may not have even met, given that one contemporary problem is that increasingly we only engage with people who share our own ideas and outlook on the world. This development is fuelled by the growing use of technologies and social media as the primary source for information, and in urban areas by commercialisation, financialisation, and gentrification, further pushing vulnerable populations to the margins. In this light, creating spaces and places where people from diverse backgrounds can meet, means working directly with the social dimension of sustainability. Thus, the goal of VISION is just that: to provide a method for genuine meetings which are simultaneously as neutral and as objective as possible. Consequently, these tools are also created for use in scenarios where individuals from varying power dynamics and backgrounds can come together to engage on equitable terms, such as during public hearings, local community celebrations, or other kinds of community activities.

The VISION method was developed to support the education of agents of change for a sustainable future and to give social workers and educators alike a method which can be used to include sustainability perspectives into their practice. As such, its focus on advocacy as well as group and community work remains methodically rooted in the social work tradition as described below, although the method can be used by anyone who wishes to educate and advocate for change and for a sustainable future.

The roots of VISION

Professional engagement to actively promote the understanding that all members of society should thrive and enjoy equal rights has remained central to the social work profession since it was founded at the beginning of the twentieth century. As such, educating and advocating for social change can be inspired both by the tradition of social work and the current global agenda of the profession. The ideals and values in VISION are deeply rooted in the values and perspectives

outlined in the global definition of social work, articulated by the International Federation of Social Workers:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.
(International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2014)

This most-recent definition of the profession places Indigenous knowledge on equal footing with knowledge from the social sciences and humanities, which have otherwise dominated the general outlook on knowledge for centuries. Indigenous means *'from the land'* and thus the definition connects the practice of social work to nature and the planet. This represents an ontological turn for the profession, which has since greatly impacted global bodies of social work. Furthermore, this scope of understanding has resulted in inviting individuals from all corners of the world on equitable terms into the profession of social work, in pursuit of establishing a more inclusive global community of social work practice. It is, therefore, essential that we disclose upfront that VISION was developed within the European tradition of social work and that we draw our main inspiration from protreptic, a philosophical practice originating in ancient Greece. The protreptic tradition specifically underscores the importance of promoting the common good, a fundamental principle for many philosophers at that time who sought to identify effective strategies for cultivating a cohesive society. Interest, however, extended beyond Greece to our times; thus, Indigenous knowledge from various European nations and other regions of the world embodies similar principles, emphasising the importance of interconnectedness and reciprocity vital to a society's prosperity.

To give the profession a common global direction, IFSW, together with the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), also formulated the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development Framework for 2020–2030, under the title *Co-Building Inclusive Social Transformation* (IFSW et al., 2020). Every other year, a sub-theme from a different region of the world is selected and celebrated at the annual World Social Work Day event held in March, encouraging members of the profession to learn from their colleagues in diverse contexts. In 2020–2022, the theme was *Ubuntu*, focusing on the traditions and philosophies of the Sub-Saharan African continent, encapsulated in the phrase 'I am because we are.' In 2024, the theme was *Buen Vivir*, highlighting Meso- and South American cultures, positing that true wellbeing is attainable only through being part of a community that lives in harmony with nature and collaborates towards balanced development. Most recently, in 2026 at the time of writing, the theme is *Co-Building Hope and Harmony: A Harambee Call to Unite a Divided Society*, which further highlights the vital role of social work in bringing people together across communities, cultures, and systems to shape a more inclusive and sustainable tomorrow. Other themes have explored the importance of solidarity across generations, the importance of co-building processes, and the importance of sustainability more generally.

In this way, the joint global bodies of the social work profession have made important strides towards changing the agenda and ontology of the profession in globally inclusive ways since releasing the most-recent definition of the profession in 2014. This background laid the foundation for VISION, and we developed the method to give social workers concrete tools to promote these principles and values in their practice. Developed under the Erasmus+ KA2 *Urban Age Ethics for Inclusion* (URGE) project (2023–2026), our primary purpose was to examine the ways in which social work can address the global environmental crisis, largely related to an extractive

economy mirrored in new waves of urbanisation. Our scope rests on the principle that this and other crises of our times, related to, for instance, disconnectedness and capitalisation, require agents of change who can initially *think* differently, laying the groundwork for imagining another kind of future and eventually beginning to act in order to change it.