

WHAT PSYCHOLOGISTS CAN DO ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE: UKRAINIAN EXPERIENCE

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Our Climate Working Group was created at the Ukrainian National Psychological Association in 2019 after the International Summit on Psychology and Global Health: A Leader in Climate Action. The summit encouraged the psychologists to look at climate change from another perspective and mobilize the existing resources in order to fight it. New areas of work always open a way for new opportunities, which can also be rather challenging due to their novelty and absence of the usual algorithms for initiating an action. We decided to start acting on the community level and focused on using psychologists as our “agents of change”, since every day they get in touch with a large number of people who appreciate their opinion. We launched [an information campaign for psychologists about the impact of climate change on mental health](#). The goal of this was to make the specialists, who deal with mental health problems every day, aware of the climate crisis and share their knowledge in order to change the habits in the community.

The first step was gathering a group of passionate and eco-aware psychologists-volunteers. Then we started to establish contacts with local ecologists, climatologists, and non-governmental organisations. Another focus for our group was to strengthen the communication with media experts and monitor relevant events, where we could present our idea to the public. We collaborated with several local ecological initiatives in order to communicate the connection between environmental problems and mental health.

Prior to starting the work we conducted a focus group on how the topic of climate change is perceived by the public. According to the results, the majority of participants considered it boring and conceptually distant from the topic of mental health. Almost all of our colleagues acknowledged the feeling of complete powerlessness in resolving this issue. So, we decided that our campaign should be focused on showing the link between climate change and mental health on examples that are relatable to our daily experiences, hoping to provide the psychologists with tools and insights that are making the change possible on an individual level.

As a result we formed [guidelines for creating eco-friendly offices, centres and conference-halls](#). This document contains clear explanations of the problem,

tips and ideas for specialists on how to make their workplaces more eco-friendly. This document is also available in English for colleagues from other countries as a potential source for insight or a starting point for developing their own guidelines. In order to support this idea we also launched [an initiative](#) for those who want to promote eco-values at their workplace by creating a personalized poster (available for downloading on our website) and placing it in the common areas for colleagues and clients to be informed. Many psychologists, companies, centers, and schools from different parts of Ukraine took part in this initiative. Now their clients, coworkers, students, and pupils know more about the values of the place they're at and steps which they have done in order to contribute to the solving of the climate crisis.

Also we prepared [a guideline on fostering eco-values and forming an eco-friendly environmental mindset for psychologists](#). This document contains evidence-based advice for psychologists who work in different professional fields such as educational, organisational and clinical psychology. We proposed different ways for colleagues to promote their ecological values considering ethical rules and specificity of their work. This document is available in English too.

We also have been working on a series of short animations for a wide audience about different aspects of the environmental crisis and its influence on mental health. [The first episode](#) covers the topic of air pollution.

We have already done a lot, but we do not want to stop and we are open to the new opportunities. A group of members from our climate working group took part in the Psychsolutions competition - an international contest of global and innovative ideas in mental health organized by the American Psychological Association. Our team pitched an idea about creating [an online training course for psychologists, teachers and medical workers](#) from Eastern Europe about climate change and mental health. We got to the finals and won the People's Choice Award. With the support from the APA's office of international affairs our team is currently working on this training course.

Our experience shows that the topic of climate change can be really interesting and important for psychologists if we can offer contemporary evidence-based knowledge and real tools for changing behavior and sharing awareness of a problem.

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