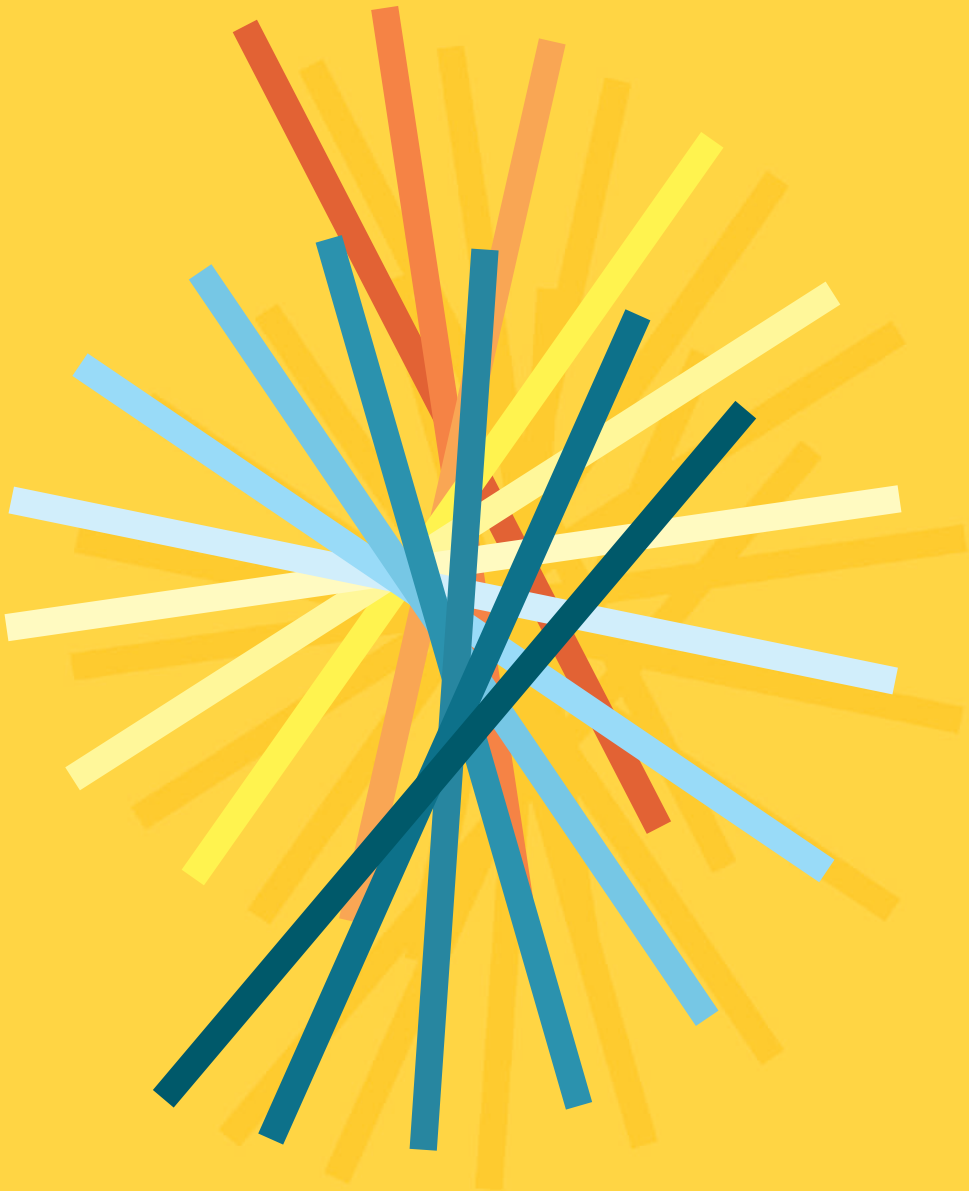
Sustainable Event
Guidelines



JINT

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS
THE POWER OF TOGETHER.

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

Welcome

Sustainability has become a topic of the utmost importance in EU policy. The launch of a European Green Deal and the addition of the green transition and climate action to the priorities of the European Youth Programmes (Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027) inspired JINT to make sustainability one of the core principles steering our work in the coming years.

JINT understands the term in a holistic way. **Sustainability is not limited to the environmental aspects and care for nature.** It includes economic factors (saving resources and money, reducing the economic burden, being happy with less, creating economic opportunity while respecting the environmental limits) and healthy living (enjoying healthy food, promoting physical activity, breathing clean air, drinking clean water, caring about mental health) as well.

Youth mobility activities not only provide valuable opportunities for organisations and participants to discuss, learn and reflect on environmental issues, climate change and other global challenges, but can also prove key in enabling youth to become changemakers and active citizens in the area of sustainability, at a local as well as international level. Besides that, Youth mobility activities support young people's voices in advocating for climate and social justice.

JINT launched this publication to inspire event and project organisers to make their learning mobility activities even more sustainable.

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Are you or will you be organising an event and do you want to do your best to make it as sustainable as possible? Then keep these guidelines close at hand from now on.

In the following pages you will discover a lot of ideas and tips about different aspects of event organisation. It would be an amazing act were you able to carry out all these engagements at once. Rome wasn't built in a day, so be patient, but yet ambitious, and get to work.

We have tried to provide tips which are more or less applicable to most events. But as every event has its own character, an adjustment from time to time is needed. We also share some inspirationally good practices.

Ultimately, we want to inspire you to look at your event through sustainable glasses and come up with actions and adjustments yourself.

The checklist accompanying these guidelines can help you through the planning phase of your event.

We are counting on you to help us add to this ongoing work in future.

And now...
time for action!

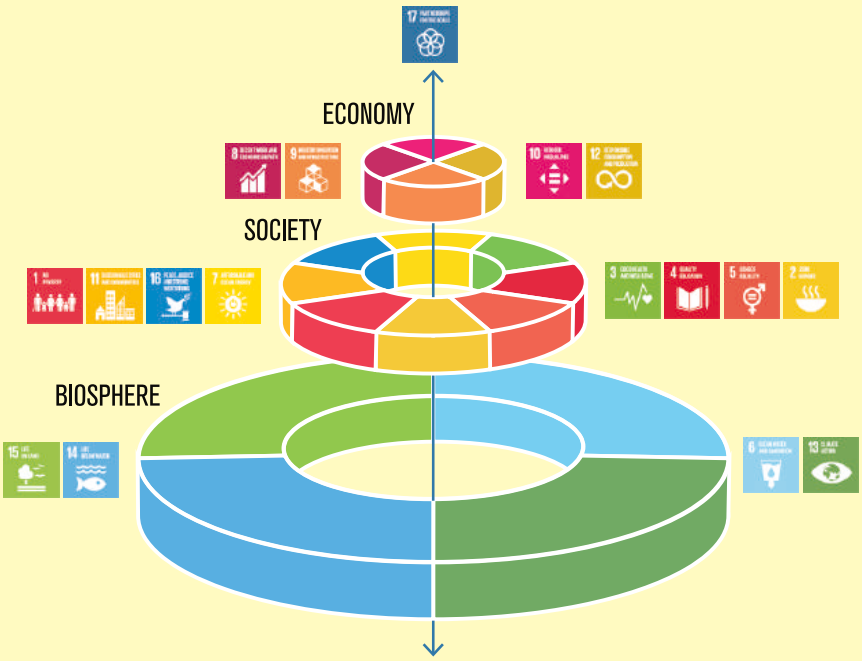
Introduction

Organising an event is often a fun and exciting experience. You have to think of 101 to-dos in a setting you often don't know too well. It goes without saying that bringing together dozens of people who travel, eat, sleep, work and relax creates a significant footprint. Not surprisingly, more and more efforts are being made worldwide to organise events in a sustainable way.

But what exactly is 'sustainable'?

It is a catch-all term which can be interpreted differently by everyone. In these guidelines, we rely on the wedding cake model of the Sustainable Development Goals. This model shows that a well-functioning economy can only run smoothly when it is part of a well-functioning and content community located within a healthy environment.

Or put more simply, we must ensure that we keep the climate and our environment healthy and resilient, so that all the inhabitants of our planet can live together in a sustainable way and enrich our communities.



Graphics by Jerker Lokrantz/Azote

There is much to say and discuss about sustainability, but in these guidelines, we want to focus on organising sustainable events within the European Youth Work context.

Online and/or offline

Let there be no doubt. Meeting others in real life remains the best way to engage in intercultural learning.

However, gone are the days when we took a plane to meet others briefly without wondering whether that particular trip adds enough real value. There is no doubt that international mobility has many benefits, but it also comes with costs for society. With global warming in mind, we should consider climate and environmental concerns before deciding to travel. Therefore, before you start planning an event and finding a good venue, it is important to assure yourself that a live meeting is sufficiently useful and necessary.

You should ask yourself whether an online alternative would not suffice for the transfer of required knowledge and skills. This is not always easy as you have to take several issues into account: what is the duration of the meeting or training? How important are group dynamics? What is the most inclusive solution? Will you see each other more than once? How many people will participate and do they have to travel long distances? And is there the possibility of combining multiple meetings?

Or in short: is it worth the resultant emissions and travel time invested?

These days a lot of online and hybrid formats and options are available. If you choose to meet (partially) online, you do need to prepare properly and specifically. You can find a lot of information and tips online on how to organise this smoothly and professionally.

Although we have based these guidelines on in-person meetings, a decision to organise the event (partially) online could be the one that brings about the biggest footprint reduction.

The search for a good venue

You can't be a good cook without a professional kitchen. If you want to organise a sustainable event, your venue needs to allow you to do that without any hassle.

Location

Your venue should be easily accessible without the need for a car (or taxi). The closer you are to a railway station, the better, as this is the most sustainable means of transport for medium to long distances. Check if participants can easily get from such transport hubs to your venue.

Be aware of public transport weekend schedules and of other larger events being organised simultaneously. If it is not an option to use public transport or walk to the venue, you'd need at the least an easy and achievable solution. For example, a shuttle bus, or an accessible bike or scooter rental system, if luggage is not an issue.

It is by far the easiest and, at the same time, most sustainable option to book a venue close to or at the same location as the overnight accommodation. If that is not possible, make sure that you can easily transfer the participants from one to the other.

Size and flexibility

It sounds logical, yet one of the simplest ways to reduce an event's footprint is often overlooked. The smaller your comfortable venue is, the less energy and lighting is needed. Having enough breakout space is a necessity but avoid an overly large venue.

It is helpful if you have access to the light- and temperature controls, as this allows you to lower the temperature or put a break on an overly enthusiastic air-conditioning system.

Check if the meeting rooms have access to natural light. It saves on lighting and creates a more meeting-friendly environment.

Accessibility

Although of the utmost importance, it is so easy to overlook the accessibility of a venue, so pay attention to this. Even when your participants don't have any significant needs, it is good to nudge venue owners towards taking action to optimise the accessibility of their venue.

The most important thing is to assure yourself that no physical obstacles impede entering the venue or moving around inside the building. Surfaces used by participants should not be uneven. Where staircases are present, a lift is needed. Alternatively, you can check out the possibility of always meeting on the ground floor. Halls, pathways, and doors should also allow a wheelchair to pass through. Accessible toilets are, of course, a must.

You can find a lot more information on accessibility checks in the SALTO ID publication 'Engage in Inclusion'.

Catering options

Check with the venue holder whether they provide catering or if you, as event organiser, are responsible for food and drink.

If the venue holder takes care of the catering, you need to make good arrangements beforehand. Stress that you want to organise a sustainable event and try to work together to make this happen. Often, venue holders don't understand themselves what 'sustainability' means but are open to suggestions.

At least check if it is possible to serve tap water, make sure that cutlery is reusable and that vegetarian, plant-based and/or halal food can be served.

If some requests are not possible or too expensive, offer to take care of those yourself.

Sometimes, you'll have to work with an external caterer, or you will have to look after the catering yourself. If so, check if the venue is set up for this and will allow you to organise this smoothly. Check if there is a kitchen area, sufficient tap water points, a coffee percolator, etc. When you bring your own cook, your expectations are more likely to be met. Just be aware that plant-based cuisine requires more experience than meat-based cooking.

Sustainability charter

When a venue 'breaths' sustainability, it is always easier to get all participants into a sustainable flow. When you are evaluating the possible venues, check to see if your favourite venue has its own sustainability charter. A Green Globe or Green Key certification is always a very good indication that it does.

If no certificate exists, check that the venue has an energy and water conservation programme. A good energy performance certificate (EPC) helps you assess if the venue is well insulated, has energy-saving measures, a smart light plan and whether solar panels have been installed. Sustainable materials and second-hand furniture are also often easy to identify.

Furthermore, check if there is easy access to tap water and that waste can be easily separated if it's not preventable.

Although it is not easy to assess, try to ensure that workers' rights are respected, and that the venue re-invests in the local community. Check whether they collaborate with sustainable partners and/or social organisations.

Overnight accommodation

For overnight events, a good night's sleep is a must. Depending on your guests and the type of event, you may either like to offer an overnight stay in your spare bedroom, a hostel, youth lodgings or a nice bedroom in a hotel.

It is not hard to guess which types of sleeping arrangements have the lowest footprint. A hostel bed generally scores far better than a private room. The more stars a hotel has, the more luxury, which means a significantly higher footprint.

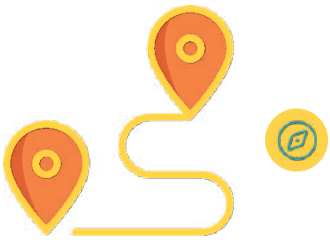
Choosing your accommodation is like choosing an event venue. Pick one that has an eye for sustainability in all its forms: Is it energy efficient? Do they ensure that rooms and linen are not overly cleaned? Is the ho(s)tel accessible? Do they offer veggie/plant-based breakfast options? Do they respect their workers' rights, etc.?

It is not always easy to figure that out by yourself. In the hospitality industry, the international Green Key label can help you find your sustainable sleeping partner. In Brussels, the 'ecodynamic company' label is given to enterprises which adopt sustainable policies and practices and demonstrate a good environmental performance.

Non-commercial youth lodgings are often a great and affordable choice for groups. Due to the communal sleeping quarters, focus on essential services and flexibility on offer, they are useful partners for a sustainable event. In Flanders, Kampas helps you screen most youth accommodation options.

"We informed the participants of the 'GOT NEXT' training course about the green policy of the hotel in Ostend where they were staying. For every day that the hotel crew didn't have to clean the room and change the towels, a tree would be planted.

On the last training day, we could reveal that the efforts of the group made it possible for 70 trees to be planted! That's a small GOT NEXT forest. More info on the project and where the trees are planted can be found on **hotelsfortrees.com**"



Green travelling

Sustainable modes of transport

How to travel to the event? By foot or bike of course! The carbon footprint will then be close to zero. However, since this is not an option for practically any participant, it is good to inform them about other sustainable travel options.

As an organiser, it is important to steer participants towards sustainable modes of transport, as travel accounts for a large part of an international event's footprint.

However, comparing emissions based on your mode of transport is not as easy as you would think. A simple example: travelling in a half-empty car or plane doubles your carbon footprint. Nonetheless, the following figure gives you a good idea of the CO_2 emissions per passenger kilometer for the most common modes of transport.

CO2 emissions per traveled kilometer per passenger

Mode of transport	CO_2e gr/km
on foot	0
bike	0
ferry (without car)	19
HST	23
train	30
bus	33
airplane > 2500 km	122
ferry with car	132
car	137
airplane 700-2500 km	165
airplane < 700 km	246

Source: 2020, DELFT, DEFRA

Clearly, taking a plane should be the last option for participants. Fortunately, in Europe, public transport is a viable choice for many of us. The sustainable rule of thumb is to opt for public transport where it does not take you more than eight hours.

Rail travel

However, booking international trains does not run as smoothly as reserving flights. Often, you'll have to book the different train journeys separately and will have to make sure you don't miss your connections. Luckily, there are some websites that help you find the perfect travel route.

First stop: the websites of the international train companies. www.b-europe.com is a good starting point for trips in Western Europe. Looking for a website packed with all kinds of train information? www.seat61.com is the place to be.

If you would like to compare and combine options (train + bus for example), make sure to check rome2rio.com or thetrainline.com. The staff of the 'Train Shop' take it a step further and actively go hunting for the best deal. For a small fee, they will put together an itinerary and thereafter make all bookings for you. Their website also gives you a good overview of your options, including European night trains.

Be aware that international trains are less subsidised than flights and are therefore often pricier. Therefore, inform participants as soon as possible about the start and end dates of the event, so that they can book their tickets in time. You can often find the cheapest tickets two to three months before departure. Also inform participants that they can often get a discount if younger than 26, although that varies from country to country. As an organisation, you might consider assuming a portion of the participants' sustainable travel costs, if they are using public transport.

Taking the bus

In recent years, we have seen the growth of a large network of international bus connections. With ample legroom, Wi-Fi connectivity and interesting departure and arrival points, these international buses have attractive features. Their (often) low prices allows them to compete fully and sustainably with cars, planes and trains. Again, it's best to book early and look out for discounts.

Although there are now many cross-border bus companies competing with the better known companies of eurolines.com and flixbus.com, the latter still have the most extensive European network.

Carpooling

The car is not an absolute no-go. When you travel with four or five people in a car, your footprint is not the worst.

In recent years, there are also more and more useful online carpool options. Blablacar.com is a well-known platform for finding other European carpoolers. For a set price, you can get a lift with other travellers or offer seats in your own car.

When flying is the only option

Sometimes, you have no other option but to take a plane for at least a part of your trip. If so, fly in economy class, choose an airline that offers fair working conditions and adequately offsets your emissions. More info on offsetting travel emissions can be found further on in these guidelines.

> "We always opt for sustainable transport. That really is our policy. We choose the location of our exchanges so that we can get there by train, even if it takes several days. Travelling with the young people creates a close-knit group early on."

Providing information during the event

Go digital

Try to communicate digitally as much as possible. Note that it doesn't come completely without any footprint, but its main benefit is that it remains available to all participants at any time. Just make sure they know where to find the information online and keep your information platform concise and structured.

Information folder

Formerly, it was common practice to offer participants an information folder, a pen and some paper when registering at the start of events. This resulted in a lot of scrap paper and another pen joining the customary notepad in a dusty drawer.

Ask participants beforehand to bring their own pen. Keep a stock of pens for whomever and whenever they are needed. Fancy notepads can be replaced by loose (scrap)paper.

Ask yourself if an information folder is needed.

An overview of events, sessions and/or speakers should do. When you have a well-designed website, event app (for example lineupr.com) and/or screens, you can put all relevant information there. You only need to guide participants towards these digital and user-friendly channels.

QR codes or NFC labels can be useful in guiding participants towards useful information via their smartphone. You can find free QR generators on the internet. Or why not create an event app instead of producing an information folder? It's easier to update.

Name tags and stickers

The most straightforward and low-key solution is to use paper stickers or tape. Sometimes you want it classier. If so, name badges with a plastic cover or lanyard come in handy. However, as with all plastic items, they are not meant to be used only once. So, make sure that participants know that you will collect them at the end of the event.
Have a collection box clearly displayed in the cloakroom or at an obvious spot at the exit, or nominate a specific colleague to collect them at the end of the event. Needless to say, they should not disappear into your closet forever after the event.

Direction signs and signposts

There is nothing as annoying as having to find your way to and around the venue. Direction signs to the rescue! But please don't start laminating all your papers, as these multi-layered items can only be burnt afterwards. Paper should only be laminated when you are sure it will be reused several times after the event. So, no mentioning of the event's name, but have instead your organisation's logo, combined with a plain arrow that you can turn in any direction.

Be aware that chalk leaves (almost) no footprint and is always your best option. Paper works well, but doesn't withstand the rain, so place it thoughtfully.

A central signpost is very useful. Participants will know where to find information and you can easily add or replace information whenever needed.

Whiteboards to the rescue

Use whiteboards and (non-toxic) pens, or digital alternatives, instead of flipcharts. No whiteboard available? Then you can use the reverse side of old posters to start scribbling. It's a good idea to collect these during the year.

Sticky notes are also very popular. Choose a smaller version when they suffice for your needs. Writing directly on the back of a large sheet of paper or poster is even better.

Sustainable printing

If printing is useful, go double-sided and choose black ink on 100% recycled FSC-certified paper. Professional sustainable print and offset companies are able to use vegetable-based ink and low-alcohol printing. Ask that minimal packaging be used and avoid plastic covers or sleeves.

Digital usefulness

Don't just put a PDF online if you want to save paper.

Use a smart digital version that was developed with the purpose of being consulted online. Make sure that the search function can be used, and links can be easily opened in a new tab. Otherwise, people will just print the whole document on their own - often less sustainable - printer.

Promo & decoration

Less is more, but that does not mean that going sustainable should result in a dull and sober event. It just means you must put a bit more effort into it.

Treats (formally known as goodie bags)

Let's get straight to the point: goodie bags are a no-go. That does not mean that you need to be a Scrooge, you just must be more creative. Hardly anyone who gets a pre-packed goodie bag in their hands will refuse it. As a result, a lot of the given gadgets and items end up in the waste bin or a closet. Therefore, don't hand over a filled goodie bag but put the useful items on a large table and let participants choose for themselves what they need and want.

Avoid gadgets by all means.

Gadgets should not be handed out just because they were got for free. If you think hardly anyone will use it, refuse it.

Giving out personalised tote bags has become very popular. Sadly, many people already have far too many of these bags. No need to add one extra to the pile.

A lot of items often come in (plastic) packaging. Try to avoid that by being proactive. If it is unavoidable, remove it before handing it out. That ensures optimal recycling and sends a better message to the participants. Also give feedback to the manufacturer or distributor, so they are incentivised to change their approach.

T-shirts

T-shirts are a good alternative way of promoting your organisation and of simultaneously making it very easy to recognise the organising team at larger events. They also create a group feeling. If it's a nice and comfortable t-shirt and has been a memorable event, people often like to wear the t-shirt afterwards. The golden tip is to make the t-shirt without mentioning the date of the event. This allows its re-use at subsequent events. It's even better to link the t-shirt to your organisation than to a specific event.

When you buy and design the t-shirt, choose fairtrade organic cotton (or sustainable alternatives). Make sure that energy saving measures have been applied during the fixation process with water-based ink.

When ordering your t-shirts, use the Fair Wear website to discover the 'fair score' of many clothing brands.

Banners and flags

What applies to t-shirts also applies to banners. Go for timeless banners that can be reused afterwards. There is nothing wrong with using banners and flags associated with your organisation, as long as they are reused many times.

Although they are often the cheapest and most widely chosen option, be sure to avoid materials made of PVC (polyvinyl chloride). They are everything but environmentally friendly, even when recycled.

Gifts

While finding the perfect gift for speakers or participants is often a head-scratcher, finding a sustainable one is even more challenging.

Flowers are lovely, but they have quite a footprint and only live for a short period. Go for a plant or, if the receiver has a garden, why not go wild and give a small endemic tree? Your gift and good memories will linger longer.

Try to avoid giving alcoholic drinks as gifts. It normalises alcohol, which is still a hard drug, and there are so many alternatives. Unique local products are always warmly received.

If you give a small gift to each participant, know that many people already have a reusable bottle or bag and don't need an extra one. You could let people choose – quiz style – from a gift table and give them a few options. That gives you the best assurance that the items will be used.

Another option is to let people choose for themselves by handing out gift vouchers. Although a bit impersonal, it can be a nice gift when you don't know what the receiver likes. There are many substantiable local shops and, of course, online equivalents for people coming from further afield.

Remember that everyone likes a gift that has character. A nice book for example is often appreciated and may also inspire other participants. Two birds with one stone.

Brightening up the rooms

Go for reusable decoration. Moving some of your office plants to the venue can make a huge difference. Some lamp cords with LED lights help create a warm homely atmosphere in darker hours. A decorative garland is also not an issue if it was made to be reused and is not left in a closet after the event. Balloons are a no-go, especially when precious helium is involved.

> "For the 'Inclusion & Diversity Forum', all participants got an apple with a logo stamp as a symbolic goodie. We also asked participants to bring a tote bag from home which they could swap with other participants upon arrival."

What's cooking

The way to eventers' hearts is through their stomach. If there is one aspect of the event's organisation that you can steer yourself, it's this one.

There are many sustainable aspects to food. Below, we describe the most important ones and give advice in each instance on what to look out for.

Plant-based above all

If you go sustainable, plant-based (vegan) food will be omnipresent at your event. It not only reduces the footprint of your meals significantly, but also eliminates animal suffering and helps to get our water- and nutrient balances in order.

However, plant-based meals require more preparation than a slice of ham or a chicken fillet sandwich. Just buying a vegan spread in the supermarket won't be the best promo for plant-based food. If you go all the way, make sure you have found a good catering team and tasted their creations. Many can prepare incredible, fresh, and healthy sandwiches and dishes!

It's up to you to include vegetarian and/or fish & meat options. If you decide to do so, make sure that the latter does not make up the bulk of the offerings available.

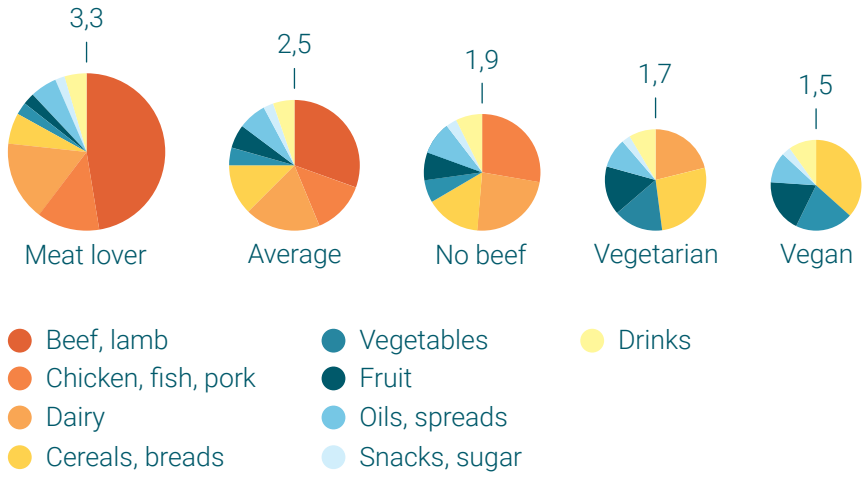
Fish, meat and veggie

When you offer fish, choose fish with a label. MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) for marine fish and ASC (Aquaculture Stewardship Council) for fish from aquaculture are the most common and useful labels for which you should keep an eye out.

For meat, you must make a choice. From an animal welfare point of view, meat from cows (not calves) is a better choice compared to pigs and chickens. However, ruminant meat has by far the largest carbon footprint, so cows and sheep are by far the worst from a climate point of view. Good to know: the footprint of dairy is of the same order of magnitude as that of pork, chicken or turkey. Eating cheese instead of these types of meats does sadly not help the climate or the animals.

Most caterers by now offer a good vegetarian range. Just make sure that there is sufficient variation for your hungry participants. In general, the less dairy there is in a veggie meal, the smaller the footprint.

Comparing carbon foodprints (t CO_2e)



All estimates are based on the average food production emission for the USA. This emission includes emissions from the supply chain losses, consumer waste and consumption. For each diet type an equal intake per day (2600 kcal) is assumed.

Sources: ERS/USDA & https://shrinkthatfootprint.com/food-carbon-footprint-diet/

Seasonal and local

You often hear that locally produced food is the most sustainable. Actually, the carbon footprint from non-aviation transport is often only 10 to 20% of the total carbon footprint of food products. Nonetheless, stick to European produce and try to serve as much locally produced and seasonal produce as possible.

Indeed, the more important aspect is not where but when it was produced. If a spring tomato was grown on open Spanish ground, its footprint is probably smaller than that of a tomato grown in a Belgian greenhouse. It's even better to avoid eating summer vegetables in winter and vice versa. For a good cook, there are enough options and alternatives the whole year round.

International cuisine

Nothing wrong with your typical national sandwich or dish, but why not think a bit beyond the borders? In larger cities, you often find small-scale caterers who offer a lesser-known type of cuisine. It is for many people a nice introduction to a new cuisine and adds some variation to the typical event catering offerings. An extra advantage of signature dishes from other continents is that they are more often vegetarian or plant-based.

A nice bonus is that you'll probably also find yourself eating food from a small-scale business.

BELGIUM

Social kitchen

Kitchen environments are often welcoming places for people who have a tough time finding a job, especially when they come from other countries or low educational background. Some organisations also offer help to willing cooks and staff who are not able to establish themselves independently due to a lack of experience, money, or connections. Ask around and help people who could use a little nudge by offering to be their guest at a meal.

Be sure to let your participants know about such collaborations. It's even better to ask the caterers themselves to give a little talk about their own project!

Fair products

These days, a lot of our food and drink contain ingredients imported from distant countries. Out of sight, out of mind, and therefore products like coffee and chocolate are susceptible to unsustainable production. To tackle this, a fairtrade label was created. It assures you to a certain extent that your delicious product has been produced according to a transparent set of – audited – rules. The main aim of the label is to procure a fair price for the often-small-scale producers. At the same time, you can be sure that certain measures are taken to combat child labour and to protect the environment.

Caterers using fairtrade products get bonus points. But you will have to question them to know to what extent they are working with fairtrade products.

Organic ingredients

There is still some debate whether biologically produced food and drinks are more sustainable than conventionally produced products, but that is dependent on many factors and open to interpretation.

Organic products contain a minimum of 95% organically grown ingredients that were produced without using chemical pesticides, artificial fertilizer, GMOs or defined additives. Organic producers also pay attention to animal welfare and the general principles of environmental care.

There are many labels and wannabe-labels on the market. One of the most well-known and reliable labels is the EU organic label, managed by the European Commission.

As with fairtrade products, you'll have to ask the caterer to know how much of the used ingredients have been produced organically.

> “Something small, when you don’t want to go full vegetarian: when asking for food preferences/allergies in the registration form of an activity, we list meat as an option next to vegetarian, vegan etc. In doing so you present meat as an option and not as a standard.”

Green mobility

Mobility is also an important aspect for caterers to consider. An electric car or, at least, a hybrid van should be used if covering greater distances or catering for larger numbers.

For smaller distances and numbers, cargo bikes - with or without cooling facilities - are readily available and used for food transport.

If you need to pick up the food yourself, renting a cargo bike could be the best and by far the most sustainable option.

cargovelo.be
cairgobike.brussels

Sustainable business operations

Caterers can also make efforts within their own business operations. As a customer, it’s not always easy to get information about their internal kitchen workings. But do politely ask them what efforts they are making.

Many of these facets are either discussed above or will be discussed further on in this document. At a minimum, caterers should avoid waste and packaging and offer a delicious and varied range of vegetarian and plant-based options.

Try to get the contact details of the person responsible for catering yourself. It is easier to get things done when you have a good relationship with them.

Green drinks

Lovely tap water

This one is easy-peasy. Your main goal should be to get as much tap water as possible. It is cheap, healthy, and safe. It also comes without the need for vending machines, transport, or packaging. No need for hustling with water bottles, stocking huge fridges or feeding recycling plants.

If you want to promote tap water, you need to pimp it a bit. Use carafes, preferably glass ones and in sufficient numbers, to give the water to the participants. To ensure the taste is good, use open carafes or leave your reusable bottles open for at least 15 minutes. Don't forget the presentation. Spread around your carafes or reusable bottles and ensure they are easy to find and use. Adding some lemon, lime or mint gives it that final touch.

Sparkling water is a welcome variant. Machines with CO_2 cartridges help create your own bubbling water while avoiding waste.

Lemonades and soft drinks

Many water-based alternatives have been invented to get your audience in the right mood. Many people love self-made lemonades, especially when it's warm. The internet is your recipe friend, allowing you to make your own lemonade in minutes. If you're not up for some sugar brewing, many companies are glad to help you out with sustainable syrups, with or without sugar. Add, mix and serve!

Coffee and tea

As coffee and tea are mainly produced in the Global South and often in dire conditions, a fairtrade label (or equivalent) is a must. These days, there are many delicious fairtrade options on the market, so that won't be a problem. Other labels that make a difference are the Rainforest Alliance (protection of the environment), the organic label and the UTZ certified label (mostly environmental protection).

For groups, a coffee percolator is a good option, but make sure that you don't make too much coffee. Thermoses help to keep surplus coffee nicely drinkable for a few hours.

Both the carbon and water footprint of coffee is many times larger than that of cereal coffee or tea. A nice assortment of the latter is therefore a great idea.

Don't forget to choose plant-based milk and fairtrade sugar on the side. Bigger bottles are better, but make sure you don't have to compromise anything.

Go local

For liquids, 'locally produced' is the way to go. Find a small producer or distributor with a sustainable heart for the products. It leads to a short production chain, limited transport of bottled 'water with some additives' and support for sustainable entrepreneurs.

Size matters

Going the conventional bottled way? Opt for larger bottles or drink boxes where possible, but make sure that you won't have to pour a lot of it away. Reusable glass bottles have the smallest footprint, if their transport is limited. Plastic or single-use glass bottles do not differ much in terms of footprint.

Fairtrade & organic produce in the mix

It's up to you which sustainable elements you pay attention to when choosing lemonades, warm drinks or alcoholic beverages, but you get some karma points if you choose drinks with organic ingredients and a fairtrade label.

> "Our venue provided everyday plastic water bottles for our guests. I was able to talk with the manager and convinced them to switch to glass jugs."

Preventing and handling waste

There was a time when events ended with bags full of waste. These days, many countries don't even allow the use of single-use cups or cutlery anymore. Sustainable events try to avoid waste wherever possible. Inevitable waste is collected, discarded, and processed separately.

Crockery and cutlery

As always, bear the waste hierarchy in mind. You should put most effort into avoiding waste production. Instead of changing materials, we should change our behavior. Again, your first question should be whether the items offered are really necessary.

Waste hierarchy (ladder of Lansinck)

Single-use crockery and cutlery create a huge volume of waste and should be avoided at all costs. Still, caterers will often push to use single-use materials as it takes less volume, does not break, demands fewer logistics and does not need to be picked up or washed afterwards. Most often, they offer biodegradable and biobased alternatives for the banned plastic items, but these items can only be composted in an industrial installation, which is not allowed in most European countries. As a result, these materials end up in a waste incinerator and are therefore only marginally better than conventional single-use plastic cutlery.

Finding reusable alternatives takes some effort, but supply is growing rapidly. Cleaning out the cupboards at home or at the venue can help when dealing with smaller groups. With larger groups, you can rely on rental companies, of which more and more offer porcelain and reusable plastic options. Reusable cups can be rented cheaply in many Belgian cities. You can also try the wash-it platform.

Finally, try to ban plastic wrapping and replace it with reusable trays, baskets, jars or boxes.

Drinks

A lot of waste and energy is avoided when participants own and use their own reusable drink bottles. You can ask participants to bring these themselves but arrange alternatives for those who are not able to do so. Offering drinking bottles on arrival is an option, but don't turn it into a gadget. Many already have quite a collection in their cupboard.

You will probably also serve other beverages. Glasses or reusable cups are by far the best options. They both have their advantages and disadvantages, but their footprint is comparable. Make sure you have enough washing (and drying) options, as well as colleagues who can take care of the latter. External options, where you can return these glasses or reusable cups dirty, are good solutions for larger events.

By using labels, you can personalise glasses, so fewer glasses or cups need to be ordered, washed, and transported.

There are some cheap and funny labels on the market, but make sure they can be reused. A paper sticker with your name on it often does the trick.

Bits and bites

Loose fruits and vegetables are not only healthy but also come without unnecessary packaging. If you would like to serve some snacks, opt for those without individual packaging. A large cake or pie for example is always a hit.

Food leftovers

Estimating the amount of food you need for a group is tough, especially when you don't know the participants well. You don't want to leave them hungry, but you don't want to throw a lot of food away either.

An important rule is to never break the cold chain, as this is a necessary condition for passing on uneaten meals to others e.g. social organisations. So, don't put all your food immediately on the table but leave some in the fridge until you see that it will be eaten.

A good trick is to have some easy dessert to fill the last holes. Like this, you don't need to order surplus food and the leftovers from dessert can be served again at 4 o'clock or in-between sessions.

If you have an event with free subscription, you don't know exactly how many people will attend.

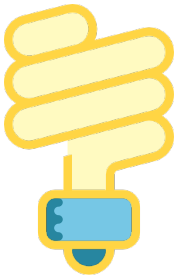
Consider catering for 10% fewer people than you have on your list, as some will not show up.

Either way, stock up with reusable food containers in which the leftovers can be distributed. You can give them to participants or friends and family. External organisations are not always looking for prepared meals, but in some cities, you can find willing parties. It is better to plan this this by giving them a call in advance.

Optimized recycling

Not all waste is avoidable and for that fraction we can only rely on recycling. This is only possible when there is a good system for separating waste. Make sure that you can at least collect (a) paper and cardboard, (b) glass with and without a deposit, (c) plastics and metals, (d) organics and food waste and (e) non-recyclable (residual) waste. Check the separation options at the venue beforehand. If an option is missing at the venue, find a solution yourself.

Waste bins should not be in a hidden spot but close to the participants. It should be clear to all participants what belongs in which waste category. Take your time during your opening talks to explain what belongs in which waste category. Don't forget to inform your caterer and other external parties. It is even better if they take their own waste with them.



Energy savers

It's not an option to install some solar panels on top of the venue's roof yourself, but you can do your best to limit the amount of energy you consume. There are two main reasons why many well-intentioned events don't achieve the desired results.

The first one is due to the hectic nature of an event. Before the event, you think that you, as an organiser, will have the time to check for lights that stay on or doors that stay open, but you never have. So, try to make all colleagues and participants aware of this.

Sadly enough, and this is reason number two, people tend to behave less thoughtfully than at home because they are suddenly part of a group in the midst of unfamiliar surroundings. As a result, an individual is less aware of lights or less inclined to turn them off, for example.

Therefore, some proactive thinking could be useful. Conclude presentations with a recurring slide asking all to close the doors, put out the lights, shut down laptops, etc. Another idea is to appoint a colleague as energy coach behind the scenes.

Fridges and freezers

Don't switch large fridges and freezers on days before the event. A large fridge only needs half a day to reach the wanted temperature, a freezer a full day. Make sure you fully stock both before you start them up, as that means a lot less energy is required to run them.

Don't overfill them, as that leads to a lot of time being needed to find the bottle you want. A closed fridge or freezer does not consume much energy. It's constantly opening them that results in a high energy bill.

Additionally, compartmentalise the fridge. When everybody knows where everything is and where the coldest bottles are, for example, you end up with less open-door time.

If you see a poor energy label on a fridge or freezer, nudge the owner to invest in a modern version. It saves them considerable money on energy consumption too …

Make sure that fridges and freezers are unplugged as soon as you no longer need them. Two fridges consume more than one, so if both are only partially filled, shut one down and stock the other one fully.

Air conditioning

Bear in mind that cooling a room by one degree requires three times more energy than heating it by one degree. Therefore, try to avoid using air conditioning.

Be proactive and try to keep the sun out of the room on hot days. Creating drafts during the cooler hours helps to naturally cool the room.

The online speaker

You might find it a bit surprising to find this topic in this chapter, but you can save a considerable amount of oil and petrol by having certain speakers giving an online session.

It does not only help to lower your footprint, but it also often gives you more chance of snagging a top speaker with a busy schedule. So, if you don't have time for a Q&A session and your speaker must travel quite a distance, an online session is a great option. Make sure that the audio and video options are optimal, though!

> "We started the meeting with 'Do you really need your laptop? If not, just switch it off. This benefits us all.' "

Logistics

Transport of materials

No doubt you have a lot of equipment to transport to the event venue. Know that in cities, you can easily rent an electric car for the required time. These can often be found nearby. Just make sure you book them early.

A cargo bike is also frequently a good, cheap and fast solution in cities.

Furniture

If the venue lacks furniture, you can buy or rent it in thrift shops or from an official second-hand store. You can find a nice overview of the 124 Belgian second-hand stores at allekringloopwinkels.nl/belgie.

Cleaning products

Use eco-friendly products for cleaning and washing-up. With vinegar or baking soda, you can clean most surfaces perfectly and for a very cheap price. When using commercial cleaning agents, look for an EU Ecolabel or a cradle-to-cradle certification. There are many other labels, but their sustainable merits are hard to evaluate.

Avoid using household paper or single-use wipes. Make sure there are enough drying towels, sponges, and reusable cleaning cloths. Fill the dishwasher completely and use the eco programme.

> “For the training ‘Navigate Youth’ booking a cargo bike was the easiest and greenest option for transporting the materials needed for the training course.”

Inclusivity

Attention to inclusiveness and to the diverse backgrounds of participants and speakers is very important. It's not only a matter of listening to your participants, but also of being proactive.

The Strategic Partnership for Inclusion has published a comprehensive brochure on inclusion within European youth projects. You will find points of interest and ideas for possible actions on almost all inclusion topics. Hereafter, we will give you some important pointers, which will enable you, as an event organiser, to make a difference.

Events for everyone

Joining events comes with a price, even when there is no entrance fee. Make sure that money is not a reason why some participants cannot join. Provide financial assistance to individuals who need it. Make sure that participants know that this option is available to them but keep the actual assistance discrete.

By organising parts of the event in a hybrid format, interested parties without time or the resources to travel can also participate.

Culture & religion

Each culture and religion comes with certain rituals and habits. Make sure that participants have the space and time for praying and other rituals. It will be important to check such requirements with them in advance.

When providing food and drinks, bear in mind religious and cultural requirements. Kosher and halal cooking are the most common examples of this. Going plant-based makes this a lot easier. Also be aware of certain fasting periods or religious holidays.

Safety & integrity

Psychological safety and mental health are of paramount importance. As an organiser, you need to create an atmosphere where everyone feels welcome and able to express their true feelings.

Make sure that the participants are aware of the need for psychological safety and for a good communicative style from the start of the event. It helps to reserve a short, time slot for this purpose, so that you can share useful tools and tips with the participants.

In addition, inform participants whom they can contact when they don't feel safe or when they fear that their integrity is threatened or compromised. Make sure that the assigned person can be approached, both formally and informally.

Be sure that all participants remain energised throughout the whole event. Make sure that the programme is not too full and provide moments of rest. A designated quiet room gives participants the chance to escape; to take a break from the hustle and bustle that comes with an event.

Selection of speakers and topics

Pay attention to the diversity of your speakers. No, you don't need to have exactly the same number of male and female speakers and you definitely don't have to move heaven and earth to find a non-binary speaker. But strive to have a good mix and representation of all genders, minority groups etc.

The same goes for the choice of topics. It's a good idea to involve participants in putting together part of your programme.

> "During the 'Inclusion & Diversity Forum' in Ostend, we had our vegan and vegetarian food provided by a caterer who also employs young people and adults with a disability."

Communication is key

Many event organisers make the mistake of planning everything nicely according to the sustainable book but forget to communicate this. Make sure you reserve enough time before and during the event to address this, or your efforts will not pay off.

The first impression

As always, the first impression is key. Demonstrate to your participants that the event they will participate in is sustainable. Once that becomes part of the mindset, half of your job is done.

Make sure you include your sustainable actions, expectations and tips in your call for participants, on the registration form and/or in the information pack.

Be careful though! You should not present sustainable events as something extra-ordinary, but it is important that your participants are aware of your endeavours and, equally so, that they are inspired to copy-paste your approach when they have to organise events themselves.

Sustainable travel

Your first task is to promote a sustainable trip. Start your trips with the most sustainable travel option. You can even omit car travel information, as the GPS will do its job anyway. It is never a bad idea to mention that parking options are limited, if that is the case. Assist participants with finding the best train connections and prices as it helps to convince them to travel sustainably.

Also help the participants to navigate the final kilometers. Provide the participants with a clear address, time estimate and, if useful, a small route map. Where public transport is an option, provide the line numbers, terminus and the name of the required stop. A link to the web page or app of the regional transport company is also welcome for international guests.

Sustainable Q&A

Ask participants to bring items like a reusable bottle, paper and pen and explain that it's part of the plan to limit waste production.

Ask participants if they have particular needs and provide all with information on the venue's accessibility. Also enquire if there are specific cultural or religious needs.

If the catering is fully plant-based, you can just mention that without emphasizing it. If the catering is not fully plant-based, go for an opt-out strategy, i.e. ask who doesn't want a fully plant-based option. If you circulate a query, place plant-based above veggie and put meat-eater as the last option.

Finally, mention that you are trying to organise the event as sustainably as possible and, if this is accomplished, the CO_2 production caused by the organisation and/or transport of the participants will be offset.

Pictures and words

Many of us remain quite biased when writing or selecting pictures. Make sure that you take account of community diversity. The world is not exclusively male, white or heteronormative. Make sure to demonstrate that, so everyone can relate to your event. No need to overdo it, just show our society as it is.

Same story for your texts. Our languages remain full of masculine words. Try to write in a gender-neutral way. This page on writingcenter.unc.edu will help you to get the job done.

Finally, don't forget to ask the participants for their permission to share or publish photos taken during the event. Not everyone is a fan of social media.

Subtle sustainable communication

Sustainable events are also perfect spots to inform and nudge participants towards a more sustainable lifestyle.

Why not put some information about sustainability on the door of toilet cubicles or other interesting locations?

Like this, you can inform participants during the event about the sustainable measures you have taken, provide information about your organisation's milestones or share some interesting sustainable facts.

CO_2 Compensation

It is impossible to organise a zero-impact event. Therefore, you'll need to avail of some external offsetting measures to achieve a carbon neutral status.

Calculating your carbon footprint

Calculating the footprint of an event is not the easiest of tasks. Don't waste your time and energy on perfect calculations. The orders of magnitude are of greater importance.

The carbon footprint of an event depends heavily on the home locations of the participants. This immediately reveals the importance played by transport in the overall footprint of an event. Therefore, focus on the footprint generated by transport.

Although not perfect, some websites can help you with the calculation of your event footprint.

co2.myclimate.org/en/event_calculators/new

But how do you put a price on these calculated emissions? You will notice a lot of variability when checking carbon offsetting calculators. It is impossible to give a single price per tonne of emitted carbon, but the European carbon price (ETS) gives a good indication. For less than € 50 per tonne of CO_2 equivalents, it is difficult to arrive at a figure which could be deemed a fair compensation.

ember-climate.org/data/data-tools/carbon-price-viewer/

Compensation options

It must be said that it is not easy to separate the wheat from the chaff when choosing the best of many options to offset your carbon footprint. But we are here to provide you with some guidance.

Plant a tree in the garden

Offsetting where you pollute is a nice principle. You just plant a tiny forest on your organisation's domain or in your city. But realise that offsetting one round trip flight from Berlin to Brussels will require twenty fully-grown trees for one year or one fully-grown tree growing for 20 years. For intercontinental flights, you can easily increase these numbers by a factor of 10 to 30.

Plant a tree in your country

This sounds more feasible, especially in countries where there is a lack of forests and/or biodiversity, and it helps to visualise your endeavours. Simultaneously, this increases the reforestation of your region. There are, however, three caveats.

The first one is that the option of planting a forest (or part thereof) is often limited and not possible for each event. Moreover, it is far more expensive in Europe than in other regions. Lastly, European countries already have mandatory targets, so you'd just be helping politicians reach this goal.

Plant a tree in the Global South

Indeed, for the price of one tree, you can plant 20 trees in Ecuador, offsetting 20 times more CO_2. Optimizing reforestation in a world that desperately needs less CO_2 is also a great principle.

The further away, the less visible something is. Therefore, it is very important that you invest in certified projects and, although not watertight, the Gold Standard gives you the best assurance that your money is being well spent and that the trees are there to stay.

www.goldstandard.org

External projects

Reducing our global CO_2 production is more important than removing CO_2 from the air is. There are currently many external parties offering investment opportunities in sustainable projects, such as efficient cookstoves in the Global South. If managed well, introducing such modern cookstoves is an efficient way of tackling greenhouse gas production in the Global South. On top of that, it also lowers the cost of heating and cooking and decreases the time needed for people to gather wood.

Make sure you invest in a Golden Standard (or equivalent) project, as there is quite some greenwashing happening.

Some final thoughts

As you've noticed, there are many ways of offsetting your carbon footprint. It is up to you to choose the one you feel most comfortable with.

Bear in mind that it is of the utmost importance that you only employ carbon compensation measures in instances where the footprint of your event is unavoidable. Be aware that offsetting CO_2 cannot negate unnecessary air travel, although many companies adhere to this belief . After all, compensation projects come with a lot of question marks and are just a band-aid on an open wound.

Finally, and as always, don't forget to provide information about your event's footprint and the measures taken to offset it.

Final words

These guidelines are here to help pass on tips and tricks which will ensure your event is sustainable. Don't feel guilty if you are not able to do the perfect job, nobody can. Be proud of the steps you have taken and are taking, and reflect on how it once was. You can use **our checklist** to keep track of the steps you take along the way.

In this brochure, we provide only general tips. These have obviously not been adapted to the specific context of your event. The golden rule therefore remains: use your common sense and adapt the recommendations where and when necessary.

We wish you much success and satisfaction!

JINT

Menu
't Toreke
Soep
+ Brood
Bloemkool
DAGSCHOTEL
VLEES VIS
VEGETARISCH
PASTA
Bolo
VEGGIE
Quiche
Courgette
Salade
Enkel op Vrijdag:
STOVERIJ
VLEES
VEGGIE
hibiscus
Gamber-citroen