

Be part of the solution, not part of the pollution

Ending extreme poverty, inequality, injustice, and climate change: that is the ambition of Agenda 2030, a plan drawn up by the United Nations in 2015. The key to achieving this? These 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals (see image).

The Sustainable Development Goals apply to everyone. Not only for the 193 Member States that signed the agreement and have to implement it in their national policies, but also more locally: every citizen, organisation and company can make their contribution. How? By making sustainable choices and taking sustainable actions.

You too can help achieve these SDGs. If you organise an event, make sure sustainability is not an afterthought, but your starting point and a common thread. The step-by-step plan below is a handy tool that will help you make sustainable choices at each step of the process.





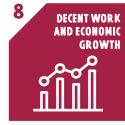














WATER

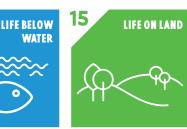




















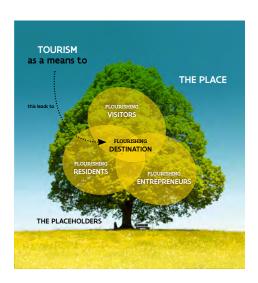


Why sustainability guidelines for events?

Events are important moments for VISITFLANDERS. They bring people together and showcase our organisation. That is why it is important that our own events (e.g. a workshop, seminar, partner event, open day, reception or press conference) convey our sustainability vision to both internal and external audiences.

This is how we set a good example and inspire everyone who comes into contact with our organisation through events.

Moreover, sustainability is both socially and ecologically inextricably linked to our pursuit of a flourishing destination within our Travel to Tomorrow strategy.



What is a flourishing — destination?

A destination with added value for the visitors, but also immediately for the residents, entrepreneurs and the place itself. A destination to which tourism contributes with respect for the place and its residents and where sustainability is thus a crucial factor.

Through the VISIT**FLANDERS** <u>sustainability</u> <u>plan</u>, we are taking steps to make our destination and our internal working environment more sustainable.

What is the purpose of this document?

This document is your guideline for organising an event. Here, we translate the objectives and actions from the Sustainability Plan into specific guidelines and ideas. This makes it easy for any colleague involved in (co-)organising an event to get started.

The information in this document also helps you communicate clearly to suppliers with regard to the expectations regarding the sustainability of their goods and services. They are crucial partners in organising events in the most sustainable way possible.

Please note: Events can be very different in their purpose, format and practical organisation. Not all guidelines and suggestions will therefore apply equally to your specific event.

The 8 pillars of — a sustainable event

In the sustainability guidelines below, we focus on eight event organisation pillars that you can prioritise when preparing and organising your sustainable event. These are:

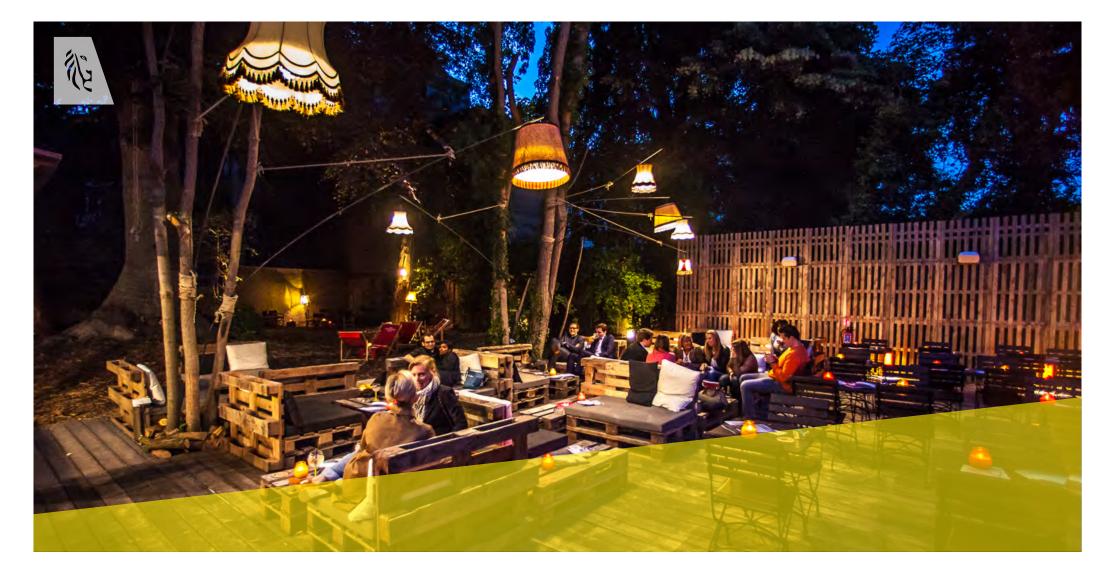
- 1. CONCEPT & FORMAT
- 2. INCLUSION & DIVERSITY
- 3. CHOICE OF EVENT VENUE
- 4. MOBILITY
- 5. WATER & ENERGY
- 6. CATERING
- 7. WASTE & MATERIALS
- 8. PROMOTION & COMMUNICATION

For each pillar, we first explain why it is important, and then we list the guidelines. Sometimes similar guidelines recur under different pillars, which is due to the fact that not everything can be separated (guidelines around mobility logically recur when choosing the event venue, for instance).

Where possible, we also refer to specific suppliers or organisations that can help to implement a particular guideline, but these lists are certainly not complete. Consider this a living document: we will often supplement and update it based on new insights and developments in the field.

Questions, comments and ideas are always welcome and can be sent to:

kevin.mcmullan@eventflanders.com.



The 8 pillars of a sustainable event

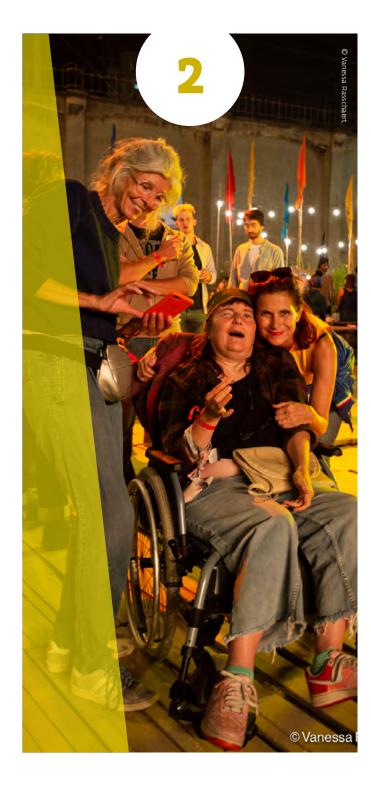


Pillar 1: — Concept & format

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

In the concept phase, you determine many fundamental matters that can have a major impact on the sustainability of your event. For example, an online event has a much lower ecological footprint than a physical event.

- Choose the format of your event based on your objective: what exactly do you want to achieve? What is the best way to achieve this? Who is the target group?
- Ask yourself whether it is necessary to organise the event (entirely) face-to-face. By holding an event online or hybrid, you can also extend its reach to certain target groups. Via the platform <u>Hybr</u> co-developed by us, you can achieve some very good things in a hybrid environment.
- Wherever possible, try to organise multiple events together or plan several meetings in succession to minimise the impact and costs of mobility.



Pillar 2: Inclusion & diversity

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Sustainability is about more than just environmental impact. We want the event experience to be positive for all participants regardless of age, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or abilities. Therefore, attention to inclusivity and to the diverse backgrounds of the participants and speakers is very important.

- When putting together the programme, consider diversity in speakers and topics covered.
 So please have a mix of m/v/x, origin and age among speakers and make sure that this diversity is also visible in the visual material for your communication and presentations. The Institute for the Equality of Women and Men created a handy checklist (in Dutch) that can help you with this.
- Ensure that event venues and accommodation are
 accessible to anyone with a motor, visual, auditory
 or mental impairment. This ranges from the main
 entrance to meeting rooms, common areas and
 sanitary facilities. Please also provide information
 about this to the participants.
 - » Consult the <u>Checklist for Accessible Meetings</u> <u>and Congresses</u> of VISIT**FLANDERS** here.
 - » For accessible accommodation, you can view this brochure on the VISITFLANDERS website.

- When registering, actively ask if there are certain support needs (interpreters, wheelchair assistance, etc.) and follow these up during the event.
- In order to guarantee a good service, it is a smart idea to designate someone specifically to follow up on these kinds of questions.
- Take into account the various religious and philosophical backgrounds of the participants. Consider, for example, specific habits, adapted diets or awareness of certain fasting periods or public holidays.
- Where possible, provide grants or financial support to individuals or groups who might encounter a financial barrier to join the event.
- Where possible, organise (parts of) the event in a hybrid formula, so that interested parties who have no time or resources to travel can also participate.



Pillar 3: — Choice of event venue

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The choice of your event venue has an impact on almost all the sustainability topics that are discussed here. A well thought-out choice is therefore crucial.

- Think carefully about the possibility of (parts of) the event taking place **virtually** so that the participants do not have to travel.
- If participants are very dispersed, you can also view the event in different locations so that less travel is required.
- Choose a venue with a suitable size for your event. Too large a venue often needs more energy for lighting and heating.
- Choose a venue that is equipped with the necessary infrastructure and equipment to avoid/limit installations and logistics transport.
- Choose a venue with a sustainability plan or certificate such as Greenkey in Flanders or Ecodynamic Company Label in Brussels. In this way, you can be sure that your chosen venue will take targeted actions to reduce the environmental impact. Such actions can include: having a green energy supplier, installing LED lighting, using rainwater for the sanitary facilities, solar panels on the roof, etc.

- Ask in advance for freedom of choice with regard to suppliers. If the venue itself cannot offer sustainable options, for example in the field of catering, ask if you can call on an external supplier.
- Provide eco- and budget-friendly accommodation for multi-day events. To do this, talk to the local or provincial tourism services. The <u>Greenkey</u> label is a good first indicator of sustainability at accommodation facilities.
- Choose a venue that is easily **accessible** by public transport (see pillar 4: Mobility).



Pillar 4: — Mobility

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Transport is often responsible for most of the environmental impact of an event. According to research, this can mean up to 80 to 90% of your event's emissions. By taking actions in this regard, you immediately make a big difference.

Your event's venue will logically have a major impact on the emissions of mobility. So choose the venue wisely (see pillar 3: Choice of event venue).

- Avoid the need for travel as much as possible.
 Think carefully about the possibility of (parts of) the event taking place virtually so that the participants do not have to travel.
- Air travel is very harmful to the environment, so in the first place limit the need to fly among the participants.
- Inform the invitees about the possibilities of travelling by **train**, even when they are coming from abroad. For example, there are several high-speed trains in Europe (e.g. Eurostar in the UK, TGV in France, ICE in Germany) and there are more and more night trains that mean that travelling to another European country often does not have to be by plane at all. The Flixbus can also be an alternative. At **www.ecopassenger.org** you can assess the

- environmental impact of your journey between two European destinations and find out what is the most sustainable means of transport.
- If many (international) guests will be present, take into account the geographical origin of the participants when choosing a host city. Choose a central destination that is easily accessible to all participants.
- Inform the invitees how to reach the venue.
 Make sure that the most sustainable option
 also becomes the easiest option. Add a map
 with the nearest railway stations, bus stops,
 bicycle parking facilities, charging points for
 electric bicycles and cars, etc. (see also pillar 8:
 Promotion & communication).
- Choose a venue within walking distance of a railway station or bus stop (see also pillar 3: Choice of event venue).
- Provide a preferably green shuttle service
 if the event venue is a little too far from the
 railway station, so that people would still take
 public transport. On <u>Ecoscore.be</u> you can view
 the emissions of different vehicles to help you
 make a choice.
- Take into account the public transport timetable: for example, make sure that your event does not end too late so that people can still go home by train.
- Provide spacious and safe bicycle parking facilities. Also consider e-bikes and cargo bikes. Indicate the nearest railway station with <u>Blue</u> <u>Bikes</u> or provide shared bikes yourself.

- Facilitate carpooling via a carpool platform on the event's website and/or Facebook page.
 You can also use existing platforms such as CovEvent.be, BlaBlaCar.be or carpool.be.
- Choose local suppliers and caterers who do not need to travel far for their services and who offer their services using a sustainable transport method such as Cargovelo.
- Encourage participants with high emissions to compensate for the impact of their travel, for example by investing in a climate fund or projects linked to the "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs).



Pillar 5: - Water & Energy

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Energy generation usually produces a lot of CO₂ emissions, depending on how the energy is generated. It is therefore important to organise events as energy-efficient as possible and to see which energy source is used.

As a result of global warming, water is increasingly becoming a scarce resource that we need to use carefully. On the site of <u>Join For</u> <u>Water</u>, you can measure your own water footprint to gain an insight into this.

For the type of events that we usually organise at VISIT**FLANDERS**, we can mainly focus on this pillar by choosing a good event venue. For example, choose a venue that has a green energy supplier or that recovers rainwater for the sanitary facilities (see pillar 3: Choice of event venue).

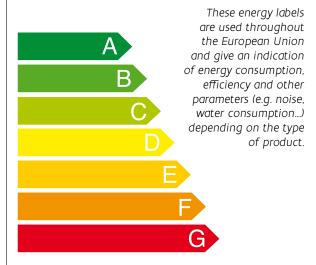
For events where we can intervene in energy and water consumption ourselves, we can provide the following guidelines:

GUIDELINES

- Use **environmentally friendly appliances** with the most economical **energy label**.
- Avoid energy hogs such as bouncy castles or air pillars.
- Avoid generators and connect as much as possible to the existing network. If you do need

generators, use ecological alternatives to diesel oil such as biodiesel or HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil).

- Always uses **LED lighting**.
- Choose compost toilets or if you can connect to the sewer, you can choose vacuum toilets or toilet trailers with a water-saving button. Possible suppliers are <u>Greencorner</u> and the <u>CVBA Daarom</u> Wel!.





Pillar 6: Catering

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

One third of all man-made greenhouse gas emissions are generated by food production. However, there are major differences between types of food.

- Animal products produce the highest emissions (e.g. beef: 60 kilograms of CO₂ per kilogram).
- Plant-based food produces 10 to 50 (!) times less CO₂ than animal food.

On average, the transport of food accounts for 10% of total emissions.

So plant-based dishes and meat substitutes reduce greenhouse gas emissions and are also healthier. Take the opportunity to let people taste a delicious and sustainable alternative (maybe for the first time).

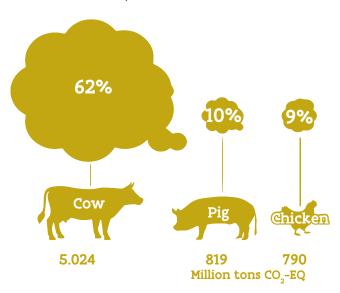
Another way to reduce your ${\rm CO_2}$ emissions in terms of food is to reduce food waste. A third of the food produced on our planet is lost, the UN World Food Organisation has calculated. There is also often food waste at events: some 15 to 20% of all prepared food is lost. This is a huge waste and an unnecessary cost.

Given the high emissions of (some) food products, it is important that we use them sparingly. That is why it is important to plan the catering for your event. The guidelines below can help you with this

GUIDELINES

General

- Follow the guideline from the Sustainability
 Plan on catering: "We opt for plant-based and
 seasonal meals at our own events".
 - » For example, go for at least 50% varied plant-based offerings and avoid ruminant meat as much as possible.



Annual emissions from cattle, pigs and chickens, in millions of tonnes, and as a share of emissions from livestock farming (source EOS)

» Even better is to go a step further and opt for 100% vegetarian or even 100% plant-based catering.

- » If you ask for the dietary preferences of your invitees beforehand, make the choice of vegetarian or, even better, vegan the default. Explain why you are doing this. That way, you will definitely get the majority of people on board.
- Apart from sustainability, there are also other things that you take into account in the field of catering when organising an event from VISIT**FLANDERS**. These often relate to the promotion of our own products and were developed by our colleagues on the Culinary theme

Seasonal, local, organic and fair

- Opt for seasonal and local products as much as possible. Via <u>Seasonal calendar - Vegetables</u> <u>| Lekker van bij ons</u> you can check out a handy fruit and vegetable calendar.
- Do not serve endangered fish species (note the MSC label) and check the WWF Endangered Seafood Guide or the VLAM seasonal calendar to serve fish that are in season.
- Opt for organic products whenever possible.
 At www.labelinfo.be you will find an overview of the existing bio-labels.
- Whenever possible, choose Fairtrade products that guarantee fair trade, for example for coffee (e.g. pay attention to the Fairtrade Belgium label).

Avoid wastage

• Ask participants to register for meals in

- advance so that you can **estimate** exactly how many people you need to provide food for
- Think in advance about what will happen with surplus food and make relevant agreements with the caterer. For example, you can donate surplus food to the nearest food bank, the Schenkingsbeurs, Foodsavers or other social organisations. Also check out the options of apps like Too Good To Go.
- Inform colleagues and participants that they may take a **storage box** with them to take home any remaining food.

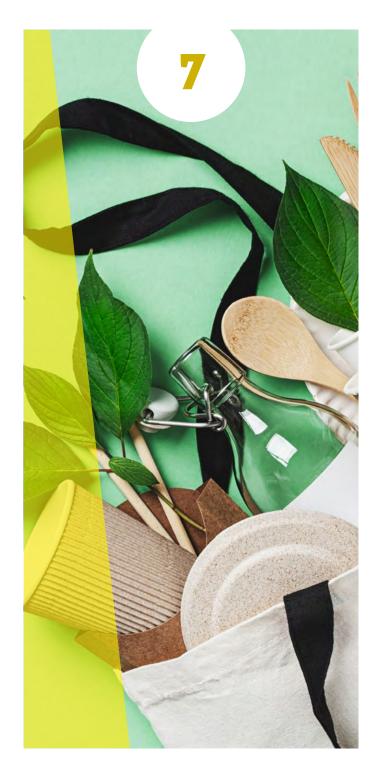
Tableware

 Go for reusable tableware such as stainless steel cutlery and porcelain, glass or plastic crockery.

Beverages

- Serve tap water. This can be done directly via a tap that cools and filters the water (for example from the Belgian Robinetto) or via large reusable bottles.
- Offer reusable cups and communicate that people can take their own drinking container to top up (see also pillar 7: Waste & materials).
- Offer drinks via large packs such as large water bottles with tap.
- Provide plant-based milk, e.g. based on oats, soy, almonds or peas (available at every supermarket).

 The production of sugar requires a lot of water. In one can of cola, as much as 200 litres of water is 'hidden'. Therefore, provide healthy and environmentally friendly alternatives to the usual sweet drinks, such as local fruit juices, kombucha or kefir.



Pillar 7: - Waste & materials

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

A well thought-out waste plan will reduce plastic in the oceans, reduce material in the incinerator and reduce litter in our environment.

By also consciously considering the materials that are used and their possible reuse, as the organiser of a low-waste event you are also contributing to the transition to a disposable-free society.

As a general principle, we use here Lansink's ladder, which represents the waste hierarchy:

LANSINK'S LADDER

A Reduce

B Re-use

C Recycling

D Energy

E Incineration

F Landfill

GUIDELINES

Avoid waste

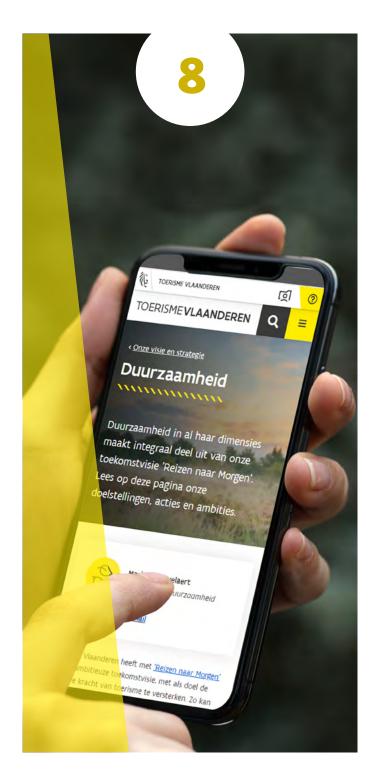
- Take into account the number of participants.
 Calculate how much you need of a particular product, think about the duration of the event and ask yourself whether the materials you want to request are useful and necessary.
 In this way you often avoid a lot of unwanted surpluses, and you also save a lot of costs.
- Check with each purchase if it is not possible to borrow the product somewhere. This is not only good for the environment, but is also usually cheaper. If you do have to buy things, check in the Guide to Sustainable Procurement (Dutch) or on the Circular Procurement Platform how you can make that purchase more sustainable.
- Avoid handing out gadgets and goodie bags at the event. Often these items simply end up in the bin or are barely used (this certainly applies to tote bags as well). If you do decide to give a small gift, think about sustainable alternatives and let people choose from a selection. Good examples include items made from recycled or more sustainable materials such as bamboo or cork. Or think of something to eat or drink such as a local beer in glass bottles or a regional speciality. If you want to give something of clothing, choose textiles made of organic cotton, hemp or other sustainable fabrics such as bamboo. Look for brands with fair labour practices and transparent supply chains. A houseplant is also a sustainable

- alternative, they not only improve air quality but also add a touch of nature to office spaces.
- Avoid using too much paper at your event by carefully and consciously handling post-its, bundles, advertising brochures, etc.
- Use whiteboards and (non-toxic) markers or digital alternatives instead of paper. If you do use paper, reuse the back of old posters, for example.
- If you use banners, flags, clothing, etc., make sure that there is no data or other specific information on it. These materials can then be used for later editions of the event
- Avoid printed matter and do your promotion mainly via website, email and social media. If you do have printed matter, use recycled FSC-labelled chlorine-free paper and environmentally friendly ink for your necessary printed matter. Print on both sides of the page and ensure targeted distribution.
- Set up a system where name tags can be reused at the end. For example, put boxes at the end of the event where participants can leave their badges so that they can be reused at a later date.
- Choose reusable mugs, cups, cutlery, plates, straws, etc. Set it as a condition for your caterer. Incidentally, since June 2023, it has been legally prohibited in Flanders to serve drinks in single-use containers at events, except in cap bottles or cans. From 1 January

- 2025, this will also no longer be allowed in cap bottles or cans, so let's apply this rule now and go all out for reusable cups.
- Of course, the aim is to collect the cups back afterwards for further reuse.
- If snacks are provided, choose snacks without packaging such as fresh fruit, biscuits from a box, etc.
- Choose linen, FSC-labelled and/or recycled napkins.
- Ban plastic film and replace it with **reusable trays**, **baskets**, **jars or boxes**.

Sort

- Sort PMD (plastic, metal can and drink carton), paper, fruit & vegetable and residual waste immediately at the event itself. Also urge the caterer to do this.
- Make sure that it is clearly indicated which type of waste must be put in which bin. Also bear in mind that any international guests are not always aware of our sorting guidelines, so provide sufficient information.



Pillar 8: Promotion & — communication

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

An event involves a great deal of communication. By planning smartly and thinking creatively, you can have a great deal of influence on the environmental impact here too. Apart from the promotion and information about the event itself, it is also important to communicate about the sustainability aspect. This ensures that the participants know how they can actively contribute, but also that after the event they are able to integrate sustainability into their own events or in their daily lives.

GUIDELINES

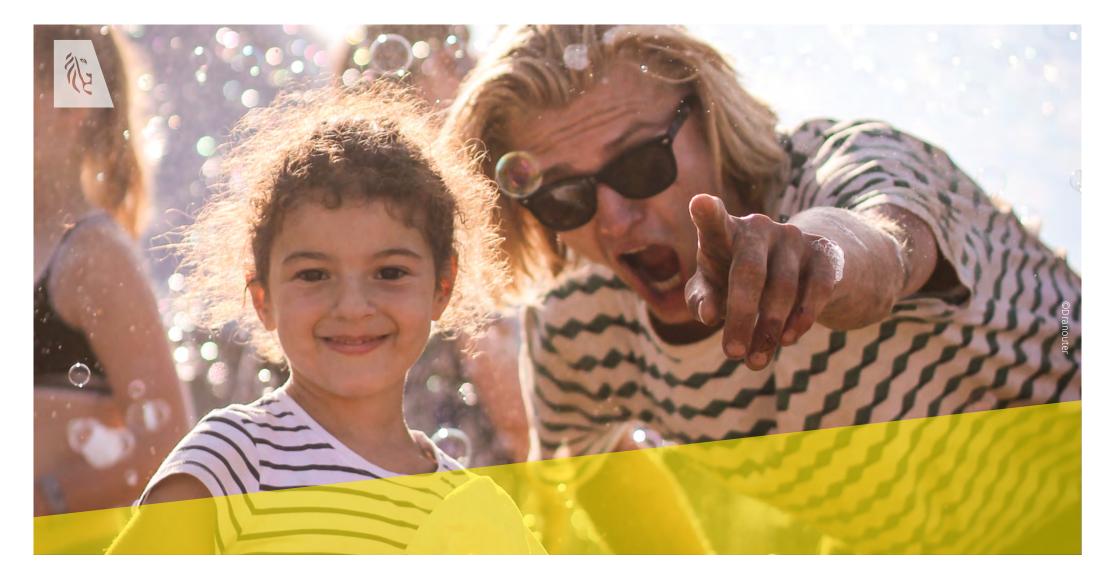
- During the event, provide information about the sustainable choices that were made.
 For example, explain why gadgets are not distributed or explain why you chose a particular type of food or caterer. This will increase the understanding of the participants and give them an insight into the impact of certain measures.
- Communicate clearly how people can confirm or cancel their participation in the event. In this way, you can estimate the number of participants as accurately as possible and you can combat food waste, among other things.
- The invitation and/or accompanying **practical**

information should contain:

- » a possibility to indicate dietary restrictions
- » a clear indication of a vegetarian or vegan option for meals
- » an opportunity for people with a disability to express their specific needs
- » a clear statement about accessibility by public transport, shuttle services, bicycle, on foot, and/or a link to a carpool platform.
- Inform the participants that you are organising a sustainable event and that they can take their own water bottle with them to top up.
- For certain event venues (e.g. a church or outside), indicate what clothing is best for participants to wear to avoid unnecessary heating or cooling.
- Communicate clearly and frequently about the different mobility options via different channels (website, email, social media, etc.).
 Provide an "accessibility" section on the event page on the website (or via other channels such as Facebook) and display a map with the marked walking and cycling routes as well as the train and bus stops.
- Ensure **diversity** is visible in the visual material for the communication and presentations (see pillar 2: Inclusion & diversity)
- Make sure that the online communication is accessible and legible to everyone, including visually impaired people. <u>AnySurfer</u> tests the

accessibility of websites and you can also find plenty of information and tips on **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines**.

 If you measure the impact of certain measures (e.g. the number of disposable cups saved or flights avoided), communicate this to the participants after the event.



Practical: getting started



Practical: getting started

You now have a clear idea of what we want to achieve in terms of sustainability at our events and what specific guidelines there are.

How do you get started as a (co-)organiser? The most important thing is to integrate sustainability guidelines into planning and preparation right from the start. Sustainability is not an afterthought, but rather becomes a recurring theme throughout the entire planning process.

TIPS

- Take the sustainability guidelines with you in your brainstorm sessions and the design of your event so that your concept and themes are already aligned with this.
- Keep the sustainability goals in mind during all
 phases of planning your event. Also think about
 what you can or must do yourself and what you
 expect from your suppliers and participants in
 your event.
- Communicate the sustainability guidelines to suppliers and event venues and mention that following these guidelines is an important criterion in your selection of suppliers and venue.
- Always check whether the supplier is in possession of a sustainability certificate, strategy or what sustainability efforts the organisation makes.

 Inspire the suppliers, event venue and organisations you work with by means of sustainability tips and tools.

Evaluation

The most important thing is that you follow the guidelines above as much as possible. Every effort is a step in the right direction.

But we also want to go further and effectively measure the CO₂ emissions of our events in the future so that we can systematically check whether we are moving in the right direction with our own events.

From the end of 2023, we want to use a ${\rm CO_2}$ calculator to map out as much as possible how the event scored in terms of ecological sustainability for every VISIT**FLANDERS** event.

Contact Kevin McMullan (kevin.mcmullan@eventflanders.com) and Louise Derre (louise.derre@toerismevlaanderen.be) if you are organising an event and they will help you to set up the evaluation.

Thank you to everyone who takes these guidelines to heart. This will enable us to make our events as sustainable as possible, allowing them to make an essentially positive impact. Thank you for your commitment!

SOURCES AND INSPIRATION

VISIT**FLANDERS** sustainability plan

www.greenevents.nl/en/tools-organisation

www.ovam-english.vlaanderen.be/?showUserLocaleOptionsMessage=false

www.eventfoodcarboncalculator.com

www.meetgreen.com/portfolio_category/infographics

www.duurzameontwikkeling.be/sites/default/files/content/handleiding_duurzaam_evenement.pdf

www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/takeaction

www.sdgs.be/en/6-questions

Five tips for strong climate communication | Bond Beter Leefmilieu

E-Book: Ten tips to make your company more sustainable. | Robinetto

www.greentrack.be/gent/pages/tools/checklist-duurzame-events

www.vaf.be/files/Duurzaam-filmen/handleiding-duurzaam-filmen.pdf

www.mvovlaanderen.be/inspiratie/inspiratiegids-voor-duurzame-sportevenementen

www.igvm-iefh.belgium.be/sites/default/files/114_-_checklist_integratie_genderdimensie_en_bevordering_gelijkheid_vrouwen_en_mannen.pdf

The Network | Network for sustainable mobility (duurzame-mobiliteit.be)

Sustainable Suppliers - Ecofest

RESPONSIBLE PUBLISHER

Peter De Wilde, VISITFLANDERS, Grasmarkt 61, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

LEGAL DEPOT

D/2023/5635/18

More information

www.toerismevlaanderen.be

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a database or retrieval system, or be published in any form or in any way (electronically, mechanically, by print, photoprint, microfilm or any other me-ans) without prior written permission from the Publisher.



