



Guidelines

on organising sustainable meeting and events at the Commission



European Commission

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Foreword



Climate change and environmental degradation are existential threats to Europe and the world. To overcome these challenges, the European Commission set out the European Green Deal, which aims to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy. It will ensure no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, economic growth decoupled from resource use, and no person and no place left behind.

The Commission is leading by example in the transition towards a climate-neutral society by setting out an ambitious and realistic plan to make the institution climate neutral by 2030 ([Greening the Commission Communication](#)). After obtaining the [Eco-Management and Audit Scheme \(EMAS\)](#) registration in 2005, the Commission reduced its carbon footprint by 32% between 2019 and 2022¹ by improving its buildings' energy efficiency and reducing waste and the use of water and paper. This figure takes into account teleworking emissions. Currently, the EMAS registration includes most office buildings in Brussels and Luxembourg, all Joint Research Centre (JRC) sites across the EU and the Directorate General's Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) site in Grange, Ireland. The registration will gradually extend to include the Commissions' Representations in the Member States in the coming years.

Moreover, under EMAS, the Commission has committed to continuously reduce its environmental impact and progress towards the 2030 targets it has set for core environmental indicators².

The purpose of this guide is to help Commission staff, and beyond, organise more sustainable meetings and events, demonstrating that we 'practice what we preach' as we seek to reduce our environmental impact.

Uniting efforts in organising more sustainable meetings and events and implementing the Commission's vision of a more sustainable European Union will contribute to improving its environmental performance and deliver significant benefits. This also gives the opportunity to lead by example and inspire event participants to adopt similar practices.

¹ The Commission is on track to meet the Greening Communication objective of reducing its carbon footprint by 38% between 2019 and 2030.

² For further details, refer to the Commission's environmental policy as part of its annual environmental statement: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/emas_registrations/emas_in_the_european_institutions_en.htm.

Introduction

Meetings, conferences and other events are a standard business practice in the Commission, and in our modern society. This is because they are often the most time-efficient and effective way of exchanging ideas and know-how, identifying solutions and reaching agreement, and making ‘face-to-face’ communication possible. They will remain an invaluable practice because of their many indisputable benefits.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual and hybrid conferencing have gained widespread recognition across the world as acceptable and often preferred alternatives to in-person participation. However, any kind of event can leave a significant environmental footprint by consuming energy, water and other natural resources, generating waste, causing air pollution, and indirectly contributing to soil and water pollution and to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions.

This guide is designed as a practical tool to help event organisers maximise the positive environmental effects and minimise the potential negative ones when planning and running meetings and events.

A sustainable or ‘green’ event is an event designed, organised and implemented in a way that minimises the potential negative impact and leaves a beneficial legacy for the host community and all those involved³.

What are the benefits of sustainable meetings and events?

- **Environmental benefits and financial savings:** Saving resources, reducing energy use, reducing waste, purchasing organic and sustainable products, opting for more sustainable food choices and simply consuming less can bring potential financial savings and reap environmental benefits. There may be an initial higher cost due to the current lower market demand for sustainable goods and services. However, applying sustainability principles will, in the long run, reduce costs (e.g. less printed material, less waste, reuse of materials, less travel) and, most importantly, help reduce our collective environmental footprint. Moreover, increasing demand for more sustainable products can lower prices and stimulate the market to become more sustainable.
- **Reputation and public image:** By organising sustainable events, we fulfil the Commission’s political commitment under EMAS and the Greening the Commission Communication to continuously reduce its environmental impact and pursue the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Event participants and the public are becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues and expect the Commission to lead by example, paving the way for a more sustainable and equitable world.
- **Multiplier effects and triggering innovation:** Other EU institutions and agencies, national and local authorities, private companies and civil society organisations already look to the Commission as a point of reference and an inspiration for environmental and social improvements in all aspects of their operations, including event organisation. Organising sustainable meetings and events may inspire others to follow the Commission’s footsteps and further promote innovative green practices.

³ Adapted from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Green Meeting Guide 2009 and based on the principles developed at Greening Events Symposium by ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability in Barcelona, Spain, September 2004.

7 simple steps to make your events more sustainable

Below are the main considerations for significantly reducing the environmental impact when organising an event. You can complete the checklist in the annex to keep a record of how you have taken each issue into account for a particular event.

A detailed explanation of what you should do for each step, along with supporting information, is provided in the following pages.

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For each step, there are two categories of ‘greening’ options:

1. *basic options* that Commission events and meetings should meet to contribute to continually reduce the environmental footprint;
2. *advanced options* with more ambitious sustainability goals for event organisers who wish to go further.

The options (basic or advanced) to be applied must be adapted to each event and consider applicable constraints.



Step 0: Format: physical, virtual or hybrid

Basic options

Reflect on the best format for the meeting or event and how people can participate online.

Meetings: Replace a physical meeting (if appropriate) with an audio or video conference or webinar, possibly supported by Commission collaborative solutions.

Conferences: To be more inclusive, organise a fully virtual or hybrid conference (in-person and virtual) or a multi-site conference to reduce travel and give participants the option to attend remotely.

Record the physical event and make it available online (let your audience know beforehand).

Turn off non-presenting participants' cameras by default.

Encourage the use of videos in standard definition instead of high definition.

Enable live chat.

Encourage people to zip media files before sharing them.

Do not send unnecessary emails or share unnecessary files before and after the event.

Advanced options

Use a sustainable event management tool, for example, based on ISO 20121, or opt for suppliers/contractors implementing an environmental management scheme, e.g. EMAS, ISO 14001 or an equivalent standard.

Adjust the time and location of the meeting or conference to external factors (such as other meetings taking place in the same town, the frequency of scheduled flights, and the possibility of direct transport options).

Consider organising a more inclusive event: ensure better physical and virtual accessibility.

The preliminary stage, before planning any Commission event, should include a short reflection on whether physical presence is necessary and the optimal length of the event. Many events can easily be replaced by online alternatives.

There are three types of meetings and events that have different characteristics and cater for different needs.

- **In-person meeting/conference:** An event where all attendees participate in person. Other people can follow via live streaming, if provided, but cannot speak.
- **Virtual meeting/conference:** An event where attendees interact (meet, discuss, network, exhibit) through an online platform. Commission staff (organisers), moderators, master(s) of ceremony, technical staff and contractors are not considered to be participants.
- **Hybrid meeting/conference:** An event where some attendees participate in person and others participate online. Commission staff (organisers), moderators, master(s) of ceremony, technical staff and contractors running the event at the venue are not considered to be participants.

Make sure you adapt your programme to the type of event. If it is virtual, make it short, engaging and interactive.

Consider using internal resources first. Seamless videoconferencing is available for everyone in the Commission on their computer through Teams.

If internal resources (meeting rooms, equipment, etc.) are not available, look at external venues to rent. Building a studio or venue from scratch would be the least sustainable option.

Once the need for a physical meeting has been assessed, consider what you can do to limit the environmental impact. Ensure that remote participants can follow in real time via live streaming or by making recordings available. Make sure the recording is not stored longer than is necessary.

Particularly for large-scale international events, consider using a sustainable event management tool (for example, based on ISO 20121) either on your own or via an external event organiser. In both cases, all the steps listed in the rest of this guide should be followed by you or the contractor.

Alternatively, you may opt for suppliers/contractors implementing an environmental management scheme, e.g. EMAS, ISO 14001 or an equivalent standard. This could apply, for example, to suppliers/contractors for catering services or waste management. This can guarantee that the provided services have a low environmental impact and, at the same time, support companies going the extra mile for local sustainability.



Step 1: Venue



Basic options

Consider the venue's proximity to airports, train stations and the city centre; the venue should be easily accessible by public transport, bike and foot and have secure bike parking.

Prioritise energy efficient buildings: choose venues and accommodation that comply with green-building standards or demonstrate that they implement environmental policies and good practices.

Ensure selective waste collection and recycling systems are in place.

Consider venues with additional technical facilities that allow for virtual participation.

Customise event rooms as little as possible and use preset meeting room layouts. Customised layouts imply the use of additional resources and may require transport for equipment and people.

Advanced options

Choose a venue with an environmental management system in place (e.g. EMAS, ISO 14001 or an equivalent standard).

Lower heating temperatures in winter and air conditioning in summer.

Include green requirements in the procurement process for selecting venues and accommodation.

Selecting the right venue is crucial for the event's overall environmental impact. Physical, hybrid and virtual events require different types of venues.

If you have online speakers and/or a remote audience, then give priority to a professionally equipped room rather than bringing in additional IT equipment. You should also consider what other features are available in the building, such as furniture, security equipment, kitchens and interpretation booths.

If a venue requires no customisation, it should be the preferred choice. Customising spaces for very short events requires intensive use of transport and removal companies, meaning a greater environmental impact.

The location should be easily accessible by public transport and other less-polluting means of transport, like cycling and walking. There should also be adequate secure bicycle parking. Preference should be given to energy efficient buildings that maximise the use of daylight and are managed in an energy-efficient manner. Advanced waste collection and recycling systems should already be in place.

For each Commission building in Brussels, energy performance of buildings (EPB) certificates are available and include information on energy efficiency (including the presence of renewable energy installations). In general, energy certificates may be displayed in the buildings' entrance halls or may be obtained from the building's owner..

Additional IT facilities, such as videoconferencing and live streaming, can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and save time and money.

Lastly, you should consider the overall management of the venue, for example procurement and cleaning policies. If the venue is in an EMAS-registered premises, this should ensure that measures are in place to reduce its environmental impact.

Give priority to venues that have: (i) environmental certificates, such as the EPB certificate of the premises; (ii) environmental certificates of the building (BREEAM⁴, DGNB⁵, HQE⁶, Level(s) assessment etc.); (iii) well-being certification (WELL, etc.); and (iv) environmental management in place (ISO 14001, EMAS or an equivalent standard).

Did you know?

Currently, **98%** of all Commission buildings in EMAS' scope in the EU are EMAS registered.

This includes most buildings in Brussels and Luxembourg, all JRC sites across the EU and DG SANTE's site in Grange, Ireland. The registration will extend to gradually include the Commission's Representations in Member States in the coming years.

EMAS-registered buildings are managed following energy-efficient practices and implement rigorous waste management. They have parking spaces for bikes (based on current user demand), and some even have charging stations for electric vehicles. Check your building and inform your participants accordingly.



⁴ Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method.

⁵ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Nachhaltiges Bauen - DGNB e.V. / German Sustainable Building Council.

⁶ The Haute Qualité Environnementale or HQE (High Quality Environmental standard) is a standard for green building in France.



Step 2: Transport and accommodation

Basic options

Reduce travel emissions by reducing and targeting the number of people attending in person.

Recommend accommodation close to the venue and easily accessible by public transport, foot and bike.

Encourage sustainable transport by providing participants with relevant information (e.g. maps, timetables)

Recommend participants to use more sustainable transport modes (e.g. train instead of air travel).

To minimise transport needs, promote carpooling or provide green transport (electrical shuttle) in more remote locations.

When flying is the only option, prioritise direct and economy flights.

Apply the same principles when you organise travel for guest speakers.

Advanced options

Choose hotels with excellent environmental performance (certified through the EU Ecolabel⁷ or another equivalent ISO 14024 certification scheme) or hotels that registered to a premium environmental management system (such as EMAS⁸) to evaluate, report, and improve their environmental performance.

Recommend participants to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from their travel by choosing more sustainable transport options.

Organise local shared transport arrangements (e.g. shuttle buses) to transfer participants from and to airports, field visits and the city centre.

The accommodation you recommend to your participants should be close to the venue or well connected by public transport. Ideally, it should be possible for participants to walk or cycle to the venue. The hotels you recommend should make bikes available to their guests or be located close to a public bike-sharing station. Unfortunately, this is more difficult for more remote sites. For those sites, you could organise a shuttle service for event participants. Use and promote existing carpooling platforms and shuttle services.

Give preference to hotels that prioritise energy and natural resources efficiency, advanced waste management schemes, sustainable catering and ecological cleaning practices. The EU Ecolabel, the EU official voluntary label for environmental excellence or other equivalent ISO 14024 certification schemes guarantee that the accommodation meets high environmental standards. EMAS registered accommodations are moreover committed to evaluate, report, and improve their environmental performance. Big hotel chains may more easily accommodate large numbers of guests and provide high-quality and often environmentally certified services. However, smaller hotels with a good environmental performance and corporate social responsibility policies can offer significant benefits to the environment and local communities.

Participants should be given clear information (such as maps and timetables) about how to reach the conference venue by foot, bike or public transport or even by carpooling and car sharing (ideally in

⁷ [EU Ecolabel - Home \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/euro-observatory/eco-label/).

⁸ [Eco-Management and Audit Scheme \(EMAS\) \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/euro-observatory/eco-label/).

hybrid and electric cars). You could suggest that they choose more sustainable modes of transport wherever possible, for example, rail instead of air travel.

On compensation for emissions with carbon removals, there is currently no common standard for certifying high-quality carbon removals with real environmental benefits. To fill this gap, the Commission will propose EU legislation on carbon removal certification. This will allow for clearly identifying and recognising activities that unambiguously remove carbon from the atmosphere in a sustainable way.

As a result, and to prioritise measures that reduce emissions, the Commission does not intend to start buying offset credits for carbon removal activities before 2030. It may re-assess the opportunity to launch preparatory pilot projects on carbon removals as part of the Greening the Commission Communication progress review once it has proposed legislation that will set the most robust and reliable criteria.

Did you know?
The [EU Ecolabel Tourist Accommodation Catalogue](#) lists hotels with excellent environmental performance, while the [EMAS for sustainable tourism page](#) for tourism organisations includes accommodations that are registered in the EMAS scheme.



Step 3: The 5 Rs: rethink, refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle



Basic options

Minimise waste: avoid it completely and, if not possible, reduce printed material, gadgets, packaging, single-use items and food waste.

Aim to avoid using single-use items.

Prioritise reusable items whenever possible and, if not, choose compostable and biodegradable⁹ alternatives.

Reuse generic branding; use any screens that are available in the venue to display information in or outside the meeting room.

Go for cardboard over plastic.

Purchase or choose items that can be used for other events.

Ensure waste is properly sorted, collected and recycled.

Advanced options

Make the event a zero-waste event.

Use glass bottles for drinks.

Consider the 5 Rs principle (rethink, refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle) in all aspects of the event's design, organisation and follow-up communication. It is a sustainable framework to help reduce an event's environmental impact and improve sustainability.

Rethink: Consider the format of the event, what to purchase, how much and what kind of products.

Refuse: Avoid buying something that is not essential or even accepting it for free. This includes items with excessive packaging, single-use items or products that are not energy efficient.

Reduce: Minimise printed material and instead use QR codes to send people to web pages where they can consult publications. Limit the use of promotional material, reduce packaging and the number of single-use items. Avoid ordering more food and drink than is actually needed.

Reuse: Avoid waste by using items multiple times for the same or different purposes. By reusing materials that would end up in landfills, you extend their lifespan. Consider reusing materials from previous events.

Recycle: A good system to sort, collect and recycle waste should be in place (as is already the case in all Commission buildings). In addition, choose promotional materials made from recycled materials.

Lastly, you may set the bar even higher by trying to organise a zero-waste event. Zero waste encourages redesigning resource life cycles so that all products are reused. No waste is sent to landfills or incinerators. The recommended process is similar to how resources are reused in nature.

⁹ UNI EN 13432:2002 certified for compostable items.



Step 4: Catering

Basic options

Choose preferably a combination of seasonal, organic and fair-trade food and drinks with a short supply chain whenever possible.

Provide a large choice of plant-based food options.

Order less food to prevent waste. Be aware of no-shows: planning for 20% fewer than the registered participants is a safe approach for catering. Adjust the quantities as close as possible to the event date. Offer small portions or plates to encourage participants to come back for more rather than leaving larger half-eaten portions.

Avoid single-use items, especially plastic. Instead, use reusable cutlery and crockery.

Preferably provide water fountains or jugs with glasses or compostable/recyclable cups instead of single-use bottles.

Use alternatives to individual condiment packets, such as self-serve dispensers.

Wherever possible, dispose of organic waste using local waste selection options.

Advanced options

Whenever possible, propose a full vegetarian or vegan menu option.

Give extra points in the selection procedure to certified caterers applying environmental management schemes (e.g. EMAS).

Propose tap water instead of mineral water.

Advertise and promote your sustainable catering efforts on the service tables and through channels like the event website.

Whenever available, ask for certified organic food.

Explore the possibility to donate leftover food. Even donating food to animal shelters is better than throwing it out.

If water fountains are available, encourage your participants in the invitation letter to bring their own water bottle.

Make green requirements part of the procurement process for selecting catering companies¹⁰.

The significant environmental impact of our food choices is becoming more and more evident, and the impact of meat and dairy is higher than that of plant-based dishes (see FAO report 2018)¹¹. For virtual or hybrid events, there will be significantly less catering; however, even some catering choices can make a difference, especially if it is visible on screen, like a glass of tap water.

When planning the menu for your event, the first meaningful choice is for healthy food, with moderate meat content and seasonal and/or organic products. A well-planned menu with a wider variety of plant-based food can be nutritionally balanced and tasty. It can also reduce the impact on the environment and benefit participants' health, as shown in several international studies (including EPIC)¹². Moreover, all health guidance documents (such as from the World Health Organization or the Commission's initiative on Food 2030)¹³ underline the need to eat more fruit, vegetables, nuts and whole grains and reduce saturated and hydrogenated fats.

¹⁰ Green Public Procurement: [Criteria for Food, catering services and vending machines](#)

¹¹The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations report: [Nutrient flows and associated environmental impacts in livestock supply chains. Guidelines for assessment \(fao.org\)](#).

¹² European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition.

¹³ [Food 2030 initiative](#).

Make sure that all food and drink served is properly labelled, including allergens. Avoid endangered species by all means, especially endangered seafood¹⁴.

Opt for tap water for drinking by choosing refillable jugs and glass containers and/or ask your participants to use water fountains if available. In most Commission buildings, water fountains are gradually being installed to avoid unnecessary disposable plastic bottles and waste. Avoid food waste by determining the exact number of participants a few days before the event; send them all a reminder to confirm their attendance at any lunch or social activities. Currently, food waste generated during food preparation in Commission restaurants is collected and used to produce electricity via a biomethanisation process in Brussels and Luxembourg. At some sites, the waste is used to produce compost. Donating leftover food that has not been served is a complex issue because health and food safety standards¹⁵ must be respected. However, you can explore such options case by case. Ask around if there are some shelters or charity organisations near the venue where food could be donated, taking into account food safety measures.

In general, considering other types of waste, avoid single-use disposable items and opt for reusable dishes, tablecloths, cutlery and crockery whenever possible. Lastly, if you choose an external caterer, you may consider organic and fair-trade products and see if they implement specific environmental management schemes (e.g. EMAS, the Good Food label or equivalent). To avoid having no eligible candidates in a procurement procedure, you may simply add this criterion as a bonus point to the award criteria. The catering contractor should also manage food waste responsibly (e.g. separate items to be sent for recycling and food waste to be sent for anaerobic digestion or composting). Terms of reference for bigger events are the right place to set out your catering requirements, e.g. a sustainable and wider variety of plant-based food and drinks, sustainable packaging, and transport. In turn, this will determine the choice of the caterer.

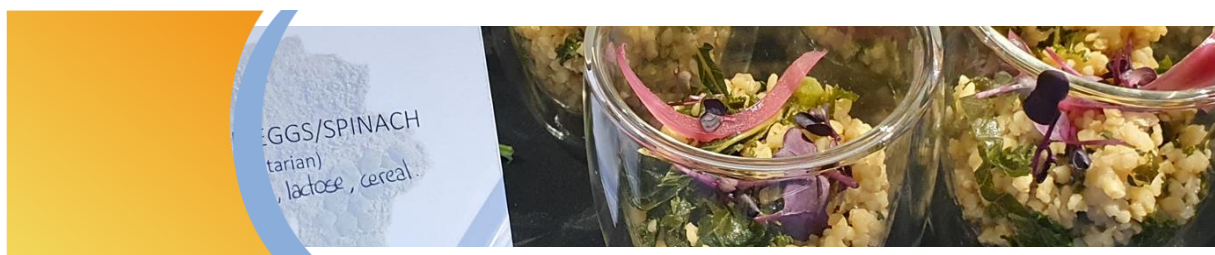
An example of sustainable catering tender specifications can be found in the annexes of this guide.

Did you know?

The Commission has phased out all single-use plastic cups in its buildings in Brussels. They have been progressively replaced by paper cups. Most vending machines that serve coffee give the option to use your own mug. As part of this process, the Commission has placed specific bins for paper cups in all buildings, close to each vending machine and water fountain and in cafeterias.

But this is only the beginning ...

The Commission is now aiming to avoid using single-use items, including plastics where possible. Corresponding measures have already been incorporated into EMAS, making it possible to carry them out in an organised and sustainable manner. The Commission will study and implement measures to reduce or remove more single-use items, particularly from catering, meetings and conferences.



¹⁴ <https://www.seafoodwatch.org/>, <https://www.iucnredlist.org>.

¹⁵ [EU Food Donation Guidelines](#).



Step 5: Promotional and printed material

Basic options

Use online or digital tools, for example, for registration and making material and resources available.

Avoid the use of printed material or limit or optimise its use. Give preference to eco-friendly design and printing¹⁶ based on available budget and printing materials.

For signposting, use existing equipment (screens, poles, poster frames, etc.).

Avoid or limit the distribution of promotional gadgets and gifts (e.g. limit the number, if it is not possible choose among [EU Ecolabel products](#) or include eco-friendly criteria in the procurement process for them).

Choose objects with value and good long-term use (e.g. a resistant drinking bottle). Good quality products have a much longer lifespan.

Order a small amount of office supplies. Choose items that have been recycled and that are refillable and made from natural material. Collect them after the event for future use.

Reuse conference materials from previous events (e.g. stands, banners, signage).

Whenever possible, re-use designs from similar events. If necessary, some parts can be adapted to better fit the conference.

Advanced options

Reuse event materials from past events for different purposes (e.g. old banners turned into bags). Think of the circular economy and be sustainable in a larger sense.

Think of transport for promotional materials. Pay attention to distance and organise sustainable delivery methods wherever possible.

Order material with sustainable packaging, avoiding plastic.

Organise specialised waste sorting and removal of materials, especially exhibition material.

Consider the social economy and give preference to inclusive companies.

Promote the measures taken for sustainability on your promotional material.

Less is more. The design of the event's communication should include a reflection on the optimal use of natural resources:

- Avoid or limit the use of printouts and think well in advance about what printed promotional material (brochures, leaflets, posters) is really needed to ensure that it is effective.
- Online registration and online pre- and post-meeting communication and resources are recommended, preferably on a central web page to limit mass-mailing.
- Reusable banners should also be used (with a generic title and a space to add removable stickers with event-specific information).
- If it is necessary to print documents, try to use eco-friendly printing, e.g. use EU Ecolabel paper, print on both sides, print in grayscale/black and white and try to reduce the text and number of pages as much as possible¹⁷.

¹⁶ Give preference to [EU Ecolabel graphic paper](#), and to [EU Ecolabel printed and stationery paper](#).

¹⁷ Tips for sustainable printing: [Environmentally friendly printing practices: 10 tips \(paperwise.eu\)](#).

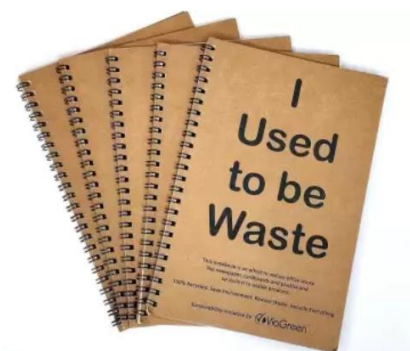
- The distribution of promotional material (e.g. gadgets, bags) and gifts should be avoided or limited. They should be produced using sustainable materials (recycled or organic) and serve a useful purpose.
- If possible, you should also consider products from local social-economy projects.
- Lastly, conference materials from past events could be reused for the same purpose (e.g. stands, general banners) or a different purpose (e.g. old banners made into bags).

Consider the origin of the product and try to avoid ordering from the other side of the world. For packaging, ask your supplier to use plastic-free materials. Some pallets and even tape are made from sustainable materials.

Apply the same approach to office supplies: you should ask ‘What are my real needs?’ and request as few articles as possible with the smallest impact on the environment. Priority should be given to reusable and fully recyclable articles, such as refillable recycled marker pens, solvent-free glue and correction fluid, and items made from natural material rather than plastic (pencils rather than ball pens). If supplies are provided internally, you should collect them after the event and return them to the office supply stock of your department for future use. When paper and printouts are supplied externally, remember to request recycled paper or paper made from a mixture of recycled fibres and virgin fibres from sustainable forests.

Did you know?

The Commission is recycling its giant banners for different purposes. For example, it used one giant banner from the Berlaymont building to make 275 hand-made baskets for Commission service bikes. Other products, like handbags and document folders, can also be made from recycled banners. If no product is ordered, the contractor will reuse the banners for agricultural purposes.



Step 6: Social aspects



Basic options

Check that all your service providers strictly comply with safety and labour rules.

Require companies to apply eco-friendly procedures when carrying out the contract and to employ staff in a socially conscious manner, including subcontractors (e.g. for catering, accommodation).

Advanced options

Select sustainable local or fair-trade products (e.g. promotional material and gadgets).

Give priority to suppliers with inclusive policies and who work with underrepresented groups of employees.

Corporate social responsibility is about organisations taking responsibility for their impact on society and acting ethically and transparently to contribute to society's health and welfare. While the main focus is on companies, the Commission also has an interest in how it interacts with the surrounding communities.

When organising conferences and events, you should consider socio-economic aspects as well as environmental ones. For example, for catering contractors and accommodation, select local eco-aware companies or social-economy companies that employ staff in a socially conscious manner (e.g. they comply with safety and labour rules or employ people from disadvantaged groups or long-term unemployed people). If possible, select fair-trade products for promotional material and gadgets, which can give boost small-scale producers with limited market access.

Did you know?

The Commission has a corporate Social Impact & Engagement Adviser, who develops and coordinates policies and initiatives in the area of corporate social responsibility. The adviser collaborates with EMAS and health and safety at work teams and the medical services. Corporate social responsibility refers to our mandate to care for each other in the Commission and for people in the communities around us.

Step 7: Raising awareness



Basic options

Communicate on the event's sustainability measures.

Ensure sustainable action that participants can take is clearly signalled at the event.

Let participants give feedback on the event's sustainability measures through a survey or include questions on sustainability in your post-event survey.

Come up with catchy sentences to promote your efforts in communication material (before, during and after the event).

Advanced options

Implement a sustainable event management system (e.g. ISO 20121) or environmental management schemes (e.g. EMAS) directly or via suppliers/contractors.

Create a 'sustainable conference' report on the website or a video, highlighting the sustainable measures taken.

If you have made environmental and sustainability measures part of the event's design and organisation, you should promote them. Inform your participants and other stakeholders about your practices via your usual communication channels to promote your event's sustainability and engage with those involved.

At the event, communicate on why and how the event has been made more sustainable. This can be done through short speeches by the host or organisers and by promoting all sustainable initiatives on the event's website. References to international reports providing objective figures on climate change and the impact of our daily choices can also be interesting reliable sources of information (see references at the end of these guidelines). Ask participants for feedback about how they made the event more sustainable, for instance, how many of them returned their badges at the end for reuse or recycling. This may be done either via a quick feedback station at the exit or a questionnaire asking if they were aware of, supportive of, enthusiastic about or (even) annoyed by the greening efforts.

Ideally, monitoring and reporting indicators should be set in advance to quantify achievements, benchmark weaker areas and set targets for future improvements. Following the event, your success stories should be shared (e.g. post a 'sustainable conference' report on the website or a video). By promoting the sustainable service providers involved, you give them visibility. This can be an incentive for them to continue acting sustainably, while inspiring others to follow their example.

Lastly, as already presented in step 0, to further strengthen the validity of your sustainability measures, you could implement a sustainable event management system (e.g. ISO 20121) directly or via contractors/suppliers responsible for the event's organisation. As an alternative to an event management system, suppliers and accommodation providers can also have an environmental management system in place (e.g. EMAS).

Did you know?

The Commission organises an annual competition to select the greenest events of the year in several categories. It aims to promote best practices and share experience. Participating in this competition will give your event greater visibility and recognition.

Did you know?

Through EMAS, the Commission monitors its environmental performance on an annual basis, e.g. energy consumption, paper consumption, waste generation, waste sorting, greenhouse gas emissions. By taking sustainable measures during the design and organisation of your event, you directly contribute to improving the Commission's environmental performance. For further information, please see the Commission's Environmental Statement on Europa¹⁸.

Did you know?

Since 2017, the European Parliament has been coordinating the [Interinstitutional Green Public Procurement \(GPP\) Helpdesk](#), which focuses on sustainable development, environmental issues and social aspects of public procurement. Since 2021, it is open to all Commission departments, 6 executive agencies, as well as additional 22 participating EU institutions and bodies. The helpdesk can answer your green public procurement questions, provide customised support in developing green tender specifications, help with market research on new sustainable products and services, give access to best practices in an interinstitutional database and make presentations to EU staff about greening the purchase of goods and services.

Contact: gpp-helpdesk@europarl.europa.eu or +32 78 480949.



¹⁸ [EMAS in the European Institutions \(europa.eu\)](#)

Further reading

Sustainable event organisation

- [Sustainability Tips for Planning a Green Hybrid Conference.](#)
- European Commission – Joint Research Centre, 2015: Best Environmental Management Practice for the Public Administration Sector: <http://susproc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/activities/emas/documents/PublicAdminBEMP.pdf>.
- Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), 2015: *Guidelines for the Sustainable Organisation of events*: https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/sites/default/files/medien/376/publikationen/guidelines_for_the_sustainable_organisation_of_events_bf.pdf.
- Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), 2012: *How to organise sustainable meetings & events in Brussels: A practical guide*: <https://iclei-europe.org/publications-tools/?c=search&uid=bYzvvhOR>.
- United Nations Environment Programme, 2009: *Green Meeting Guide 2009 – Roll out the green carpet for your participants*: [Green meeting guide 2009: roll out the green carpet for your participants \(unep.org\)](https://www.unep.org/press/docs/2009/09/20090901_green_meeting_guide_2009.pdf).
- United Nations Environment Programme, 2012: *Sustainable events guide - Give your large event a small footprint*: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/pdf/Buying-Green-Handbook-3rd-Edition.pdf>.
- Net Zero Carbon Events Initiative: <https://www.netzerocarbonevents.org>.

Green Public Procurement (GPP)

- European Commission, DG Environment, 2016: *Buying Green! A handbook on green public procurement* (3rd edition): <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/pdf/Buying-Green-Handbook-3rd-Edition.pdf>.

Sustainable catering

- European Commission, DG Environment, *GPP criteria for food & catering*: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/eu_gpp_criteria_en.htm.
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) - Office for Sustainability: *Guide to sustainable catering - Zero Waste Planning Guide Chapter*: http://web.mit.edu/workinggreen/docs/sustainable_catering_guide.pdf.

EU Ecolabel

- [The EU Ecolabel for Tourist Accommodation - factsheet](#)
- [The EU Ecolabel for Graphic Paper- factsheet](#)
- [The EU Ecolabel for Printed Paper, Stationery Paper and Paper Carrier Bags- factsheet](#)
- [The EU Ecolabel product Catalogue](#)

Contact

European Commission

Directorate General for Interpretation, Conference Services Unit, SCIC.C1
SCIC EMAS: SCIC-EMAS@ec.europa.eu
SCIC C1: SCIC-C1-SECRETARIAT@ec.europa.eu

Directorate General Human Resources and Security, EMAS Coordination Team, HR.D.7:
EC-EMAS@ec.europa.eu

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Annex I - Checklist

Guidelines on organising sustainable meetings and events at the Commission

The main elements that should be considered to significantly reduce the environmental impact when organising an event are presented below. You can complete this checklist to keep a record of how you have taken them into account for a particular event.

Event title:

Date:/...../.....

Step 0: Format: physical, hybrid or virtual	Yes/No comments
Basic options	
Reflect on the best format for the meeting or event and how people can participate online.	
Meetings: Replace a physical meeting (if appropriate) with an audio or video conference or webinar, possibly supported by Commission collaborative solutions.	
Conferences: To be more inclusive, organise a fully virtual or hybrid conference (in-person and virtual) or a multi-site conference to reduce travel and give participants the option to attend remotely.	
Record the physical event and make it available online (let your audience know beforehand).	
Turn off non-presenting participants' cameras by default.	
Enable live chat.	
Encourage people to zip media files before sharing them.	
Do not send unnecessary emails or share unnecessary files before and after the event.	
Advanced options	
Use a sustainable event management tool, for example, based on ISO 20121 ¹⁹ , or opt for suppliers/contractors implementing an environmental management scheme, e.g. EMAS, ISO 14001 or an equivalent standard.	
Adjust the time and location of the meeting or conference to external factors (such as other meetings taking place in the same town, the frequency of scheduled flights, and the possibility of direct transport options).	
Consider organising a more inclusive event: ensure better physical and virtual accessibility.	

Step 1: Venue	Yes/No comments
Basic options	
Consider the venue's proximity to airports, train stations and the city centre; the venue should be easily accessible by public transport, bike and foot and have secure bike parking.	
Prioritise energy efficient buildings: choose venues and accommodation that comply with green-building standards or demonstrate that they implement environmental policies and good practices.	

¹⁹ ISO 20121 available at: [Greening of events - SCIC Corporate Conference Organisation - EC Extranet Wiki \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eip/eip-ecm/wiki/ISO_20121).

Ensure selective waste collection and recycling systems are in place.	
Consider venues with additional technical facilities that allow for virtual participation.	
Customise event rooms as little as possible and use preset meeting room layouts. Customised layouts imply the use of additional resources and may require transport for equipment and people.	
Advanced options	
Choose a venue with an environmental management system in place (e.g. EMAS, ISO 14001 or an equivalent standard).	
Lower heating temperatures in winter and air conditioning in summer.	
Include green requirements in the procurement process for selecting venues and accommodation.	

Step 2: Transport & accommodation	Yes/No comments
Basic options	
Reduce travel emissions by reducing and targeting the number of people attending in person.	
Recommend accommodation close to the venue and easily accessible by public transport, foot and bike.	
Encourage sustainable transport by providing participants with relevant information (e.g. maps, timetables)	
Recommend participants to use more sustainable transport modes (e.g. train instead of air travel).	
To minimise transport needs, promote carpooling or provide green transport (electrical shuttle) in more remote locations.	
When flying is the only option, prioritise direct and economy flights.	
Apply the same principles when you organise travel for guest speakers.	
Advanced options	
Choose hotels with excellent environmental performance (certified through the EU Ecolabel ²⁰ or another equivalent ISO 14024 certification scheme) or hotels that registered to a premium environmental management system (such as EMAS ²¹) to evaluate, report, and improve their environmental performance.	
Recommend participants to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from their travel by choosing more sustainable transport options.	
Organise local shared transport arrangements (e.g. shuttle buses) to transfer participants from and to airports, field visits and the city centre.	

Step 3: 5 Rs Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle	Yes/No comments
Basic options	
Minimise waste: avoid it completely and, if not possible, reduce printed material, gadgets, packaging, single-use items and food waste.	
Aim to avoid using single-use items.	

²⁰ [EU Ecolabel - Home \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/euro-observatory/en/eu-ecolabel).

²¹ [Eco-Management and Audit Scheme \(EMAS\) \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/euro-observatory/en/eu-emas).

Prioritise reusable items whenever possible and, if not, choose compostable and biodegradable ²² alternatives.	
Reuse generic branding; use any screens that are available in the venue to display information in or outside the meeting room.	
Go for cardboard over plastic.	
Purchase or choose items that can be used for other events.	
Ensure waste is properly sorted, collected and recycled.	
Advanced options	
Make the event a zero-waste event.	
Use glass bottles for drinks.	

Step 4: Catering	Yes/No comments
Basic options	
Choose preferably a combination of seasonal, organic and fair-trade food and drinks with a short supply chain whenever possible.	
Provide a large choice of plant-based food options.	
Order less food to prevent waste. Be aware of no-shows: planning for 20% fewer than the registered participants is a safe approach for catering. Adjust the quantities as close as possible to the event date.	
Offer small portions or plates to encourage participants to come back for more rather than leaving larger half-eaten portions.	
Avoid single-use items, especially plastic. Instead, use reusable cutlery and crockery.	
Preferably provide water fountains or jugs with glasses or compostable/recyclable cups instead of single-use bottles.	
Use alternatives to individual condiment packets, such as self-serve dispensers.	
Wherever possible, dispose of organic waste using local waste selection options.	
Advanced options	
Whenever possible, propose a full vegetarian or vegan menu option.	
If you use an external caterer, give extra points in the selection procedure to certified caterers applying environmental management schemes (e.g. EMAS).	
Propose tap water instead of mineral water.	
Advertise and promote your sustainable catering efforts on the service tables and through channels like the event website.	
Whenever available, ask for certified organic food.	
If you use an external caterer, explore the possibility to donate leftover food. Even donating food to animal shelters is better than throwing it out.	
If water fountains are available, encourage your participants in the invitation letter to bring their own water bottle.	
Make green requirements part of the procurement process for selecting catering companies ²³ .	

²² UNI EN 13432:2002 certified for compostable items.

²³ [Contact support \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic_contact-support_en.pdf).

Step 5: Promotional and printed material	Yes/No comments
Basic options	
Use online or digital tools, for example, for registration and making material and resources available.	
Avoid the use of printed material or limit or optimise its use. Give preference to eco-friendly design and printing ²⁴ based on available budget and printing materials. This will be subject to analysis and validation beforehand if the request is done via the OIB.	
For signposting, use existing equipment (screens, poles, poster frames, etc.).	
Avoid or limit the distribution of promotional gadgets and gifts (e.g. limit the number, if it's not possible choose among EU Ecolabel products or include eco-friendly criteria in the procurement process for them).	
Choose objects with value and good long-term use (e.g. a resistant drinking bottle). Good quality products have a much longer lifespan.	
Order a small amount of office supplies. Choose items that have been recycled and that are refillable and made from natural material. Collect them after the event for future use.	
Reuse conference materials from previous events (e.g. stands, banners, signage).	
Whenever possible, re-use designs from similar events. If necessary, some parts can be adapted to better fit the conference.	
Advanced options	
Reuse event materials from past events for different purposes (e.g. old banners turned into bags). Think of the circular economy and be sustainable in a larger sense.	
Think of transport for promotional materials. Pay attention to distance and organise sustainable delivery methods wherever possible.	
Order material with sustainable packaging, avoiding plastic.	
Organise specialised waste sorting and removal of materials, especially exhibition material.	
Consider the social economy and give preference to inclusive companies.	
Promote the measures taken for sustainability on your promotional material.	

Step 6: Social aspects	Yes/No comments
Basic options	
Check that all your service providers strictly comply with safety and labour rules.	
Require companies to apply eco-friendly procedures when carrying out the contract and to employ staff in a socially conscious manner, including subcontractors (e.g. for catering, accommodation).	
Advanced options	
Select sustainable local or fair-trade products (e.g. promotional material and gadgets).	
Give priority to suppliers with inclusive policies and who work with underrepresented groups of employees.	

²⁴ Give preference to [EU Ecolabel graphic paper](#), and to [EU Ecolabel printed and stationery paper](#).

Step 7: Awareness raising	Yes/No comments
Basic options	
Communicate on the event's sustainability measures.	
Ensure sustainable action that participants can take is clearly signalled at the event.	
Let participants give feedback on the event's sustainability measures through a survey or include questions on sustainability in your post-event survey.	
Come up with catchy sentences to promote your efforts in communication material (before, during and after the event).	
Advanced options	
Implement a sustainable event management system (e.g. ISO 20121) or environmental management schemes (e.g. EMAS) directly or via suppliers/contractors.	
Create a 'sustainable conference' report on the website or a video, highlighting the sustainable measures taken.	

Annex II - Eco tips

Eco tips for organisers to minimise an event's digital footprint

To complement the points mentioned under step 0 of the guidelines, organisers may consider the following measures to minimise an event's digital footprint. These can be shared with attendees in a pre-event email and on the event's website.

- Reflect on the best format for the meeting or event and how people can participate online.
- Meetings: Replace a physical meeting (if appropriate) with an audio or video conference or webinar, possibly supported by Commission collaborative solutions.
- Conferences: to be more inclusive, organise a hybrid conference (in-person and virtual) or a multi-site conference to reduce travel and give participants the option to attend remotely.
- Record the physical event and make it available online (let your audience know beforehand).
- Turn off non-presenting participants' cameras by default.
- Lower the video quality when streaming where possible. Switching from high definition or 4K to standard definition can considerably reduce your carbon footprint.
- Enable live chat.
- Encourage people to zip media files before sharing them.
- Do not send unnecessary emails or share unnecessary files before and after the event.

Example of email/message to participants

'We also encourage you to do what you can to reduce the environmental impact of your attendance. A few easy steps you can take during and after the event to make a difference are listed below.'

- Switch off your camera when it is not necessary. This can considerably reduce the carbon footprint of your online presence.
- Reduce the brightness of your computer monitor. Lowering it from 100% to 70% brightness can save up to 20% of the energy used without affecting your experience.
- Switch off your computer when it is not in use: this saves power, improves your computer's performance and helps battery life. Your energy consumption can be reduced by two thirds by simply turning off the monitor.
- Consider unplugging your laptop from time to time, even for a short period, especially if your laptop is fully charged.

Annex III - Catering



Technical specifications

Event title:			
Date:			
Address:			
Services' summary:			
When	What	Where	Quantity
<i>e.g. 9:30-10:00</i>	<i>Coffee break</i>	<i>Foyer main room</i>	<i>350</i>
...			

The contractor is required to provide quality food and beverages at the conference above and any staff, material or transport needed to provide this service.

General

Menus and set-ups need to be adapted to event space and take into account any constraints. The contractor may be required to integrate the catering into space used for other purposes at the event (for example, a mixed catering and exhibition space).

Any catering offer should include an explanation of what action the contractor will take to avoid food waste. For any unavoidable leftover foods or materials, the contractor must propose solutions for disposing of them in a sustainable way, for example, donating them to a local charity or composting/recycling them.

The catering services required for the event include but are not limited to:

- food and beverages;
- tables and chairs or other furniture;
- cutlery and crockery;
- tablecloths;
- dedicated staff to help with last-minute changes or adapt to ad hoc requests;
- accommodating special dietary needs, including gluten/lactose-free, halal, kosher, vegan, vegetarian;
- food labelling (e.g. vegetarian, vegan, lactose-free, gluten-free);
- catering at the event location and off site;
- VIP dinners;
- social events;
- setting up and decorating catering locations;
- place cards;
- printed menus;
- blank seating plans;

- cleaning and waste disposal.

Catering and related services must be quoted at market prices.

Coffee break

- This should be made up of coffee, tea, healthy juices, water, biscuits, small sweets, pastries and fruit.
- Biscuits and pastries should preferably be locally sourced, organic and easily consumed while standing.
- Heavily processed industrial options are not recommended.
- Single packaging is not allowed.
- Fruit must be washed.

Buffet lunch or cocktail dinner

Mainly plant-based buffet, including water, healthy juices, coffee, and tea. There should be no red meat on the menu. Some sustainably sourced fish, eggs and dairy are allowed. Food should preferably be seasonal, locally sourced, organic and easily consumed while standing. Fish and shellfish have to be sourced as much as possible from the EU and should not include endangered species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s red list²⁵. The use of sustainable consumer guides is recommended to select the fish to serve, e.g. Seafood Watch²⁶.

- The menu should consist of at least six different dishes, at least 50% of which should be vegan/vegetarian. Vegetarian dishes may include eggs and dairy.
- All dishes should be made using whole ingredients.
- They should not contain industrial or heavily/ultra-processed ingredients, such as meat substitutes.
- Nutri-Scores should be taken into account (in Member States that use them); D and E scores should be avoided.
- At least 25% of dishes should be low carb.
- Some allergen-free dishes should also be provided (e.g. gluten-, dairy- and egg-free) once numbers are known after registration.
- Bulk food should be used as much as possible.
- Food in plastic packaging should be used as little as possible.
- The buffet is made up of savoury warm and cold dishes, fresh salads and at least four different types of small desserts (minimum three per person).
- 50% of the food must be vegan, including desserts. The meals must be of impeccable quality, tasty and presented in an appealing way to entice the intended audience.
- Fruit must be washed.

²⁵ <https://www.iucnredlist.org>

²⁶ <https://www.seafoodwatch.org>



The presentation of the buffet is very important. All dishes must be accompanied by a clear description of the main ingredients, including the origin where relevant. For example, indicate the origin with 'Local vegetables' or indicate 'Contains animal and/or vegetable proteins', 'Contains possible allergens'.

Fully vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free and lactose-free dishes should be available and clearly indicated on the menu that the contractor submits before and put on display during the event.

Coffee machines should not use plastic or non-recyclable capsules.

Beverages are only to be served from glass bottles or a water fountain.

Food and drink should be presented on sufficiently large buffet tables covered by tablecloths down to the floor. There should be several food access points to make the service easier and avoid queuing. Food and drink are to be consumed at high tables in the catering area. The high tables should be covered in tablecloths and decorated with a small centrepiece unless their design does not require it. Chairs are not needed.

Tablecloths, if needed, must be clean and ironed. Plates, glasses, cups and cutlery must be made from sustainable materials (glass, porcelain, stainless steel, bamboo, wood, slate). No plastic is allowed. Tableware must be clean and identical for all guests.

The contractor must provide a sustainable buffet and table decoration.

The caterer must provide umbrella roofs for outdoor buffet coverage if there is rain, potted plants for decoration, and cordons with pole columns to delimit outdoor catering area.

At the cocktail dinner, food and drink must be served on trays by waiters.

The serving staff should be able to speak fluent English. Any other EU language is an asset.

At this stage of the organisation, the indicated quantities are only an estimate and subject to a later revision. Exact timings are still to be confirmed by the European Commission. The contractor must be able to adapt their proposal to the actual number of participants upon the Commission's request.

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE EU

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All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you online (european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en).

On the phone or in writing

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- by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls),
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EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1951 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex (eur-lex.europa.eu).

EU open data

The portal data.europa.eu provides access to open datasets from the EU institutions, bodies and agencies. These can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and noncommercial purposes. The portal also provides access to a wealth of datasets from European countries.

