

ORGANISING SUSTAINABLE EVENTS

A sustainability concept



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

**UNLOCKING
THE POWER
OF DATA
INITIATIVE**

CONTENTS

This concept was created as part of the “Unlocking the Power of Data Initiative”¹. The measures and recommendations are based on various existing federal regulations and recommendations.

The paper was prepared together with various stakeholders within and outside the federal administration.



¹ www.upd-initiative.ch

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1. FOREWORD

The organisation of national and international events by the Swiss Confederation is an important task of federal offices. Sustainability and its implementation covers three dimensions: social, economic and environmental aspects. Sustainability and the responsible use of resources must be a key part of these events. All three dimensions have been taken into account in this concept.



The following pages are based on the sustainability concept that was developed and applied for the 3rd United Nations World Data Forum (UNWDF) in October 2021. This concept has been created and implemented together with partners from the federal administration and external stakeholders from the private sector. Experience gained in implementing and reviewing the sustainability concept was noted in the conference final report and communicated in various places such as on the “Holiday Day” in spring 2022, which was organised by Switzerland Tourism. Further information on the UNWDF’s sustainability concept and the evaluation is available from the following website: www.upd-initiative.ch/de/nachhaltigkeitskonzept.

This concept also takes into account other documents, recommendations and decisions that are already being applied in the federal administration, as well as practical examples that are also already being regularly implemented by various stakeholders. Examples include the “Recommendations for enjoyable and environmentally friendly catering at events”² from the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), the recommendations on events in the Federal Administration’s “Equality Strategy 2030”³ and the Federal Council’s guidelines for business trips⁴, which were introduced by the Federal Administration as part of the “Climate Package”⁵.

In this context, the pandemic years have highlighted opportunities concerning the types of events that exist. Today there are considered to be three possibilities: a) On-site events, b) hybrid events, c) virtual events

In line with the “leaving no one behind” motto, the aim is to find more sustainable ways to hold events integrating the environment, people and the local economy. The measures and recommendations mentioned below should not be considered exhaustive, but they can be used as a basis and guideline for organising national and international events. Of course, this is not just possible at events organised by the federal administration.

We would like to thank our partners both within and outside the federal administration who gave us input during the preparation of this concept.

² www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/de/home/themen/wirtschaft-konsum/fachinformationen/nachhaltiger-konsum/konsumentscheide-und-umwelt.html (in German, French and Italian only)

³ www.ebg.admin.ch/ebg/de/home/themen/recht/gleichstellungsstrategie2030.html (in German, French and Italian only)

⁴ www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen.msg-id-79417.html (in German, French and Italian only)

⁵ www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen.msg-id-75697.html (in German, French and Italian only)

2. INTRODUCTION

The term “sustainable development” was first defined as it is understood today in the 1987 Brundtland Report:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

It is about nothing less than together creating an inclusive and stable future for people and the environment, from which future generations can draw resources to ensure the positive development of global society.



Sustainable development goes beyond the environment. It covers economic, ecological and social aspects, all of which are interconnected.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a major step in this direction. Since 2016, it has served as a global framework for national and international efforts to address the most important challenges to be tackled worldwide. These include extreme poverty, climate change, environmental degradation and related health crises.

The 2030 Agenda comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Many of these can be attributed to various actions in the organisation of national and international events.

The goal of this concept is to evaluate the possible environmental, social and economic impact of holding events and to propose countermeasures and recommendations.

2.1. Principles related to the implementation of sustainable events

Before organising events, the following elements should be considered at each stage from the concept phase onwards:

Reduction

Are the planned dimensions (size, duration, framework, etc.) necessary to achieve the event's goal?

Reducing the scope of the various elements can effectively reduce resources and thus also positively impact the budget.

Substitution

Can the selected elements or sub-areas be replaced by others with a more positive impact in terms of the *3 dimensions of sustainability*?

2.2. Various forms of events

Planning an event is always about bringing people together for a common purpose – to educate, inform, negotiate, or celebrate. Participation in events can be divided into three different types:

2.2.1. On-site events

All participants are on site and virtual participation is not possible. However, it should be possible for individual speakers to join from afar.

This is the most effective form of communication and experience that can be offered to the participants. There is no medium that better expresses the nuances of communication than personal contact. Body language is an important factor in communication. Posture, gestures, facial expressions and eye movements are best conveyed in person. Furthermore, many people attend events not only for the content, but also for the opportunity to meet and network with other participants (and also with the speakers).

2.2.2. Hybrid events

Some of the participants are on site and some participate virtually: This variant enables a wide range of participants to take part and can substantially reduce an event's carbon footprint. This form of organisation is complex to implement.

Hybrid events combine the best of both worlds: Some of the participants can attend in person while others can participate virtually, which increases the benefit of the entire interaction. Hybrid events can also be used as a method to reduce costs and resources, as the time investment and travel expenses incurred by some of the participants are eliminated. In contrast, the costs for the organiser are often substantial. This inclusive format offers all participants flexibility and convenience and allows participants from all around the world to take part, even if time zones must be taken into account.

2.2.3. Virtual events

This type of event allows for short-term exchanges, lower costs, and a wider reach. In this case, all participants are connected via a platform. Panellists and presenters can be together in one studio.

People often opt for virtual events if resources such as time and money are scarce. Virtual events can be held quickly and with a considerable reduction in costs. Some good examples of discussions that work best in a purely virtual format are panel discussions on current events or political issues, interviews or educational events that last up to 90 minutes. Virtual events are also a good option if it is necessary to plan something quickly in response to a potential crisis or controversial issue. For longer discussions that focus on face-to-face interaction, on-site or hybrid event formats are usually more suitable. These events have a small impact on travel, but energy is nonetheless still used for this type of conference.

2.2.4. The advantages and disadvantages of the different types of events

Each event has its advantages and disadvantages. Below are two tables that can be used as a basis for decision-making.

WHAT TYPE OF EVENT WOULD BE MOST APPROPRIATE?

	On-site	Hybrid	Virtual
Effective communication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Quick turnaround			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Saves on costs			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Better cooperation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Wider reach		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Flexibility and convenience		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sharing of complex information	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Low travel costs		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

THE FOLLOWING TABLE SHOWS THE DIFFERENT STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE THREE TYPES OF EVENT.

ON-SITE EVENTS

⊕ STRENGTHS

- Networking is easier;
- The experience is usually more intense than in the case of other types of events;
- It is easier to build a rapport with other participants, as social aspects (such as aperitifs) can also be integrated;
- Confidential discussions can easily be held.

⊖ WEAKNESSES

- The total resources required are substantial and the costs are not negligible;
- The reach is limited to the participants.

♻️ SUSTAINABILITY ASPECTS

Emissions are generated by arrivals, departures and the on-site implementation. These may conflict with the interest in building networks and rapport.

HYBRID EVENTS

⊕ STRENGTHS

- You achieve a wide reach
- Participants can choose to attend only part of the event;
- Accessibility is ensured for more people than is the case for purely professional events;

⊖ WEAKNESSES

- The attention span of online participants is much shorter (this must be taken into account when developing the programme);
- Good quality for virtual participants comes at a high price and consumes a lot of energy (electricity)
- Networking opportunities are limited;
- The complex organisation is extremely time-consuming and the preparation requires a substantial amount of human resources;
- The costs are high;
- People attending the conference online may have less access to the event than those attending on-site.

♻️ SUSTAINABILITY ASPECTS

Hybrid events require the greatest amount of physical resources overall (catering, technology, electricity, etc.). Moreover, no shows are also a problem. Participants register and watch via an online stream. It is important to consider what content should be made available online to save resources.

VIRTUELLE VERANSTALTUNGEN

⊕ STRENGTHS

- Relatively easy to organise and fewer resources required for preparation
- Low budget
- Participants are all equal and have easy access to the event.

⊖ WEAKNESSES

- Participants' attention span is shorter than for an on-site event
- Networking is not possible or is extremely limited
- Interaction and participation must be planned in detail using the event platform (e.g., MS Teams, Zoom or Webex). Not all platforms are available in all countries.

♻️ SUSTAINABILITY ASPECTS

Requires few resources. However, the energy resources needed for virtual events should not be underestimated. Attention spans may not do justice to the content's importance.

The type of event chosen has a direct impact on the goals to be achieved. Reducing an event's carbon footprint can, for example, be in direct conflict with the goal of enabling an active exchange between par-

ticipants or building networks. Each event organiser must ask themselves which type is most suitable and how any negative impact can be minimised in terms of sustainability.

3. MEASURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The concept contains measures (M) and recommendations (R) for managing the environmental, social and economic impact of events. The measures can be implemented directly by the event organisers, while the recommendations are intended for the event partners and participants.



The proposed measures and recommendations will address the most important issues in the following areas:

- 1. Reducing CO₂**
- 2. Mobility**
- 3. Catering**
- 4. Logistics**
- 5. Social aspects**
- 6. Economy**
- 7. Knowledge transfer**

The seven aspects mentioned were recorded in such a way that they can be applied directly by organisers. For this reason, the measures and recommendations have been written in the “we” form.

It is not always possible to implement all measures and recommendations for every event. The measures and recommendations are intended to offer assistance when implementing sustainable events. The costs for holding sustainable events are often lower than those without sustainability measures.

3.1. CO₂-Reduction

Reducing CO₂ has a direct impact on the following goal:



For each event firstly consider how it would be possible to reduce the carbon footprint. How can elements be replaced, for instance? Can some parts be omitted completely? This applies in particular to gadgets, giveaways and single-use exhibits (see also chapter 2.1).

Not all emissions can be avoided but CO₂ offsetting can at least partially compensate for this shortcoming. The idea is that those who generate CO₂ emissions finance climate protection projects that then save the same amount CO₂ elsewhere. CO₂ offsetting is an interim solution for emissions which are currently unavoidable. That is why reducing CO₂ should always come first, for example, by using green electricity.

MEASURES

- M.1** We reduce emissions with specific targets in the project plan and focus on this when planning the event.
- M.2** We commission a company to evaluate the event's CO₂ emissions as well as additional energy saving opportunities.⁶
- M.3** After the event, we calculate and then financially compensate for the CO₂ emissions.
- M.4** We actively communicate the name of the company and the projects financed by the compensation payment before, during and after the event.⁷

⁶ Further information on this topic can be found at the following link:
www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/en/home/topics/climate/info-specialists/reduction-measures/compensation.html

⁷ Further information on this topic can be found at the following link:
www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/en/home/topics/climate/info-specialists/reduction-measures/compensation.html

3.2. Mobility

Mobility has a direct impact on the following SDGs:



Many means of transport generate high quantities of CO₂ emissions. This is a major issue which we intend to tackle with the following actions and recommendations:

MEASURES

- M.5** When looking for a suitable conference venue, we highly prioritise good access to public transport, short distances to transport infrastructure (railway stations, etc.) and important transport hubs.
- M.6** We will check whether public transport can be used free of charge for participants. This is possible in some cities in Switzerland.
- M.7** We organise partnerships with a national or local transport company so that participants can use public transport cheaply even outside the locality. The Swiss Travel Pass⁸ for participants travelling from abroad can support this measure.
- M.8** We proactively communicate how public transport can be used (free of charge). This will be done as part of the preparations by email and/or via the event page.
- M.9** We do not use private buses when changing locations and rely on public transport.
- M.10** We encourage the use of bicycles available at the venue.
- M.11** As the organiser, we offset the participants' CO₂ emissions incurred by travel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R.1** We recommend that participants travel by train where possible.⁹ Those arriving by plane should continue their journey by public transport after arriving in Switzerland.
- R.2** We recommend that participants offset their CO₂ emissions.
- R.3** We recommend that participants use public transport during their stay.
- R.4** We encourage participants to choose a hotel or accommodation that is either close to the venue or located within the public transport network. Labels such as Swisstainable¹⁰ from Switzerland Tourism can be used for guidance.

⁸ www.sbb.ch/en/leisure-holidays/inspiration/international-guests/swiss-travel-pass.html

⁹ As regards participants from the Swiss administration, for any destination that can be reached in less than six hours (door-to-door), the journey must be made by train. Further information can be found here: www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen.msg-id-79417.html (in German, French and Italian only)

¹⁰ www.myswitzerland.com/en-ch/planning/about-switzerland/sustainability

3.3. Catering

3.3.1 Catering

Catering has a direct impact on the following goals:



MEASURES

- M.12** We only offer vegetarian buffets.
- M.13** Plant products are sustainable, seasonal and of organic and/or regional origin. In general, organically produced food always has a smaller carbon footprint.
- M.14** We label animal products (eggs, milk, etc.) and these are produced regionally and organically.
- M.15** We label the origin of the food.
- M.16** We only use fair trade food and drinks.
- M.17** We provide tap water.
- M.18** We provide water fountains.
- M.19** We only provide regional drinks, especially beer and wine.

3.3.2 Food waste

Food waste has a direct impact on the following goals:



MEASURES

- M.20** Buffets can be provided with individually packaged food in sustainable containers. (For example: Main courses with filling side dishes already pre-packed in “Weck” glass jars).
- M.21** We check dietary requirements and allergies in advance and give participants a choice.
- M.22** We order catering for a maximum of 80% of participants registered for on-site attendance.
- M.23** We offer participants the option of taking unpacked food home in their own containers.
- M.24** After the event, we offer to pass on unpacked food to third parties. Due to hygiene regulations (HACCP)¹¹ this is not possible for all dishes, but this point must be actively discussed with the catering provider to evaluate the options available (as seen by the example of the canton of Geneva)¹².
- M.25** Our tableware and tablecloths are reusable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R.5** We replace bottled mineral water with tap water in the meeting rooms.
- R.6** We encourage participants to bring their own drinking bottle as tap water is drinkable everywhere in Switzerland.
- R.7** We ensure that the caterer provides water dispensers in key areas so everyone can refill their own bottle.
- R.8** We provide organic fair-trade coffee and sustainably produced tea.
- R.9** We refrain from providing any takeaway coffee containers or cutlery.
- R.10** For hot drinks, we do not use individual portions for condiments such as cream, milk & sugar.

¹¹ Further information: www.wirtepatent.ch/de/wissen/haccp-konzept-hygienekonzept-in-der-gastronomie-127.html (in German only)

¹² www.geneve.ch/en/themes/sustainable-development/what-action-does-municipality-take/engagements-economie/feed-city-program/fostering-transition-towards-sustainable-food/reducing-food-waste

3.4. Logistics

3.4.1 Paper & documents

These have a direct impact on the following SDG:



MEASURES

- M.26** We have reduced the size of the printed programme to a minimum (by excluding abstracts and biographies) and provide an accessible electronic programme for persons with disabilities.
- M.27** For the programme that is still printed, we ensure that recycled paper is used.
- M.28** Prior to and during the event, we upload all documents onto the fully-accessible website for participants to download onto a portable device.
- M.29** We restrict the use of notepads and pens.
- M.30** We provide the material either in spoken format or in Braille for participants with visual impairments.

3.4.2 Stands and exhibitions

Stands and exhibitions have a direct impact on the following SDGs:



RECOMMENDATIONS

- R.11** We encourage exhibitors to use recycled and recyclable materials.
- R.12** We encourage exhibitors to reuse stands.
- R.13** We encourage exhibitors to avoid or at least minimise the use of promotional items such as bags (or if necessary, make them from fair-trade cotton) and other gifts.
- R.14** We encourage exhibitors to avoid packaging.
- R.15** We encourage exhibitors to bring only the required amount of printed materials.
- R.16** We encourage exhibitors to reuse packaging material for the stand.

- R.17** We encourage exhibitors to avoid stands that use a lot of energy and unnecessary lighting.
- R.18** We encourage exhibitors to take energy-saving measures.

3.4.3 Waste management

Waste management has a direct impact on the following SDGs:



MEASURES

- M.31** We avoid generating too much waste, especially single-use plastics such as cups and PET bottles.
- M.32** We do not produce any special clothing for the event.
- M.33** We collect unused lanyards at the end of the event and reuse them at another event.
- M.34** We will check whether it is necessary to produce name tags and if so whether they should be recyclable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R.19** We encourage participants to separate waste (PET, paper, other waste) and indicate this at the venue.

3.4.4 Energy

Energy has a direct impact on the following SDGs:



MEASURES

- M.35** We use only energy from hydro or solar sources at the venues (generally only green electricity) and from local and regional suppliers where possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R.20** We encourage all participants to limit electricity consumption by turning off any unused electrical appliances. This is especially important for hybrid and virtual events.

3.5. Social aspects

3.5.1 Choice of partner institutions

Employment has a direct impact on the following SDGs:



MEASURES

M.36 When awarding contracts to partner companies, we ensure the three sustainability dimensions are taken into account and that this is of central importance when assessing the awarding of the contracts. This can be done, for example, based on sustainability reports from partner companies. This should be applied to products from home and abroad.

M.37 Various group activities will also be offered as part of the event, e.g., yoga, jogging and guided meditations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R.21 We encourage partner companies to apply eco-friendly procedures when implementing the contract.

R.22 We encourage partner companies to employ staff in a socially responsible manner, avoiding any discrimination e.g., on the basis of gender, origin or disability (this is in line with the Swiss Confederation's GTCs).¹³

R.23 We recommend that subcontractors who do not have their own sustainability strategy should prepare one.

3.5.2 Accessibility for persons with disabilities

Accessibility has a direct impact on the following SDGs:



MEASURES

M.38 We ensure that all premises and the event's online platform are accessible for people with disabilities.

¹³ For further information: www.bkb.admin.ch/bkb/de/home/themen/agb.html (in German, French and Italian only)

- M.39** We ensure that all catering and seating is accessible. The same applies to coffee breaks.
- M.40** We ensure that the event is subtitled live.
- M.41** We ensure that the (international) event is interpreted into international sign language.
- M.42** We ensure reserved seating with signage for persons with disabilities and their personal assistants/interpreters.
- M.43** We ensure that the measures taken are discussed in advance with the involved stakeholders (venue, partner organisations, speakers, etc.) and organisations representing people with disabilities.
- M.44** We ensure that the content is presented in a way that can be understood by all participants. This can be ensured by simultaneous interpretation into different languages.

3.5.3 Equal opportunities

Equal opportunities for all genders has a direct impact on the following SDGs:



MEASURES

- M.45** We ensure that there is a balance of the genders among speakers and moderators. Each gender should be represented at least 40%.¹⁴
- M.46** We take diversity into account when selecting juries as well as decision-making and planning committees.
- M.47** We take linguistic diversity into account if the event covers several language regions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R.24** We ensure that there is a balance of the genders among the number of participants allowed on-site.
- R.25** We provide toilets that are accessible for persons with disabilities as well as single-sex and unisex toilets.

¹⁴ Further information can be found here: www.ebg.admin.ch/ebg/de/home/themen/recht/gleichstellungsstrategie2030/paneletparite.html (in German, French and Italian only)

3.5.4 Geographical diversity

Geographical diversity has a direct impact on the following goal:



MEASURES

- M.48** For international events, we ensure that all UN regions (on-site and online) are represented. The limited on-site places should also be reserved in particular for representatives of developing and least developed countries.
- M.49** For events of national importance, we ensure that the events can be accessed from all parts of the country. For recurring events, (where appropriate) different parts of the country and language regions should be considered as venues.

3.6. Economy

Economic aspects have a direct impact on the following SDGs:



RECOMMENDATIONS

- R.26** The event boosts the economy at the venue and in Switzerland. This way, hotels, local restaurants, museums, public transport, small businesses, service providers and shops can benefit as well.
- R.27** In the context of a tender, we give higher weighting to establishments (e.g., hotels and restaurants) with sustainability labels, (e.g., with the Swisustainable label) as an award criterion. This should already be noted in the invitation to tender.¹⁵
- R.28** If a fringe programme is organised, we will work together with local tourism organisations
- R.29** The event creates short-term jobs for students and professionals.

¹⁵ Federal procurements must be in accordance with the Federal Act on Public Procurement (PPA) (www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/oc/2020/126/de) and the Ordinance on Public Procurement (OMP) (www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/oc/2020/127/de) (in German, French and Italian only)

3.7. Knowledge transfer

The event has a direct impact on the following SDGs:



MEASURES

- M.50** We record the entire event and it can also be followed on a time-delayed basis on the corresponding online platform. In this way we guarantee accessibility, visibility and a certain level of longevity in terms of content being available to everyone for longer.
- M.51** The recorded plenary sessions are available with translations in international sign language as well as subtitles which we provide.
- M.52** We ensure that partnerships built and developed at the event are maintained afterwards.
- M.53** We make the knowledge transfer and experience shared available to all in the form of a report, video summaries, etc.
- M.54** We will produce a final event report which will be accessible to all interested parties so that lessons can be learned from the experience.



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