



The European Showcase
Platform for World Music

SUSTAINABILITY BEST PRACTICES AND MINIMUM CRITERIA FOR MEMBERS



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Introduction

There are several efforts to create a more sustainable festival sector, and UPBEAT's sustainability initiative aims to transform these actions to the context of showcase festivals.

The aim of this document is to collect sectoral best practices as well as to set a minimum sustainability standard for showcase festivals. This way, all events can find their next possible steps on their sustainability journey. There are obvious global challenges, and the need for change is increasingly evident. The change must be cross-sectoral, overarching multiple fields and addressing the structural and cultural roots of unsustainable practices. The music industry and festivals cannot be exempt from these efforts, and festivals need to be considerate about the environmental impact their events are having (e.g. from the travel of artists and delegates, to materials used and food consumed). As cultural entities, they also have the responsibility of leading by example, showing artists, delegates and other stakeholders that sustainable events and living is something within reach.

The document is based on discussions and working group meetings with UPBEAT Platform members

and associated partners. All events are different: some are small-, some are large-scale events, indoor or open air, coming from all over Europe, from various geographic and socio-economic backgrounds – this means their experiences, challenges and possibilities of becoming greener are quite different. Through working groups, we realised that still, the solutions are quite similar, but it might take different approaches and varying timelines to implement them.

Between November 2025 and June 2026 five working group meetings were organized to discuss sustainability challenges and best practices with members and associated partners.

Each working group focused on a specific topic. Industry level basic goals were presented, as well as best practices and possible actions. It was followed by a best practice case study from within the members' group and discussion on possible challenges and next steps for the festivals participating in the working group.

The concluding working group discussed and agreed on the content of this document, accepting the minimum level of sustainability.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Platform Members

FESTIVAL / COUNTRY

A to Jazz	Bulgaria
Babel Music XP	France
Budapest Ritmo	Hungary
Czech Music Crossroads	Czechia
Folkest	Italy
Hide and Seek	Belgium
MENT Ljubljana	Slovenia
Méra World Music Festival	Romania
Mercat de Musica Viva de Vic	Spain
PIN Music Conference	North Macedonia
Saules Muzika	Lithuania
Tallinn Music Week	Estonia
Waves Vienna	Austria
WOMEX	Germany
World Music Festival Bratislava	Slovakia

Associated Partners

FESTIVAL / COUNTRY

Sicily Music Conference	Italy
Sisons Enclave Musical	Spain
Tromso World	Norway
Folkelarm	Norway
Festival Aux heures d'été	France
Goulash Disko	Croatia
Polja Festival	Serbia
Avant Festival	Italy
BoglArt Festival	Hungary
ESTAM World Music Festival	Serbia

Besides Member's experiences, this document is relying on well researched documents, recommendations and collections of bestpractices, for example

Green Deal Circular Festivals (GDCF) Model

YOUROPE's „European Green Festival Roadmap 2030“

The Show Must Go On Report 2026

A Greener Future website

Julie's Bicycle website

Music Declares Emergency website

Vision for Sustainable Events

Each of the following sections will include a short introduction of relevance, best practices from members (and industry), as well as minimum criteria and advanced solutions.

The aim is to highlight all relevant best practices to inspire further developments, we'll mark (*) if a specific practice is implemented by more than 50% of the participants. This provides an impression of the current level of sustainability within the platform. Most relevant topics are travel, food and beverage, and materials, while energy and water will only be shortly mentioned.

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GENERAL TOOLS — OPERATIVE LEVEL

Governance of sustainability efforts on the operative level is just as important as the specific topics and actions. A clear line of responsibility should be in place for sustainability within the organization. So, while the success of sustainability efforts strongly relies on the overall commitment of the whole team, having a responsible person is necessary. They should be responsible for setting goals, planning actions, implementing and monitoring results.

Engaging all stakeholders is crucial. The goal is to have the whole crew on board and inspire them to come up with sustainable solutions within their own activity. This can be achieved by specific training and general awareness raising activities.

Engage your suppliers, local partners, and venues. It is understood that having set venues for most of the showcase events pose limitations to specific sustainability activities in many topics. So, including them, explaining your goals and sustainability efforts can make them more willing to cooperate and explore what is possible to do. Setting sustainability criteria for local partners is also a possibility; sustainability measures can be included in contracts – with

existing partners, or when looking for new partners, venues, suppliers. You can also link incentives with sustainability measures, for example reduced commission for sustainable vendors and caterers, marketing advances, etc.

Engaging visitors, artists, and delegates is particularly crucial, as their travel-related emissions can account for 70–90% of an event's total carbon footprint. With delegates and artists, discussions on train options or carpooling can make a substantial change. Clear information needs to be given to audiences on how to access your venue with low emission travel modes (e.g. public transport, safe bike routes, trusted carpooling sites). Communication on other topics (e.g. low impact food choices, switching off electric devices, etc.) can lead to behavioural change. Sustainability performance should be monitored. This means collecting all relevant data to have an overview of the environmental impact of the event, while specific data should be used to measure the effectiveness of any implemented actions. Thus, it will be ensured that all measures are effective and modified if needed.

Minimum Criteria	Next steps
<i>Data collection</i>	<i>Sustainability communication on website and other platforms.</i>
<i>Yearly sustainability report</i>	<i>CO2 calculation.</i>
<i>Clear line of responsibility</i>	<i>Training for all staff.</i>

COMPENSATION

Compensating emissions includes financially supporting projects which aim to balance anthropogenic CO2 emission by capturing and storing carbon in natural or technological reservoirs. Carbon

compensation cannot be considered as a tool for climate action, as it cannot tackle the climate crisis, and should not be used INSTEAD of emission reduction actions.

Compensation should only be considered once emissions are lowered so that only unavoidable emissions are to be compensated.

Unavoidable emissions are the emissions still left behind after you have successfully introduced an emission reduction plan over all relevant topics. This might be due to local infrastructure or unforeseeable actions of stakeholders. Once your emissions are carefully managed, and have made calculations on your emissions, should you be looking into options to compensate for the unavoidable amount. For carbon calculations, several event specific tools are available (e.g. [GDCF Monitor](#), [Climeet](#), [Green Producers Tool](#), [MyClimate](#), etc.).

For the actual carbon compensation program, you can either choose a trusted global entity (e.g. [Gold](#)

[Standard](#)) and choose a project to support via them, or you can look for a local initiative to support. The latter one might take more time and work, but contributing to local ecosystems and communities might be more meaningful, and a better option to demonstrate the organizer's values. For the type of project to support, we recommend nature-based solutions (reforestation, afforestation, wetland restoration, sustainable agriculture, etc.), because besides the sequestration of atmospheric carbon, they enhance local biodiversity and support conservation goals, while also positively impacting local communities. Compensation should only be considered once emissions are lowered so that only unavoidable

TRAVEL

Travel seems to be the most relevant emission factor for showcase events – an area over which organizers have little to no direct control, while usually most of their delegates and artists are travelling internationally. Travel includes:

***the travel of artists, delegates, visitors and crew,
international travel to the event's location,
local travel to the venues or between them as some
events take over multiple locations.***

The level of emission reduction an event can achieve highly depends on their location, train and public transport connections, and the availability of direct flights for overseas destinations. In some cases,

switching to train from flights only depends on time and finances, while some locations could only be reached by a multiple-day journey.

Actions should aim to reduce mobility through smart programming, choosing locations and accommodations with access to public transport and smart logistics, and working with local suppliers. Switching towards sustainable modes of travel is the next step. Generally, avoiding flights should be the aim, switching to trains or coaches, or maximizing car occupancy by organizing carpooling.

For local travel, public transport should always be prioritized, but the best is if cycling and walking is possible/encouraged. For local travel organized by the event, electric vehicles are also to be considered.

Best practices

Local transport

- Clear and engaging communication on how to reach your venues by public transport.
- Collaboration with local municipalities/public transport companies to link tickets.
- Free public transport for delegates, artists and staff. (WOMEX)
- Organized carpooling.
- Free shuttle buses from major hubs/stations or between event venues.
(Méra World Music Festival, World Music Festival Bratislava)

- Electric vehicles for the transport of artists/delegates.
- Deals with local bike sharing companies.
- Safe bike parking.
- Limited car parking.
- Hotels within walking distance from the main event venues – Using hotels as venues.

International transport

- Carbon conscious booking – taking into consideration the routes that could be taken by the artist, working together with local artists.
- Collaboration with other festival directors and venues in close proximity geographically and time-wise to share artists, reducing travel costs and emissions while maximizing opportunities for the artists.
(Méra World Music Festival, PIN Conference)
- Co-programming initiatives – [RoadTrip](#), [Sparse Plus](#).
- Organized carpooling for delegates coming from the same routes.*
- Direct negotiations, personalized train alternatives to delegates.
- Providing financial compensation for artists and delegates choosing sustainable travel.
- Shuttles for last-mile connections.

Minimum Criteria	Next steps
<i>Clear communication on sustainable local travel options.</i> <i>Direct discussions with delegates and artists on sustainable travel, personalized alternatives. *</i> <i>Grouping transports.</i> * Acknowledging the fact that there are cases when the „sustainable alternative“ is still far from low emission travel option (e.g. travelling to an island, direct flights should be preferred over multiple flights). Personalized recommendations might mean country-specific recommendations due to a high number of delegates.	<i>Carbon conscious booking, co-programming.</i> <i>Free or discounted public transport, bike rentals.</i> <i>Support with organizing carpooling.</i> <i>Zero emission vehicles for transfers and shuttles.</i>

FOOD AND BEVERAGES

For most events, food and beverages should cover the second biggest impact. This includes food served for artists and delegates at receptions (especially relevant for showcase events), meals purchased by audiences, and all drinks provided or bought. The impact usually depends on:

the way the ingredients are being grown, produced, and processed

the locations where the food and drinks come from

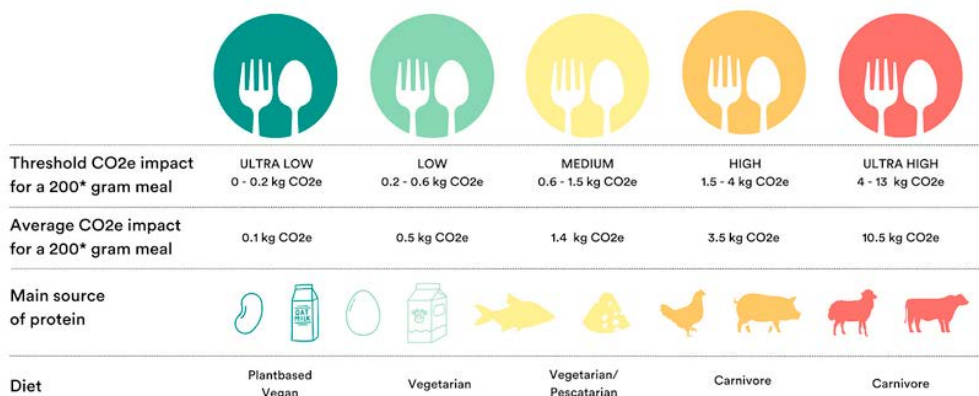
the amount of food that ends up as residual waste

The biggest impact here would come from reducing the number of meat-based meals consumed, while also focusing on sourcing ingredients locally and seasonally. While switching completely to

plant-based meals should be favourable from the environmentalist viewpoint, it might be culturally challenging. Hence, reducing foodprint should be considered as a scale of possible interventions, while ensuring a wide variety of food options made from lower emission protein sources, and healthy, local ingredients. Meat products should be sourced ethically and locally; white meats should be prioritized. Plant based meals should consist of seasonal and local ingredients, preferably organic.

The issue of food waste should also be considered. Many catered events can produce a great amount of surplus food. Edible surplus food should be planned to be redistributed – either between crew or to charity.

FESTIVAL FOOD IMPACT LABELS



*200 grams is based on an average festival snack or meal and is significantly smaller compared to an average dinner meal

Source: GDCF

Best practices

- Great variety of seasonal vegan and vegetarian dishes.
- Exclusively vegan dishes for people fed by the event (staff, artists).
- Completely red meat free menu.
- Exclusively locally made drink offering.
- Free drinking water.
- Clearly labelled food options.

Minimum Criteria	Next steps
<i>Set goals for vegan/vegetarian menus offered (40-60%). *</i> <i>Red meat free offering for artists, delegates, staff.</i> <i>Monitoring foodwaste and surplus food.</i> <i>Free drinking water.</i> <i>Clearly labelled food options and providing information on ingredients (esp. for dietary restrictions)</i> * including food served for artists, delegates, staff, on-site foodtrucks and caterers chosen for the event, venue's own food providers and caterers. Excluding outside restaurants.	<i>All catering ingredients are local, organic certified and seasonal.</i> <i>At least 50% meat-free options.</i> <i>Redistributing surplus food (if there's any).</i>

MATERIALS

Procured materials used at the events (decorations, signs, building equipment, tableware and cups), leaflets, merch products as well as the disposal of waste materials are adding to the environmental impact of the event. All materials procured should be planned, the specific needs and quantities checked, and sustainable alternatives should be considered. Plan for reuse, procure recycled or reused items. The amount of procured materials should be reduced to a minimum by rethinking production, considering alternative design and materials, or keeping materials in circulation through planning. Plan for reuse, procure recycled or reused items and prevent the need to acquire non-renewable materials. Have multiyear designs and avoid date marking to reduce the need for new decorations each year.

Zero residual waste should be sent to landfill. This should be achieved by following the idea of waste hierarchy (the R ladder) – keeping materials in circulation for as long as possible through reuse, refurbishment, and similar approaches – and by ensuring effective material recycling through proper waste management systems that address several relevant

waste streams. Provide efficient signage for waste management. If you have biodegradable serveware, make sure to have a composting system in place. Single use plastics and hard to recycle materials should be eliminated. New materials should be produced from renewable sources, like biobased or recycled materials. Look for environmental labels, and ethical sourcing practices (GOTS, FSC, Fair Trade, etc.).



REFUSE: *prevent raw-materials use*

REDUCE: *decrease raw-materials use*

RETHINK: *redesign processes to become circular*

REUSE: *use product again (second-hand)*

REPAIR: *maintain and repair product*

REFURBISH: *revive product*

REMANUFACTURE: *make new product from second-hand*

REPURPOSE: *reuse product for a different function*

RECYCLE: *salvage material streams with highest possible value*

RECOVER: *incinerate waste with energy recovery*

Best practices

- (Deposit based) reusable cups and tableware.
- Compostable tableware with composting system in place.
- Free drinking water for everyone – no packaged water sold.
- Encouraging people to bring their own reusable water bottles.
- No single use water bottles backstage. (WOMEX)
- Pocket ashtrays. (Méra World Music Festival)
- Reducing the amount of printed materials.
- No printed materials.
- Plastic free events.
- Recycled materials for lanyards and wristbands. (WOMEX)
- DIY/on-demand merch products.
- Upcycled merch products.

Minimum Criteria	Next steps
<i>Deposit based) reusable cup system.</i>	<i>Reusable tableware OR compostable tableware with composting system.</i>
<i>Recycling system handling all relevant waste streams.</i>	<i>All merch products (if any) are from biobased or recycled materials.</i>
<i>No single use water bottles backstage (only stage water).</i>	<i>Have an ethical and sustainable sourcing guide in place.</i>
<i>Encouraging people to bring their own reusable water bottles.</i>	<i>No single use water bottles for artists, delegates, audiences.</i>
<i>Consciously reducing the need for printed materials and decorations.</i>	<i>100% plastic free.</i>

WATER

Water may appear to be less relevant, as most showcase events work with existing venues with existing water systems.

The aim is to reduce the potable water usage to the safe minimum, while non-essential water should come from renewable sources. Zero pollution to

local environments, surface and ground water must be ensured. If building temporary infrastructure, aim to connect your systems to local water and sewage systems, but waterless compost toilets are also a great option (avoid chemical toilets). Have water saving equipment installed.

Best practices

- As of now, no apparent water related best practices are uncovered specific to showcase events. Might be due to the lack of relevance.

Minimum Criteria	Next steps
<i>Near 0 chemical toilets</i>	<i>Composting or other waterless toilets instead of chemical toilets</i>
<i>Zero pollution to the local environment.</i>	<i>Water saving equipment</i>

ENERGY

Energy might not be so relevant to many events, as they are taking place in existing venues with connection to the local grid.

The aim is to reduce energy consumption by increasing efficiency, rethinking and optimising processes. Renewable energy should be sourced either through green tariffs or on-site renewable energy sources. Moving away from fossil fuel generators is the main goal, which could be replaced during

the transition period by batteries or HVO or biogas generators.

Awareness raising and small actions can also take place: switch off lights, unplug unused equipment, turn off heating/air conditioning when not needed. If you have several energy users (e.g. caterers) provide them with individual meters, so they can become mindful of their own consumption.

Best practices

- Planned switch off and on times to save energy.
- Rechargeable batteries used instead of generators – charged by solar panels. (Folkest)

Minimum Criteria	Next steps
<i>No diesel generators.</i>	<i>Green tariff or on-site renewable energy sources.</i> <i>Set Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART) targets for energy reduction.</i>

TO CONCLUDE

Showcase events are facing sustainability challenges due to their internationality, the venues' infrastructure, local characteristics and limited capacities. The UPBEAT Platform's members have a conscious overall approach to sustainability and have already introduced impactful measures.

Each event is encouraged to carefully map their current environmental impact, realize points of interventions, plan and execute relevant measures. Best practices are shared within the group, so each event has the opportunity to modify these to fit

their circumstances. A responsible person within the team can make sure the sustainability efforts are carried out properly – the responsible person is not necessarily a full-time employee, interns (local or Erasmus+) or volunteers with a relevant field of study are sufficient support.

The challenge is to find the next possible step aligned with local possibilities, while actively engaging all stakeholders, contributing to awareness raising and behavioural change.

UPBEAT Sustainability Working Group

The working groups and outcome document were facilitated and prepared by the Event Sustainability Consultants of Virens Planet:

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