Interreg

NEXT MED

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# Guide for greening project implementation

## Interreg NEXT MED Programme

REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

#everythingMEDpossible

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# 1. Project greening

## 1.1 Why project greening?

One of the three horizontal principles stated in the Interreg NEXT MED Programme document is "sustainable development" in line with Article 9 of Regulation (EU) No 1060/2021. Nevertheless, the daily project implementation itself has an impact on the environment, for instance in terms of C02 emissions related to travel, production of communication material, generation of waste during events, etc. Indeed, Interreg NEXT MED projects should strive to adopt eco-friendly practices for their daily activities, especially concerning events and meetings.

For the Interreg NEXT MED community, maintaining credibility requires a strong awareness of the environmental impact of their activities and a commitment to reducing their ecological footprint. Project partners are, therefore, strongly encouraged to adopt energy-efficient practices and sustainable principles in all their endeavors. By minimizing environmental impact, projects not only enhance their credibility but can also achieve significant cost savings.

This document provides guidance on simple greening measures that projects can apply to contribute to sustainable growth in the Mediterranean cooperation area. It is worth highlighting that the Application Form will contain a specific section for Applicants to specify the concrete measures planned to reduce the environmental footprint of project implementation., This approach to eco-friendly project implementation will be assessed through criterion 5.1 "Sustainability". Nevertheless, ensuring a low environmental impact during project implementation should not be viewed merely as a principle to cope with, but as a shared commitment by all partners to uphold sustainable practices throughout the project's lifecycle and contribute to comprehensive climate neutrality.

**The content presented in this document have been inspired by the guidance for green project implementation developed by the Interreg Alpine Space Programme. The Interreg NEXT MED' Managing Authority would like to acknowledge the tremendous work done by the Interreg Alpine Space Programme which served as a primary source of inspiration to develop this document.**

Additional useful documents on the topic include United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) publications, namely 'Kick the habit: a guide to climate neutrality' and the 'Green meeting guide'.

# 2. Recommendations for project greening

Below are some examples of practical hints for incorporating sustainability into project activities (i.e. events, meetings and travels). Whenever possible, project partners are encouraged to implement as many of these simple actions as feasible: while it may not always be possible - considering the nature of some activities, the transnational dimension of partnerships including several territories (and the related need to travel to ensure cohesion among partners) or the availability of providers/products responding to the

requirements indicated below – partners should demonstrate a proactive and positive attitude to reduce the carbon footprint of project activities.

To assess the carbon footprint of their activities, projects are encouraged to utilize a carbon footprint calculator. While several tools are available online, the calculator developed under the Interreg Euro-Med Programme seems aligned with to the types of projects funded by Interreg NEXT MED. You can access it at: https://zeroco2med.rechenwerk.com/simplified_calculator .Please note that the below content should be considered as general guidance to inspire partners for a more climate-neutral delivery of projects. Additional greening actions, not foreseen by the guide, are encouraged.

### 2.1 Project publications and promotional products

Publications can be disseminated electronically. Printing of publications and production of promotional material should be foreseen only if strictly necessary and only if following a sound dissemination plan. Short, clear and "to-the-point" publications should be preferred to long ones and images should be reduced to save printing space.

Ideally, publications should be printed for external communication purposes (if needed only) on both sides and on recycled paper. For electronic publications, a "printer-friendly" version (less colours, more compact text, less pages) should be made available.

Recycled or natural material should be preferred for the production of promotional products. Only useful products should be produced.

Publications and promotional products should be produced where they are going to be distributed in order to minimize transportation distances.

## 3. Events and meetings

Applying greening principles for the organisation of meetings and events provides high visibility for the project's commitment to sustainability and climate change mitigation. It is important to communicate effectively, what kind of greening measures the project applies, so that the event participants are made aware of the results achieved in this domain. You will find below a checklist, which could help facilitate the organisation of green project events and meetings in line with the Programme eligibility rules.

### 3.1 Organizing events/meetings

1. Always assess if an online meeting would be efficient or practical than a physical gathering.
2. Electronic means (e.g. e-mail, website) are used rather than printed materials for pre-meeting and follow-up communications. Make use of QR codes for participants to easily download relevant documents.
3. Participants are encouraged to use sustainable ways of travelling:
    a. For short trips favour train to coach/plane and if train is not an option, favour car/coach to plane.

   b. Participants are encouraged to share the drive with other participants or use ride-sharing services when available.
4. Information on the greening efforts made at the meeting/event is provided electronically prior to, and after the meeting.
5. Paper used is recycled paper and any necessary material is printed at the local venue rather than shipped from elsewhere. Printed documents are provided only upon request.
6. Participants' bags/packs are avoided or produced locally using recycled material, and are reusable. Participant's packs contain only strictly necessary material.
7. Pens provided are made of a high content of recycled material, and are refillable.
8. All material produced for the event (such as banners, posters, signs, even badges, etc.) is designed and written in a generic way to allow them to be reused for other events.
9. The use of decorative elements such as flowers, banners, etc. is minimised.
10. All the necessary information of the event (agenda, accommodation, transportation, etc.) is easily accessible and updated through a web link and a QR code, to minimize both printing and emailing new versions after changes.

## 3.2 Venue

1. Priority is given to locations available in the premises of one of the project participants in order to reduce the need for staff to travel.
2. The venue gives clear indications on the use and handling of the environmental duties in place (reduction of waste, use of reusable dishes instead of disposable ones, the use of tap water or water refill station instead of plastic bottles, etc.).
3. The venue has good access to the main public transport connections and town centre.
4. If possible, all waste produced at the venue is sorted for recycling and sufficient, well-marked bins are provided in both participants and staff areas.
5. It is possible to regulate the temperature within the building. Use of natural light is preferred and the use of stage lights is kept to the strict necessary. Remember to switch off the video projector during coffee and lunch breaks. It consumes a lot of energy, and it is not necessary.

## 3.3 Accommodation

1. The hotels are located near public transportation and as close as possible to the conference facilities (preferably within walking distance).
2. Hotels certified with recognised green building system or Environmental Management System (EMS) and/or having environmental policy and action plans are preferred.
3. The hotel should give clear indications on the use and handling of the environmental duties in place (waste reduction, use of reusable dishes instead of disposable ones, refillable soap dispenser etc.).

## 3.4 Catering

The following aspects are taken into account when procuring services, in the specification of services, the criteria for selection or award, as well as in clauses of the contract to be concluded with the caterer.

1. The use of reusable dishes, cutlery, glassware and linens is ensured and aluminum foil avoided.
2. If disposable items are essential, it is ensured that they have a high content of recycled or plant-based material, are recyclable and that appropriate recycling systems are in place.
3. Paper products used for catering have a high recycled content and are totally or elementary chlorine-free (TCF or ECF).
4. The use of single-use bottles for beverages is avoided.
5. If possible, all waste produced is sorted for recycling and sufficiently numerous, well-marked bins are provided in catering areas.
6. The caterer is informed on the exact number of participants and is able to re-evaluate the quantities needed to avoid waste.
7. In case, there are a lot of leftovers, make sure the catering company could donate the food to charity organisations or similar.

## 3.5 Food and drinks

1. Locally grown and produced food and drinks are used and menus reflect the seasonal products of the region.
2. The use of organically produced food and drinks is preferred.
3. For products like sugar and coffee, the use of fair-trade labelled products is preferred.
4. The quantity of meat products offered is minimised and at least one vegetarian option is offered (as the production of meat produces considerably more CO2 than non-meat products).
5. Tap water, when drinkable, is used and served in jugs instead of in single-use bottles or favor the use of water refill station when possible.

## 3.6 Public transport

1. Clear instruction is provided to participants on appropriate public transport and/or walking arrangements from point of arrival/departure (railway station, airport) to the venue, accommodation, town centre, etc. This is provided by e-mail shortly before the event and can be additionally displayed at the venue.
2. A member of staff is provided to accompany the participants from hotel/station to the venue on foot or public transport, if this can avoid taking additional taxis or shuttles.
3. If public transport is not available, a shuttle service is organized trying to minimize the number of journeys to be done, taking together as many people as possible.

# 4. Digital carbon footprint

Digital pollution has no smell, no color and no apparent trace, but it very much exists. It might seem invisible, but its carbon footprint is so high that if it were a country, it would be the third largest energy consumer in the world. Nowadays we have social media platforms to chat, video telephone services to conduct job meetings and, of course, the well-known email.

Each action we perform online has an environmental impact: every time we send an email, use the Internet or social media, a small amount of carbon is emitted. Sending an email is, in the end, more environmentally sustainable than delivering a physical letter, and uses only 1.7% of the energy. It does, however, still come at a cost. Every email (taking into account all the processes behind hitting send) equates to carbon emissions: 0.3grams of CO2 for a spam email, 4g for a regular email, and 50g for an email with a photo attached.

There are a few different ways to reduce your digital carbon footprint:

- Save on electricity by powering down devices when not in use.
- Go through your clouds service you use – Google Drive, Dropbox, etc. – periodically and delete files you no longer need.
- Limit unnecessary streaming.
- Manage emails more efficiently, delete old emails cluttering your inbox, and unsubscribe from mailing lists you do not need.
- Disconnect more often (unplug your modem or router at night, disable mobile notifications, remove unused applications).
- To send heavy files or sending them to large audiences, explore options such as uploading the file to a cloud service (OneDrive, Dropbox, etc.) and including in the email the link. It will also allow you to apply changes in the file with no need to send it again.
- Calculate the digital carbon footprint in the professional sphere by using specific measurement tools. There are many options available online such as the one developed by the Institute for Sustainable IT at https://myimpact.isit-europe.org/. This helps raise awareness of how much energy we consume with our daily office work.

# 5. Promoting the project's environmental achievements

We encourage you to promote the environmental achievements of your project. Beyond the objectives of your project, you can also communicate on the sustainable practices of your daily work within the partnership, such as the adoption of a sustainable practices charter, sustainable travelling to a partners meeting, a solution implemented to reduce the carbon footprint of your project etc.

For those ones applying to the call for green transition projects of Interreg NEXT MED, bear in mind when drafting the proposal that the communication will be among the topics with

more weight in the assessment (8 points). External assessors will evaluate your project communication by answering the following question (criterion 4.4):

*"Is the communication strategy and connected activities well designed, adequate and cost-effective to reach and inform target groups, media, policy-makers/institutions and general audience? Is the communication strategy likely to promote better environmental awareness, eco-friendly behaviors and potential positive changes among target groups and final beneficiaries?"*

Design your project accordingly to make sure you tell your audience what the project is doing for the environment and making people adopt eco-friendly behaviors. Tell it in a way it encourages others to do the same, making it seem simple and showing your efforts on social media for instance. Promoting environmental initiatives or achievements will encourage your partners and yourself in this sustainable approach and provide inspiration to others to do the same.

# 6. Green public procurement and other horizontal aspects

The Interreg NEXT MED Programme strives for an innovative and sustainable development of the Mediterranean region. Public procurement rules allow for horizontal aspects such as the protection of the environment, social considerations (e.g. advancement of women, better integration of people with disabilities) or the enforcement of innovation to be taken into account when purchasing a product, service or work. Project partners are thus invited to make use of this possibility whenever possible. These aspects may be integrated into public procurement procedures for instance by the following means:

- taking these horizontal aspects into account in the planning of the procurement or the specification of services (e.g. a study on a certain topic may take into account the different needs of men and women);
- setting specific selection and award criteria (e.g. preference given to equipment with low electric power consumption or assessment taking into account the life-cycle-costs of equipment when analyzing the offers of the potential providers);
- including specific clauses in the contract with the provider of the service, good or work (e.g. foreseeing that certain tasks are performed in a neutral carbon way, or by people in risk of exclusion, establishing a contract penalty in case this is not respected).

It should be kept in mind that a balance is to be ensured between the promotion of these horizontal aspects and the need to provide fair conditions of competition for suppliers. Attention is thus to be paid that they do not result in a discriminatory treatment among providers of similar services/supplies/works. For instance, procurers are not allowed to demand that a specific product or service carries an ecolabel, but the underlying criteria of an ecolabel can be used in procurement tenders. More information can be found on "Ecolabel and Green Procurement".

The Programme herewith would like to encourage project partners to make strategic use of public procurement, e.g. by applying Green Public Procurement (GPP) where public authorities seek to procure goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle when compared to goods, services and works with the same primary function that would otherwise be procured. Although a voluntary instrument in the EU, public authorities can make an important contribution to sustainable consumption and production by applying Green Public Procurement and using their purchasing power to choose goods and services with lower impacts on the environment. In general, independently of their legal status and country, organizations participation in an Interreg NEXT MED funded project are encouraged to consider the principles of Green Public Procurement.

The Directorate-General for Environment of the European Union has developed a specific official website of Green Public Procurement. You'll find here numerous resources such as:

- Green Public Procurement Training Toolkit
- Good practice library
- GPP Helpdesk to respond directly to stakeholders 'enquiries;
- A GPP News Alert, issued monthly
- ...and much more

# 7. Additional simple actions to green your project

Besides green events and meetings, why not integrate the sustainable dimension into the daily office life of the project and its partners? Simple actions or alternatives can be put in place to ensure that the environmental impact of the project is as small as possible. You could consider adopting some of the suggestions in the checklist to your daily office habits. And don't forget to disseminate what you've done so colleagues or other projects can adopt these behaviors.

## 7.1 Transportation

- When possible, use train/bus/car-sharing for travelling to meetings, conferences and trainings instead of airplanes.
- Favor direct flights or combine with train/bus/car-sharing when possible.
- Promote back-to-back meetings.
- When organising meetings, prioritize online meetings/webinars instead of in-person when relevant.
- Come to work by walking, bike or public transport (unless this is not possible).
- Most transport companies offer the possibility to compensate CO2 emissions when purchasing your ticket. You might consider doing so as this would be an eligible expense.

## 7.2 Project meetings

See "events and meetings" section in this document.

## 7.3 Food

- Use washable plates and cutlery.
- Avoid take-away options unless they have their own boxes with them.
- Use reusable bags and refuse plastic bags.
- Favor local and bio/vegetarian milk in reusable bottles, limiting disposable packaging.
- Favor eco-friendly ways of preparing coffee.
- Use reusable cups for the coffee break.

## 7.4 Digital footprint

- Clean mailboxes by deleting emails and folders saved on the joint server.
- Permanently archive and delete "sent" and "deleted" emails older than 6 months.
- Not multiply receivers of their emails when not necessary.
- Send links instead of attachments (e.g. to documents saved on the server). It will also allow you to apply changes in the file with no need to send it again.
- Avoid saving duplicate files and keeping old versions of documents when not relevant anymore.
- Disactivate the automatic backup service in your computer or smartphone.

## 7.5 Paper consumption

- Limit printing to the essential in their daily work (no printing, black & white, more pages in one, less ink).
- Stop paper archive for project monitoring (digital archive only).
- Recycle paper and packaging.

## 7.6 Daily office life

- Prioritize warm clothing to high heating.
- Heat their office at a maximum temperature of 21°C.
- Cool the office at a minimum temperature of 25°C.
- Provide separate bins for paper, plastic, glass, and electronics.
- Use low-flow faucets and toilets to reduce water consumption.
- Make sure all the windows are closed when you turn on the AC or the heating to avoid energy waste.

## 7.7 Energy saving

- Put your work smartphones on save battery mode.
- Switch off your work smartphones when not in use.
- Turn off computers, screens and printers in the evening.
- Turn off screens when leaving for lunch or internal meetings.
- Turn off lights when leaving offices or a meeting room.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator whenever possible.
- Get power strips with switch buttons so you can switch them off when leaving the office.
- Monitor Energy Usage: Use smart meters to track and reduce energy consumption.

- Check if your office roof is suitable to install solar panels and whether there are any public aids to co-finance them.

### 7.8 Project management

- Take time to exchange with your partners about environmental measures and legislation in every country. You'll discover the best practices in other sites that you can adapt here. You could even find ideas for a new project!

## 8. Acknowledgements

The Interreg NEXT MED Managing Authority would like to warmly thank the Interreg Alpine Space Programme for allowing us to use their invaluable guidance for project guidance. We are convinced that the advice and hints contained in this document will be of inspiration to partners across the Mediterranean to deliver more eco-friendly and low-carbon projects.