



arche noVa
Initiative for People in Need



German
Toilet
Organization

Sustainable Office Practices

A Guide to Greening Your Workplace
as a Humanitarian Organisation

Funded by:





📷 Stakeholder engagement with the Climate Charter in Indonesia.

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It is part of three products supporting the Country Offices and their partners in applying a green approach while implementing humanitarian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) activities. The other two products consist of a modular training on environmental mainstreaming and a process guidance document on environmental mainstreaming in the humanitarian WASH sector. All three products should also help the Country Offices and partners in developing their Action Plan once the Climate and Environment Charter has been signed by their respective organisation.

¹ ECT WASH = Environmental Sound and Climate Sensitive Transformation of WASH

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Chapter 1



Purpose of this guidance document and whom it addresses.

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The purpose of this document is to serve ASB and AN Country Teams as well as their partners as a practical guidance with tips and suggestions on how to improve the ecological footprint of their offices. It should encourage colleagues and partners to overcome any hurdles associated with this topic and to work together on overcoming them.

In the first chapter, the document will reflect on the topic of greening the office by setting the framework, showing opportunities and challenges. In the next chapter, it presents ideas on how to approach the topic, have the team manage it and measure impacts/success.

In the last chapter, it provides a diverse range of practical tips/suggestions for different areas. These might not be applicable by all the Country Teams and partners working in different contexts. Thus, this guidance document can serve as a basis/example for Country Teams and partners to develop guidelines on how to green the office in their specific context. Rest assured, it can be translated into local languages and shared with other stakeholders.

We hope it will help colleagues and partners 'green' their office, thereby fostering responsible and environmentally friendly behaviour.



OWDA Regional Office, Ethiopia.



Why reducing our office Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) footprint matters? A reflection of our daily practices as humanitarian workers.

a. Building the landscape: the context of our operations:

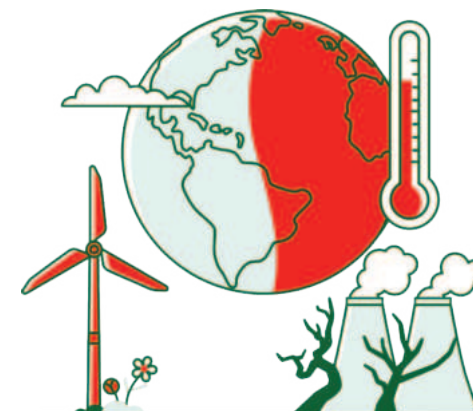
Our planet is being pushed to its limits. Its resources are being consumed at a rate that is unsustainable, leading to effects such as climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity. These environmental and climate crises are already affecting communities, threatening the survival of humankind now and in future. Hence, our response not only should strengthen the communities to anticipate, prepare and respond to environmental and climate change-induced disasters but also ensure that our reaction does not harm the environment and minimises our involvement in further climate change.

As a humanitarian organisation working with communities already greatly impacted by climate change, it should be our duty to serve as an example by actively considering our own ecological footprint while making positive changes to become more sustainable. It

requires that if we ‘talk the talk’ then we must also ‘walk the walk’ – that is, turn words into action to reduce our climate and ecological footprint both at the organisational and operational level.

In addition, the majority of headquarters and offices are located in high-income countries, which emit much more carbon – and have been doing so for much longer than low-income nations, thus providing an even greater incentive to act.

Finally, an organisation asking its staff to green their practices or advocate strongly for more climate action without taking initiative itself demonstrates a lack of coherence and integrity, which can be counterproductive for staff engagement and the organisation’s image.



b. Our office activities can add to environmental damage and climate risks in various ways. What are they?



Energy Consumption: heating, ventilation, air conditioning (AC), lighting and other electronic devices (computers, printers, copiers, oven, and water cooker) consume electricity. Leaving them on when not in use adds to the overall energy consumption. Offices typically use a lot of energy for heating, cooling, and ventilation systems. Inefficient heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems as well as poor insulation can increase energy use. Furthermore, storing data on online clouds uses more energy than storing it on a personal hard drive.



Paper Usage: printing and copying documents on paper in training and workshop activities. High volumes of printing and copying, or training activities and publication result in significant paper use, which contributes to deforestation and waste. Even though digital documents are more common, paper is still widely used and donors might still require printed versions. Paper waste from printers and copiers contributes to landfill issues. Even with recycling programmes, the process of recycling paper involves energy and resources.



Waste Generation: food waste, paper waste as well as office supplies like pens, notebooks, and other office supplies for cleaning contribute to waste – especially if they are single-use or non-recyclable. Offices often have cafeterias or break rooms where food waste can accumulate. This waste, if not properly managed, adds to landfill issues.



Water Usage: restrooms, kitchens, cleaning purposes, gardening, and cooling systems. Offices use water in restrooms, kitchens, and for cleaning purposes. High water usage, especially if not managed efficiently, contributes to the depletion of local water resources.



Transportation: commuting, business travel. Employees commuting to and from the office contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, especially if they use single-occupancy vehicles. Business travel for meetings, conferences and other business activities often involves flights and long-distance travel, adding to the carbon footprint.



Building Materials and Construction: The energy efficiency of the office building itself, including its insulation, windows, and construction materials, impacts its ecological footprint. Offices that do not adhere to green building standards or certifications may have higher environmental impacts. This might be mostly relevant for owned buildings and not leased ones.

Greening the office is not only a matter of social responsibility but also a strategic approach to long-term sustainability and operational efficiency of the organisation. Greening the office is crucial for reducing environmental impact. By adopting green practices, offices not only contribute to global sustainability goals but also gain operational and organisation reputational benefits, such as reduced CO₂ footprint and energy costs, lower waste and water consumption, employee satisfaction, and compliance with regulations and policies.



c. Here are several compelling reasons why offices need to adopt green practices:



Environmental Impact

- **Climate Change Mitigation:** Offices contribute significantly to carbon emissions through energy consumption, transportation, and waste. Reducing this footprint helps mitigate climate change and aligns with global efforts to limit temperature rise.
- **Resource Conservation:** Efficient use of resources like paper and water helps conserve natural resources, reducing the strain on ecosystems and promoting sustainability.



Regulatory Compliance – please refer to next sections in regard to external commitments for humanitarian sector.

- **Adherence to Regulation:** Many countries have stringent environmental regulations and standards. Greening office operations ensures compliance with these laws and helps avoid potential fines or legal issues.
- **Futureproofing:** As rules around environmental impact become stricter, proactive measures in office sustainability can prepare organisation for future compliance requirements.



Cost Savings

- **Energy Efficiency:** Implementing energy-saving measures, like LED lighting and efficient Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems, can lead to significant cost savings on utility bills.
- **Waste Reduction:** Reducing paper use and improving recycling processes can lower waste disposal costs and decrease the need for office supplies.
- **Water Conservation:** Efficient water use and management can lead to lower water bills while reducing the office's overall operational costs.



Organisational Reputation and Branding

- **Positive Public Image:** Organisations that prioritise sustainability could be viewed more favourably by other stakeholders (like donors, communities, partners). This can enhance the organisation's brand reputation and attract eco-conscious stakeholders.
- **Employee Engagement:** Many employees are motivated by working for organisations that align with their values, including environmental stewardship. A green office can improve employee satisfaction and retention.



Health and Wellbeing

- **Improved Indoor Air Quality:** Green practices, such as using non-toxic materials and improving ventilation, can enhance the indoor air quality of the office. This contributes to the health and wellbeing of employees.
- **Sustainable Work Environment:** Creating a green and sustainable workspace can contribute to a more

pleasant and productive working environment.

- Having plants in the office or its premises contributes to the well-being of employees.



Innovation and Leadership

- **Driving Innovation:** Implementing green practices can foster innovation within the organisation, as employees and management seek new ways to improve sustainability.
- **Leadership:** By adopting and promoting green practices, organisations can position themselves as leaders in sustainability within working areas, influencing peers and setting benchmarks for others.



Long-term Viability

- **Risk Management:** Reducing environmental impact helps manage risks associated with climate change, resource scarcity, and waste management. It contributes to the long-term viability and resilience of the organisation's business.
- **Future Preparedness:** Sustainable practices prepare organisations for future challenges related to environmental regulations, resource availability, and shifting consumer expectations.



Social Responsibility

- **Ethical Obligation:** As humanitarian practitioners, organisations have a responsibility to minimise their environmental impact and contribute positively to society. This ethical stance can build trust and strengthen community relations.

d. Greening the office brings benefits but also presents certain challenges



Initial Costs

- Initial Investment: Upgrading to energy-efficient systems, placing solar panels, installing water-saving fixtures, and implementing waste reduction measures often require significant initial investment and can have future recycling challenges.
- Budget Constraints: Smaller organisations or those with limited budgets might find it challenging to allocate funds for green initiatives.



Implementation Complexity

- Integration Issues: Incorporating new technologies and practices into existing systems can be complex and may require specialised knowledge or training.
- Disruption: Transitioning to greener practices can temporarily disrupt normal operations, as new systems are installed and old ones phased out.



Employee Engagement

- Behavioural Change: Encouraging employees to adopt new green practices (like reducing paper use or participating in recycling programmes) requires ongoing capacity building and engagement.
- Resistance to Change: Some employees may resist changes due to habit or a lack of understanding of the benefits, making it essential to communicate effectively and provide incentives.



Maintenance and Management

- Ongoing Maintenance: Green technologies and practices require regular maintenance to ensure they function efficiently. This can add to operational costs and complexity.
- Resource for Monitoring and Reporting: Tracking and reporting on environmental performance require resources and may involve additional administrative work.



Technology Limitations

- Availability and Compatibility: Some green technologies may not be readily available or compatible with existing office infrastructure.
- Evolving Standards: As sustainability standards and technologies continue to evolve, staying current can be challenging and may require continual updates.



Measurement and Evaluation

- Quantifying Impact: Accurately measuring the impact of green initiatives on carbon footprint, energy use, waste, and water consumption can be complex and require sophisticated tracking systems.
- Data Collection: Gathering accurate data and evaluating the effectiveness of sustainability measures often involves additional effort and resources.

Balancing the benefits and challenges involves careful planning, effective communication, and a commitment to long-term sustainability goals.



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e. Commitments and standards in the humanitarian sector

Arche noVa and the Arbeiter Samariter Bund are implementing humanitarian projects together with their partners in line with international commitments and standards of the sector. Here are some main examples referring to greening our work:

External commitments and standards

In addition to being in line with national regulations (see section above) regarding reducing environmental risks, there are also commitments coming from the humanitarian sector:

- Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations (2021): especially commitment 2 – maximise our environmental sustainability and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions (www.climate-charter.org).
- Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability: particularly standard no. 4 (providing adequate access to support), does not harm people or the environment (www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard).
- Principle of 'do no harm' requires environmentally responsible humanitarian action.

- Environmental responsibility refers to an organisation's duty to operate in a way that avoids and mitigates adverse environmental impacts. This includes the organisation's commitment to reduce its overall CO₂ footprint as best as possible, while being accountable for any environmental harm it has caused (IASC Guidance on Environmental Responsibility – IASC Guidance on Environmental Responsibility in Humanitarian Operations | IASC [interagencystandingcommittee.org]).
- DG ECHO (2020): approach to reducing the carbon footprint of humanitarian aid. The commitment to reducing the ecological footprint of humanitarian aid now guides DG ECHO's own actions and its cooperation with partners.
- [DG ECHO's approach to reducing the environmental footprint of humanitarian aid](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/our-work/our-approach-to-reducing-the-environmental-footprint-of-humanitarian-aid) –European Commission (europa.eu).
- Sphere Handbook Thematic Sheet: 'Programmes should minimise their environmental impact and consider how procurement, transport and choice of materials, or land and natural resource use may protect or degrade the environment further' (www.spherestandards.org/resources/thematic-sheet-environmental-impact).
- German Federal Foreign Office – new Humanitarian Assistance Strategy (Sept. 2024): [Strategy on Humanitarian Assistance Abroad](http://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/humanitaer-erleichterung-der-noch-und-weniger-gehoerend-240824) | Bundesregierung (publikationen-bundesregierung.de).
- United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals (2015): Goal 13 – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13>.



Chapter 2



Establishing Rules and Team Ownership for a Sustainable Office

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a. Securing Commitment from Senior Management

Engagement from senior management, including the Country Director and other key managers, is essential for obtaining high-level backing, ensuring impactful outcomes, and driving meaningful behavioural change. Leadership at this level plays a vital role by offering strategic direction and visibly demonstrating their commitment. They also have the capacity to advocate for environmental priorities at the board level and accelerate initiatives. It is important to clearly outline and convey the specific support required from senior management, which may include approval for key actions, allocation of resources (such as personnel, funding, and time), delegation of responsibilities, as well as providing mentorship and guidance. Senior management must ‘walk the walk’.

b. Developing/adjusting internal policies and principles for greening the office

Organisations often solidify their dedication to environmental stewardship by adopting a green policy. This policy expresses a commitment to enhancing environmental performance and outlines the organisation’s strategic approach towards achieving specific environmental goals. It clearly articulates the environmental objectives and delineates the scope of environmental accountability.

As a guiding framework, the green policy steers the organisation towards sustainability by embedding environmental considerations into its operations. It also usually articulates the core values and guiding principles that reinforce the organisation’s commitment to minimising environmental impact and promoting responsible environmental practices.

Key Considerations for Developing Green Policies in Humanitarian Organisations:

- **Alignment with mission and values**

Ensure that the green policy is consistent with the organisation’s core mission and humanitarian values. The policy should enhance the organisation’s commitment to delivering aid while reducing environmental harm.

- **Understanding the local context**

Consider the unique environmental challenges and opportunities present in the countries where the organisation operates. The policy should be informed by local environmental laws, cultural norms, and ecological conditions, along with relevant environmental standards and certifications that impact the organisation’s work.

- **Stakeholder engagement**

Involve stakeholders, including employees, local communities, partners, and, if necessary, donors, in the policy development process. Their input can provide valuable insights and ensure the policy is relevant and effective.

- **Assessment of environmental impact**

Perform a comprehensive evaluation of the environmental impacts resulting from the organisation's operations. Focus on critical areas such as energy consumption, water use, waste production, transportation, and procurement practices.

- **Setting clear objectives and targets**

Establish clear, specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals. These may include targets for reducing carbon emissions, minimising waste, conserving water, or increasing the use of renewable energy sources.

- **Integration into existing processes**

Embed the environmental policy into existing organisational frameworks and decision-making processes. This involves incorporating environmental considerations into project planning, procurement, logistics, and other operational activities.

- **Resource allocation and implementation**

Ensure the allocation of adequate resources like funding, personnel, training, and a dedicated team to effectively implement, sustain, and monitor the environmental policy.

- **Compliance with legal and regulatory requirement**

Ensure that the policy complies with all relevant local, national and international environmental laws and regulations. This includes understanding environmental standards and certifications applicable to the organisation's operations.

- **Adaptability and continuous improvement**

Recognise that environmental challenges and best practices evolve. Regularly review and update the policy to reflect new insights, technologies, and changes in the operating environment.

Organisations may already have a Green Policy or refer in their SOPs, internal policies and Code of Conduct to reducing the CO₂ footprint in their organisations and programming. In this case, it would be important to verify if these documents are already covering all different aspects or whether they require further elaboration.



c. Inclusive training for the whole staff

Once internal policies and principles are established, it is crucial to provide training that ensures the staff understands and can effectively implement them. For example, introducing energy-efficient equipment in the office without proper training may lead to improper use, diminishing the benefits. Conversely, educating staff on how to correctly use this equipment and encouraging a culture of energy mindfulness can significantly enhance the impact of energy-saving initiatives.

Equally important is ensuring that training is inclusive and accessible to all staff; engaging everyone through diverse tools and methods helps guarantee that all employees have a consistent and comprehensive understanding of the policies.



ASB South and South-East Asia staffs.

d. Set up a green team to promote and monitor environmental performances in the office

Forming a green team is vital for securing essential support and fostering a culture of sustainability. Green champions or teams play a key role in spearheading resource efficiency efforts and ensuring compliance with procedures like waste segregation. When assembling a green team, it is important to include a diverse group of employees from various levels and departments, empowering them to act as advocates for environmental responsibility.

How to identify the 'green team champions'?

- Interested people are more likely to be motivated
- Employees from diverse background will enhance perspectives on green practices

Roles and responsibilities of the green team can be:

- Taking ownership of the idea proposed by the organisations
- Facilitating initiatives and offering access to diverse skills and perspectives
- Engaging with employees to minimise resistance to change
- Enhancing awareness and understanding of the necessity for change



Measure and Monitor Resource Use

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One of the initial steps an organisation should take towards improving its environmental performance is to monitor and track its resource usage. Employing a carbon calculator can be an example of this monitoring practices. Tracking the resource or carbon footprint will provide a clear understanding of usage patterns and eventually will inform efficient resource management.

Additionally, carbon calculator tools will help the organisation spot areas requiring environmental improvements. The humanitarian carbon calculator can be used for measuring direct and indirect greenhouses gas emission associated with the organisations' activities. ([Click here to learn about humanitarian carbon calculator](#)).

Despite the benefits, carbon calculators have some drawbacks. They often rely on generalised data or averages, which may not reflect specific circumstances, such as the exact emissions from particular vehicle models or local energy sources. Simplified assumptions to improve user experience can also lead to oversimplified results, omitting factors like regional dietary choices or local waste management practices. Additionally, a lack of standardisation across calculators' results in varied methodologies and inconsistent data sources, causing discrepancies in outcomes.

Moreover, these tools tend to overemphasise carbon emissions while neglecting other environmental issues, such as water use or biodiversity loss, and they rarely consider social and economic factors. Many calculators also exclude certain emissions sources

like digital consumption or indirect emissions, and fail to account for regional differences. Users can introduce further errors through incorrect data input or misinterpretation of the results. Lastly, the recommendations provided by calculators are often too broad, limiting their practicality and offering little insight into the specific impact of individual actions. Nevertheless, a carbon calculator can be a good tool to measure the emissions of your office – you just have to be aware of the drawbacks.

Another example to monitor is by doing it manually. You can begin by analysing how your office consumes resources such as paper, office supplies, water, and energy, and understand the reasons behind waste production. Determine which metrics to monitor and regularly collect this data.



It is recommended that offices regularly track and measure:

- Key materials used (e.g., paper and packaging),
- solid waste produced,
- water consumed,
- energy depleted,
- and other practices explained in chapters 1 and 3.

The collected data will help you to:

- Monitor performance over time and assess the impact of any initiatives or changes.
- Identify improvement areas by comparing your performance against established key performance indicators (KPIs).
- The monitoring activities can start by benchmarking, and many organisations benchmark against previous years' data. If this data is unavailable, you can:
- Review invoices to collect data for a 'baseline' year. Even though prices may not be stable for every country. Therefore, manual measurement that is appropriate to local context is recommended.
- Use the current year to monitor and measure resource use, then establish a baseline year for future comparisons.

Here are some typical figures for benchmarking office performance:

- Waste: A good-practice office generates less than 200kg of waste annually for small office with 10–20 staff members, which can vary depending on their country's relevant waste management practices.

- Recycling: Efficient recycling schemes can achieve a success rate of 60–70% for paper, glass, cardboard, cans, and toner cartridges.
- Paper: A best-practice office uses as little as seven reams of paper per staff member per year (one ream contains 500 sheets).
- Water: A good-practice office should use a minimal amount of water. For example, for offices with a kitchen or pantry, water usage can rise to around 10 litres per staff member due to restroom use, kitchen and drinking water as well as cleaning and maintenance.
- Energy: Energy use and emissions should be assessed based on consumption per square metre of treated floor area². High energy use typically leads to higher bills.



📷 A good-practice office should use a minimal amount of water.

² Treated floor area (TFA) is the gross floor area (total area inside external walls) excluding plant rooms and other areas not heated (e.g. stores, covered car parks and roof spaces). Ideally, it should be measured, but an estimate of TFA can be made by multiplying the gross floor area by 0.9.



Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Remember, raw data alone doesn't provide the complete picture. Comparing data to operational metrics or staff numbers can illustrate efficiency better. Establish KPIs to track performance and encourage improvements. For instance, a KPI could be the number of reams of paper used per office employee annually.

It is important to note that the implementation and effectiveness of KPIs for greening a humanitarian organisation largely depend on its size and commitment to environmental activism. A larger organisation may have more resources to dedicate to comprehensive sustainability initiatives, while a smaller one might focus on more targeted efforts. Likewise, the success of these KPIs is influenced

by the degree of commitment from senior management and staff towards environmental stewardship. Whether it's reducing energy consumption, minimising waste, or promoting sustainable procurement practices, the commitment to these actions plays a crucial role in achieving meaningful, positive environmental outcomes.



 Handover solid waste to local startup in Yogyakarta

Good KPIs should adhere to the Six A's:

- Aligned: Ensure KPIs align with your organisation's strategic goals and objectives.
- Attainable: Choose KPIs with data that is easily obtainable.
- Acute: KPIs should keep everyone focussed and aligned.
- Accurate: The data for KPIs should be reliable and accurate.
- Actionable: KPIs should provide actionable business insights.
- Alive: KPIs should evolve with your growing and changing organisation.

Choosing the right KPI is crucial. Appropriate KPIs might include:

- Waste (tonnes) sent to landfill
- Percentage of waste recycled
- Water usage (m³) per staff member
- Energy usage (kWh for gas and electricity) per floor area (m²)
- Paper usage per staff member (reams or kg)
- Percentage of office and canteen waste recycled per staff member

Some examples of good KPIs for humanitarian organisations are:

- **Energy Consumption Reduction**

KPI: Percentage reduction in total energy consumption per month or year.

Target: Achieve a 10–15% reduction in energy use within the first year.

Measurement: Compare electricity and gas meter readings or utility bills over time.

- **Water Usage Efficiency**

KPI: Percentage reduction in water usage per employee per month.

Target: Reduce water consumption by 10% within six months.

Measurement: Monitor water meter readings and calculate the average water use per employee.

- **Waste Reduction and Recycling**

KPI: Amount of waste diverted from landfills through recycling and composting.

Target: Achieve a 50% diversion rate of waste from landfills.

Measurement: Weigh waste and recycling bins regularly and track volumes over time.

- **Paper Consumption Reduction**

KPI: Percentage reduction in paper usage per employee.

Target: Reduce paper usage by 30% within a year.

Measurement: Track the number of reams of paper purchased and used, and promote digital documentation.

- **Sustainable Procurement Practices**

KPI: Percentage of office supplies and equipment purchased that are environmentally friendly.

Target: Ensure that 70% of all office supplies are certified sustainable or eco-friendly.

Measurement: Track purchasing records for sustainable certification or eco-labels.

- **Reduction in Single-Use Plastics**

KPI: Number of single-use plastic items used in the office.

Target: Eliminate the use of single-use plastics within 12 months.

Measurement: Conduct regular audits of waste bins to identify single-use plastic items.



Chapter 3



Practical tips and suggestions for greening the office

This chapter will provide a diverse range of practical tips/suggestions for different areas on how we can contribute to reducing our CO₂ footprint. Not all tips are applicable in all contexts but should help the Country Teams and partners define their guidance document for a greener/environmentally friendly office.

a. Energy consumption at office level

The way we heat and cool our buildings, the lighting we use, and the devices and appliances we plug in all contribute to our energy footprint. Reducing the energy footprint not only contributes to reducing the CO₂ footprint but also saves money.

Connect your office electricity to the local system. If this not possible as it is unstable or does not exist, check whether you can install solar panels for office electricity instead of using diesel generators.

Guiding principle: reduce energy consumption, use renewable energy where possible.



Lighting:

- Use natural lighting as much as possible. Use windows to create light and white surface walls to reflect light around the room.
- Use LED lightbulbs.
- Switch off the light when leaving the room.
- Install sensors to switch off the lights in the washrooms whenever no one is using them.
- Post signs to help remind staff to switch off lights.



Heating / Air Conditioning:

- Cooling: Set the temperature at 24°C–26°C. Turn the AC off when leaving the room for more than three hours. If you leave for a short period, consider keeping the AC on – especially if it's hot outside. You can adjust the temperature setting to a higher level (e.g., 27°C) to save energy.
- Close doors and windows when switching on the AC.
- Open the window in early morning hours to let the air circulate and refresh the room.
- When purchasing a new AC, make sure it corresponds to the size of the room and is energy efficient.
- Maintain the AC regularly.
- Use ventilators/fans whenever possible – it helps to circulate the air.
- Heating: set the temperature at 18°C–19°C; lowering the heating by 1°C equates to 7% in energy savings on average.
- Close doors and windows when switching on the heating.
- Set the water heater temperature between 50°C and 55°C.



Information and Technology:

- Switch off photocopier, printers, monitors and laptops after working hours or when not in use; unplug them before going home.
- Set printer, photocopier into eco-mode, if applicable.

- Select equipment (printer, photocopier, fax, etc.) with power save mode and energy saving label.
- When using computer/laptops, consider switching to energy saver settings.
- Set your computer to sleep mode when you are away for a certain period of time, meeting or lunch break. Do not use screen saver, as it uses more energy. Using sleep mode can save computer energy by up to 70%.
- Choose a laptop instead of desktop, as laptops use five times less energy than desktops, making them the more energy-efficient choice.
- Consider setting your computer/laptop to dark mode if you are comfortable with it. Dark mode uses less energy than a traditional white background.
- Consider sending a cloud link instead of an attachment of documents in an email. Sending attachment(s) requires more bandwidth and energy than sending a link to access documents.
- Verify if documents and all their versions really need to be saved on an online cloud, given that it consumes much more energy than documents being saved on a personal hard drive/laptop.



Other electronic devices – like oven, refrigerator, microwave, coffee machine, etc.

- Purchase energy efficient models.
- Maintain the devices regularly.
- Unplug when not in use.

b. Waste and paper usage

Waste is a huge problem for our planet. If it is not disposed correctly, it can leak into the environment and harm nature and wildlife as well as human beings. Think about all resources going into a product and material, only for them to be thrown away at the end of their lifetime. As pressures grows on global resource availability, we need to act in a responsible way by reusing/repurposing existing items, repairing them if possible and preventing wastage.

Guiding principle: Avoid, reduce, reuse or repurpose, (repair), recycle.



📷 Waste paper is sorted for reuse or shredded.



Food waste, plastics

- Bring your own reusable water bottle.
- Say 'no' to plastic cutlery and tableware.
- Think again when you want to use cling wrap.
- Use reusable bags when shopping for the office.
- When on a field trip or outside the office, consider using reusable cups and bottles for drinking tea/coffee and water.
- Recycling: Find out if your municipality/community, local businesses or NGOs support/offer recycling. If there is no recycling system in your community/municipality in place you may look into options to work together with NGOs or start-ups having this focus.



📷 Bring your own reusable water bottle.

- Implement solid waste separation: organic, recycling, not recycling (landfill). Waste separation is a highly effective way of reducing waste while controlling its cost. As a minimum, all clean paper/cardboard and recyclable plastic types should be separated from other types of waste, so they can be recycled rather than landfilled. This means that there must be clearly marked bins to place paper/cardboard, plastics and general waste wherever this waste is produced, and near areas where people are working. Provide recycle bins at entrances to the building, so that staff can immediately dispose of items used during their commute, such as empty take-away coffee cups and lids, plastic drink bottles, food wrappers, newspapers and magazines while entering the workplace. There may also be opportunities to recover food waste for composting.
- All types of paper, recyclable plastic including plastic bags, polystyrene, glass, aluminium, and cardboard should be placed in the specific recycling bins. Avoid mixing them with non-recyclable materials.



Paper usage

- Think before you print. Do you really need to print the material or does having it on your laptop suffice?
- Consider prioritising black-and-white instead of colour printing: It saves more energy and money.
- Use double-sided printing.
- If the budget allows, consider buying recycled paper and products.
- For internal documents, think about using an e-signature software, this can reduce paper usage and saves time, in some countries they are even legally recognised and can be used on contracts, etc.

c. Water

Only 2.5% of the water on this planet is fresh water, and less than 1% is available for people to use. As global temperatures rise, water will become scarcer; hence, we all need to consume it more sustainably to ensure there is enough for everyone. Our water is not just for drinking – we use it for washing clothes, cleaning windows and flushing our toilets. Fortunately, sustainable solutions for meaningfully conserving water exist.

Guiding principle: Conserve and reuse water whenever possible!



📷 Avoid using small disposable plastic bottles and cups.

- Use flow restrictors on taps.
- Maintain the water pipe systems & water flush tank so that there is no water leakage – repair immediately if there is a leak.
- Use dual flush toilet system where possible.
- Put stickers to remind water saving at water usage point.
- Install water dispenser for drinking water, avoid using small disposable plastic bottles and cups.
- Collect/harvest rainwater for watering the plants or cleaning purpose.

d. Movement & Transport

Each trip has an environmental cost. Therefore, we should think more carefully about how we travel, where to, for which purpose and how often – this can have a positive impact on limiting our contribution to climate change.

Guiding principle: Think twice before you travel – is it necessary and by which means?



Install water dispenser for drinking water.





Air transportation

Air travel cannot be avoided while working in an international context, but should be reduced, as it is a contributor to greenhouse gas emissions:

- Verify if an international trip or domestic trip is necessary or whether a meeting can be done online.
- Check whether the trip cannot be done by a colleague located in that region.
- Combine different purposes for the trip/plan your trip wisely
- Choose direct flights, as they produce less carbon than multiple stopovers, considering that a significant percentage of an airplane's carbon emissions stems from take-off and landing.
- Verify whether your CO₂ contribution can be offset (see the box below) or financed by donors or via the office budget.
- Air travel within a country should be avoided if security allows and other means of transport (like trains or buses) are available.

Carbon Offset

As humanitarian organisations worldwide are urged to reduce emissions within their operations, they also need to invest in climate mitigation to address climate change and help the global community to lower its carbon footprint. This is where carbon offsetting comes in. The UNFCCC2 defines carbon offsetting as an activity enabling organisations and individuals to 'compensate for the emissions they cannot avoid by supporting worthwhile projects that reduce emissions elsewhere'. Essentially, carbon offsetting involves voluntary climate actions by organisations to reduce, eliminate or prevent the release of CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions. Carbon offsetting can play a critical role in accelerating the transition to net zero emissions at the global level.



Vehicle transportation (duty trips)

- Combine your trip with different purposes for avoiding several travels and combine with the trips of colleagues if/when possible.
- Verify whether public transportation could be used – using a train should be the first option if available and security allows.
- While purchasing a vehicle, pay attention to fuel-efficiency/low-emissions; have a mixed fleet adopted to different road conditions – for example, there is no need to have SUV or 4x4 in urban areas.
- Ensure vehicles are properly maintained.
- Set ambitious speed limits and restrict car speeds. Lower speed equals lower air resistance which means lower fuel consumption. Hence, you cover the same distance with less fuel, thereby reducing CO₂ emissions.
- Train the driver in eco-driving practices.



Movement to the office

- Where and when possible: Promote using public transport or walking, bicycling to the office.
- Promote carpooling.
- Promote 1–2 days of home office per week.

e. Events/Training

Meetings and events can be great for fostering solutions and sharing knowledge, but how many of us have also suffered from too many of them or been in meetings where we have seen food wasted and received too many pens and notebooks?

Green event practices include implementing recycling and minimising waste, reusing or purchasing environmentally friendly supplies, use of digital tools and using sustainable transportation practices.

Guiding principle: Train green: Empowering minds, protect the planet!



Conduct environmentally sustainable training and events to educate participants on eco-friendly practices, inspire actionable change, and transform both behaviours and environments for a better, greener future.



Conduct environmentally sustainable training and events.



Venue and Accommodation

Look for venues that have green policies and practices. Remember that 'requesting green' is key.

Ask venue providers about the following:

- Does the venue have a sustainability policy?
- Are recycle bins for paper, cans, and plastics located throughout the property and, if accommodation is on-site, are recycling boxes located in guest rooms?
- Does the venue ensure that recyclable materials are diverted from landfill?
- Does the venue compost food waste?
- Does the venue provide refill or bottled water?
- Does the venue have energy and/or water conservation programmes (e.g., energy-efficient lighting and automatic lighting controls, low flow taps, shower heads and toilets)?
- Does the venue offer a linen and towel reuse programme? This provides guests with the option to reuse their linens and towels more than once, thus reducing water, energy and detergent use.



Food and Food Services

- Choose reusable items over disposable.
- Provide water pitchers and glassware rather than bottled water.
- Have your food and beverage suppliers use bulk dispensers for milk, cream, sugar, salt, pepper and other condiments, rather than individual sachets or cartons.
- Use cloth napkins or those made from post-consumer materials.
- Order the right amount of food and beverages for the number of participants. Over-ordering costs money and generates waste.
- Request locally produced and/or vegetarian food. If local or regional food isn't available, ask for food/produce that is seasonal.
- Consider partnering with a local charity to donate leftover food, or see if it can be brought back to the office to share with staff.
- Compost food waste. Tell participants you are trying to minimise food waste, ask them to put any food waste into a prominently-displayed container for composting.



Transportation

- Choose a meeting venue that will minimise travel and facilitate public and/or active transportation for the majority of participants.
- Recommend accommodation within walking distance of the venue, and encourage participants to walk or use public transport if/when possible.
- Ensure vehicles used during the event are appropriate in size for the number of participants you are transporting.
- Provide a shuttle service and/or facilitate carpooling by linking participants who need to travel to the same place around the same time (e.g., to the airport).
- Enable participation by teleconference and/or videoconference.



Material

- Go paperless. Make presentations available by email or download; use whiteboards, projectors and posters rather than handouts or flip charts; use laptops or tablets for note taking, and encourage participants to do the same.
- If needed, use recycled paper, always print double-sided, and put copies of any handouts at the entrance of rooms rather than at every chair, thus ensuring that only participants with a genuine interest/need will take them.
- If necessary, provide pencils and pens made out of recycled material. Reuse leftover material at future events and avoid printing dates on promotional banners and signage so they can be reused.

f. Office furniture and consumable and visibility material

Guiding principle: The 5 R's – Refuse, reduce, repair, reuse, recycle!



Furniture:

- Avoid standardised renewal of furniture.
- Renew if furniture is not functional anymore and cannot be repaired.
- Donate furniture if still functional but no longer used.
- Buy furniture locally – certified if possible.



Consumable:

Purchase sugar, tea, coffee, etc. in bulk.

- Obtain and use a coffee machine instead of one portion instant coffee.
- Do not use small plastic bottles, but either a filter/water dispenser or large water bottles instead
- Buy eco-friendly cleaning products – if existing and affordable – and use them mindfully.



📷 Collect reusable paper.



📷 Drink filtered water.



Visibility material & gifts:

- Banners can be a large source of plastic waste when they are just used once. One option is to not include specifics on the banner (Date, location etc.) so the banner can be reused for the next event. If this is not possible, think about ways of reusing the banner in other ways or donate the banner to a school for art classes.
- Substitute using the tarpaulin banner for cloth material instead.
- Ascertain whether gifts are really needed: use gifts out of local or reusable material and gifts that are practical.

g. Greening the office premises

Growing plants around your office premise and inside the offices not only relaxes the mind and reduces stress/fatigue, it also greatly improves people's moods while purifying and increasing air quality in the office.

Guiding principle: Flowers Generate Happiness!



- Plant trees/plants in the office surrounding if/when possible.
- Use drip irrigation for office plants – water the plants early in the morning or late in the afternoon to minimise evaporation.

- Install shadowed areas for having meetings outside.
- Harvest rainwater, for example, for plants/trees or car washing/office cleaning.
- Painting roofs white helps to reflect the sun's rays and avoid heating the interior of the building. This reduces energy consumption for air-conditioning and does not require major renovations.
- If the building is owned by the organisation, you should obtain professional advice on how the office can reduce energy consumption pursuant to green building standards in your country.



📷 Growing plants around your office premise and inside the offices.



Final Remarks

This guidance document has been developed by members of the Project Coordination Unit based on existing documents/literature (please see references) as well as input from different Country Teams and partners of the ECT WASH project received during regional workshops within the scope of the initiative. We hope that this guidance document supports staff to begin 'greening their Country Office' and thus 'walk the walk'!





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Chapter 3

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Remarks

References

