FAQ Sustainable and Inclusive Events

This FAQ answers frequently asked questions about the process towards an ETH standard for «Sustainable and Inclusive Events».

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1. What do we mean by a sustainable event?

A sustainable event is designed to be both ecologically and socially responsible. At the same time, the original character of an event should not be changed, and sustainability measures should be chosen in such a way that they remain within a financially sound framework for ETH.

2. Why do the guides refer to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

The 17 SDGs create a basis for shaping global economic progress in harmony with social justice and within the Earth's planetary boundaries. They are the centerpiece of the 2030 Agenda, the global reference framework for sustainable development. Switzerland is committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda at both the national and international level. Federally affiliated organizations such as ETH play a model role in its implementation. With reference to the SDGs, the guides show how responsibly organized events contribute to the implementation and promotion of the sustainability goals.

3. Why does the title of the guides say "sustainable and inclusive" instead of just "sustainable" events?

The 2030 Agenda encompasses all three dimensions of sustainability - social, economic and environmental - and is based on five core messages as guiding principles for action: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships. ETH's understanding of "sustainability" is based on the UN definition, and "inclusion" is part of it. Many ETH members are already familiar with the checklists for accessible and gender-sensitive events. The term "inclusive" is also emphasized in the title so that it is immediately clear that these aspects of sustainability are also integrated into the guides.

4. Why are there three guides?

Events organized by ETH members at and outside ETH differ in key respects. For example, the environmental impact of air travel for international guests or hotel accommodation plays no role at smaller ETH-internal events, such as networking events (Guide #1), but is often significant in the context of larger conferences at ETH (Guide #2) or outside ETH (Guide #3). At larger ETH-internal events, the choice of room and location is limited, although additional sustainability aspects can be considered at external events. The three guides were developed so that, as much as possible, only the relevant measures for one type of event need to be considered. In the next phase, the three guides will be partially replaced by a query tool.

5. There are already checklists and tips for accessible and gender-sensitive events. Why do we need more guides?

The most relevant measures from all existing checklists relating to environmentally friendly, accessible and gender-sensitive events are summarized in these three new guides.

For those who wish to go beyond the measures listed in the new guides or would like additional information on implementation, these can still be found in the tips on barrier-free events and in the checklist "Organizing a Conference? - How to Make it Gender/Diversity Balanced"

6. Who are the guides intended for?

The guides are available to all ETH event organizers who are organizing an eventat or outside ETH. This applies regardless of whether an event must be authorized or is planned with the support of the event management team.

7. The website talks about pilot phases and the development of an "ETH standard". What does this mean?

The aim is to develop an ETH standard for sustainable and inclusive events. This standard will be developed in a dynamic process. Experience in dealing with the proposed measures will be gathered from as many event organizers as possible. Based on this experience and corresponding feedback, the current measures will be adapted and integrated into the event planning processes in an iterative process. These phases are called "pilot" phases because they are tested and continuously adapted. There are no "final" products in these phases.

8. Is the implementation of the guides mandatory or will this become mandatory at ETH?

The implementation of the measures mentioned in the guides is currently not mandatory, but expressly desired. In the future, all events at ETH should fulfil a certain sustainability standard, which will be developed in the pilot phases with the support of the ETH community. The development of a standard will establish a more binding and consistent event practice.

9. What is the difference between «**good practice**» and «**excellent**» measures?

«Good practice» refers to those measures that are required to fulfil a desired sustainability standard. The «excellent» measures go beyond the «good practice» measures in terms of implementation effort, potential implementation costs and/or relevance.

No further weighting of the measures was carried out. For example, comparisons of measures to promote inclusion versus climate friendliness are not deemed expedient. In addition, the relevance of individual measures varies depending on the nature of an event.

The categorization into «good practice» and «excellent» measures serves as a guide and is the basis for awarding the «Sustainable Event Silver» and «Sustainable Event Gold» labels, which will be available in the future.

10. Are labels already awarded for sustainable events?

The «Sustainable Event Silver» and «Sustainable Event Gold» labels are currently still being planned. If your event is taking place in the second half of 2024, you are welcome to contact us at events@services.ethz.ch or sustainability@ethz.ch if you are interested. From this point onwards, it should be possible to obtain a label if a certain number of measures per category are implemented, provided that the prospect of labels is met with interest.

11. Where can I get support and how do I know which guide to use?

If you have any questions about event organization, please contact Event Management. If you have specific questions about the accessibility of your event, you can contact Campus Services; if you have questions about diversity at ETH, you can contact ETH Diversity; or if you have questions about environmental friendliness and general questions about the development of the ETH standard for sustainable events, you can contact ETH Sustainability.

12. Why should an internal ETH label be developed? Are there no official, independent labels for sustainable events?

ISO certification for sustainable events has recently been introduced: ISO 20121. A label is also currently being developed based on this, which particularly recognizes major events. Neither ISO certification nor external labels are currently considered appropriate for ETH events. The scope, costs and effort involved are not in proportion to the benefits. In addition, there are various ETH-specific framework conditions that must be considered when planning events.

13. Who bears the costs of implementing sustainability measures?

A sustainable event is not always an expensive event. It depends on the mix of measures implemented and the prioritization. Potential additional costs must be factored into the event planning and included in the budget.

14. Why is there no recommendation to compensate for events?

The avoidance and reduction of emissions should each be prioritized as the main strategy in addressing climate change. While not all emissions can be eliminated due to current technological and operational constraints, offsetting and removing CO_2 should be considered as supplementary actions, focusing on high-quality and impactful projects. This approach underscores the importance of first avoiding emissions and reducing one's CO_2 footprint wherever feasible before looking into compensatory measures for the remaining unavoidable emissions ("reduce first…eliminate the rest").

For those interested in neutralizing their emissions through high-quality CDR projects or contributing to a climate protection project, there are several options, each with unique approaches and pricing:

- **Climeworks** (https://climeworks.com/): A Swiss company and ETH Zurich spin-off that specializes in high-quality CDR through the technology of direct air capture and storage (DAC+S). It allows for the permanent underground storage of CO_2. The current cost to remove 1 ton of CO_2 is approximately CHF 1'250.
- **InPlanet** (https://www.inplanet.earth/): An AgTech initiative focusing on CDR through regenerative agriculture and Enhanced Rock Weathering in tropical soils. Their approach aims for gigaton-scale CO_2 removal while regenerating soils. To purchase CDR credits and receive a cost estimate, a form needs to be filled out.

- **myclimate** (https://www.myclimate.org/): A Swiss company and ETH spin-off offering conventional CO_2 offsetting through various projects like biogas digesters, reforestation, and renaturation of Swiss moorland. CO_2 offsetting prices range between CHF 5 and CHF 50 per ton of CO_2.
- **Carbon Removed** (https://carbonremoved.com/): A platform developed by Climacrux, a Swiss-based startup focused on reversing climate change. It aims to make CDR accessible to individuals by partnering with credible CO_2 removers. Users can customize their CDR purchase according to the amount and method and receive a CDR certificate. The current cost for removing 1 ton of CO_2 varies between CHF 50 and CHF 700, depending on the removal methods chosen.
- **Carbonfuture** (https://www.carbonfuture.earth/): This portfolio company deals with durable CDR solutions, promoting trust and reliability in their CO_2 offsetting projects. To start purchasing CDR credits, an account must be opened.

15. Who developed the guides?

The guides are being developed for the ETH community by ETH Sustainability and the Event Management Team (Campus Services), in collaboration with the Barrier-Free Project (Campus Services), ETH Diversity, SGU, Community & Outreach and the ETH Student Sustainability Committee, and are constantly being developed further through co-creation.

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