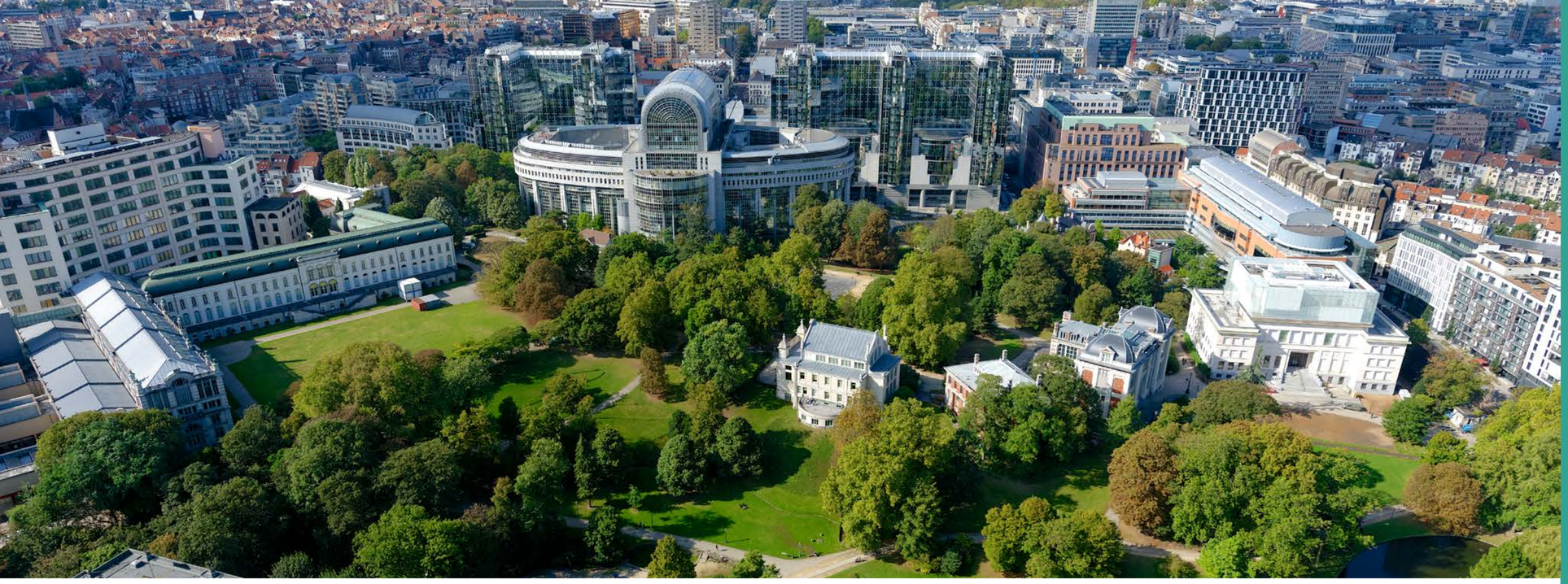
Best practice guide for

SUSTAINABLE EVENTS

in Brussels

visit.brussels



Destination Brussels, for events with a positive impact

In 2023, Brussels was ranked in the top 10 global destinations most popular with visitors in terms of sustainability *(Tripadvisor Travelers' Choice 'Best of the Best' - Sustainable Destinations - World)*[1].

visit.brussels and its partners intend to continue satisfying these visitors and make Brussels an ever more sustainable tourism destination that is open to all and constantly evolving. A region that dares to lead the way in sustainability in Europe. A true green capital and a model of social integration. A friendly city where the watchwords are well-being and slow living.

« The need for rapid and transformative global action to tackle climate change has become urgent, and the link with tourism and events more apparent than ever. »

anie Neumann, The GDS-Movement™, in GDS-Index Report 2023

Brussels was assessed as part of the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index). This programme uses 70 indicators to assess destinations' performance in four areas : environmental, social, supplier/partner and Destination Management Organisation (DMO). These indicators are aligned with the 2030 Agenda and integrate the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

[1] The result of a collaboration between the GDS-Index and Tripadvisor, this ranking identifies the sustainable destinations that are most popular with visitors. Among the top 100 destinations ranked in the GDS-Index 2023, Tripadvisor analysed the 300,000 English-language reviews from 2023 with a minimum «4 bubbles rating» and involved sustainability-related terms (e.g. «environmentally friendly», «eco-tourism», «waste reduction»).

Our commitment to positive impact tourism

As confirmed in its 2023-2028 management contract, one of visit.brussels' major objectives is to participate in the promotion and achievement of **positive impact tourism,** regenerating Brussels from an economic, cultural, social, and environmental point of view. To achieve this goal, our teams work closely **with all the players in the visitor economy** - which encompasses all tourist interactions with the destination - and with other regional public interest organisations.

- **On an economic level :** support a reasonable growth in visitor numbers, promoting direct returns for the local and circular economy, as well as the creation of value and jobs for the Brussels-Capital Region.

- **On a cultural level :** contribute to the development of a high-quality cultural, artistic and heritage offering that benefits both visitors to and residents of Brussels.

- **On a social level :** set an example by supporting diversity, equality, and inclusion, internally and in all its actions.

- **At an environmental level :** reduce the ecological footprint of our projects and operations as much as possible, set an example and make the entire tourism sector aware of its responsibilities.

Through our actions, we aim to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the Brussels-Capital Region has set itself for 2040 as part of its Regional Sustainable Development Plan (PRDD).

We also support the initiatives of the *Shifting Economy*, the Brussels economic transition strategy and the different regional policies initiatives and programmes to promote sustainable development, with the aim of achieving zero carbon emissions by 2050 : the Good Move regional mobility plan, the Good Food strategy for sustainable food consumption, the Regional Programme for a Circular Economy (PREC), the Ecodynamic Company Label, etc.

Our vision and commitments are set out in our Sustainability Charter.

Contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals

Of the **17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), visit.brussels has chosen to prioritise the following :

Good health and well-being
Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Quality education
Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Gender equality
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

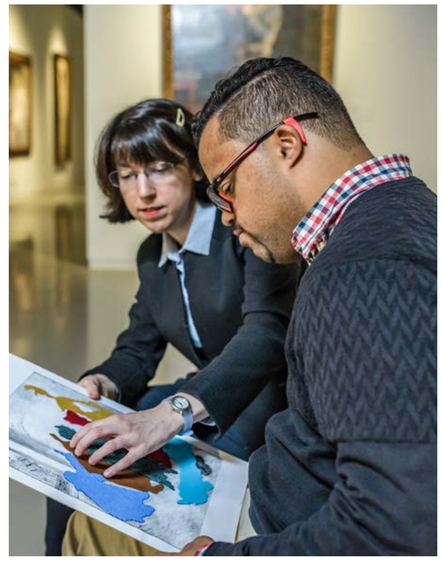
Decent work and sustainable growth
Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

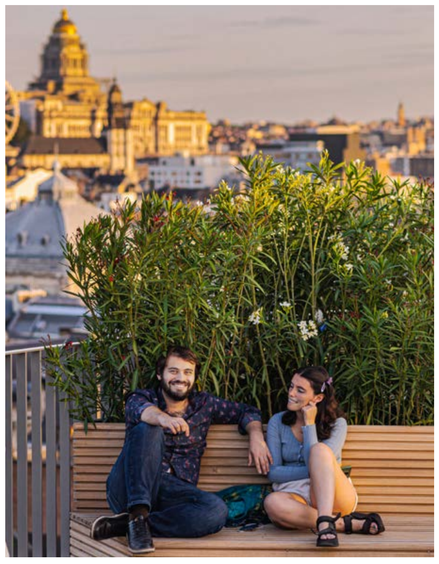
Industry, innovation, and infrastructure
Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialisation that benefits all and foster innovation.

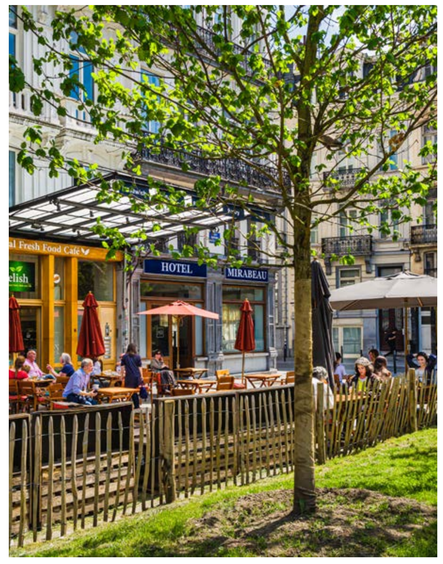
Sustainable cities and communities
Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Responsible consumption and production
Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Combat climate change
Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.







The Business Events sector, a key player in sustainability

With 3.84 million overnight stays for business in Brussels in 2023[2], the Business Events sector, like other economic sectors, has a major impact on sustainability issues through energy and water consumption, food waste, volume of waste, pollution, impact on biodiversity, etc.

However, every event, however short-lived, has the potential to implement sustainability criteria, reduce its environmental footprint and leave a positive legacy. Every party involved in organising an event can help to improve its sustainability. This applies from the specifications stage.

Why create this guide?

As a tourism promotion and communication agency, visit.brussels aims to help make every event, meeting or conference organised in the Brussels-Capital Region a more responsible and sustainable project.

This guide was designed to help event organisers (companies, institutions, associations, communications, or incentive agencies, etc.) design and run an event in Brussels in line with their sustainability objectives. It offers a list of available **aids and services**, inspiring **best practices** in various fields (mobility, catering, venues, accommodation, accessibility, etc.) and **checklists** to support every stage of a project, from planning to evaluation.

With this publication, our ultimate aim is to enable all organisers and suppliers in the Business Events sector to **take autonomous action to promote sustainable development** and thus bring **added value to the entire sector and to society** as a whole.

• Conferences generate 5.8 kg of CO2 equivalent per participant, or 3,202 tonnes of CO2 equivalent per year.

• 93.62 % of greenhouse gas emissions generated by visitors come from transport to their destination.

Source: visit.brussels study on the impact of tourism in Brussels, calculation of sector-specific emissions using parameters calculated by Rico et al. (2019), Carbon footprint of tourism in Barcelona, Tourism Management 70: 491-504

« In the years to come, the success of tourism companies and destinations will be increasingly linked to their ability to manage and act in the face of growing ecological and environmental threats. »

World Economic Forum Travel & Tourism Development Index, in GDS-Index Report 2023

[2] *Statbel, Barometer of overnight stays.*

Brussels, the ideal choice for sustainable events

A green city at the heart of Europe, home to over **180 nationalities**, committed to sustainability... Brussels is an events destination with many assets.

A capital that is the beating heart of Europe

A green and natural city

An accessible city that supports soft mobility

Diversity and inclusion in its DNA

A region committed to the circular economy

Investment in reasonable and sustainable food

Eco-certified venues and accommodation

Controlled management of waste, energy, and water

Sustainable, participatory projects

A capital that is the beating heart of Europe

Brussels, a friendly cosmopolitan city, is the **capital of 500 million Europeans.**

- As home to the European institutions and over 2,400 international associations, it is at the crossroads of **decision-making** and information. **Brussels is a melting pot of cultures, languages and influences** that embodies the very spirit of Europe's founders.

- In 2024, as part of the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union, Brussels has hosted a number of high-level political and cultural events, demonstrating more than ever its privileged position for meetings and conferences.

- In the heart of the city, the European Quarter has become one of Brussels' most dynamic and surprising districts with its own proper brand. Home to institutions, museums, businesses, housing, parks and more, it offers a **unique mosaic** of modernity and history, innovation, and tradition. Its development has also been the subject of a strong regional urban planning vision, focused in particular on reducing its carbon footprint.

A green and natural city

Brussels is **the greenest capital in Europe,** with **8,000 hectares of green space,** or 29m² per inhabitant. More than 40% of the area is undeveloped, and nature is never far away.

The city's green network is Increasingly being extended and enhanced and includes several major sites :

- the Green Walk, a continuous route that allows people to cycle or walk 60 km through preserved natural areas and heritage, cultural and historical sites.

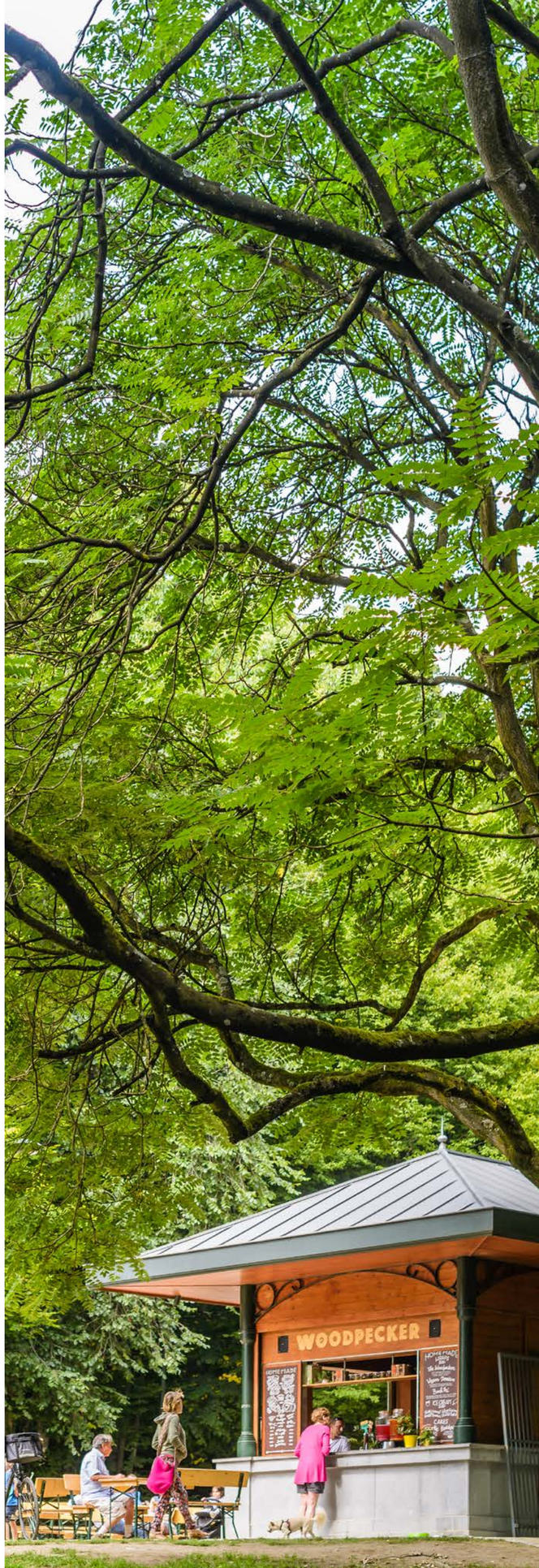
- the Bois de la Cambre, Brussels' green lung on the edge of the Sonian Forest, one of Europe's outstanding beech forests and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- the Rouge-Cloître site, a rich architectural and forestry ensemble, the bucolic remains of a 14th-century priory on the outskirts of the city.

- the Canal and its 60,000 m² of banks, an ecological corridor undergoing a re-greening programme to promote biodiversity.

- Laeken Park, at the heart of the Royal Estate, forming a landscape ensemble with Osseghem and Sobieski Parks, and the Colonial and Florists Gardens.

- as well as many other parks : Brussels Park (formerly the Royal Park), Cinquantenaire Park, Duden Park, Elisabeth Park, Egmont Park, Josaphat Park, etc.



An accessible city that supports soft mobility

For centuries, Brussels' central location and urban structure have made it **particularly accessible.**

The **regional mobility policy** has adopted an ambitious plan to improve quality of life and encourage changes in travel habits.

- The city is at the heart of Europe's largest high-speed rail network. Thanks to the Eurostar (London, Lille-Europe, Amsterdam, Paris, Cologne) and its hub at Brussels-South railway station (2 km from the city centre), **60 million Europeans live less than two hours by train from Brussels.**

- Brussels is a capital on a human scale that is **easy to get around** ; it is a ***twenty-minute city*** where, in 20 minutes, people can go from work to leisure, or from a conference venue to a range of museums, shops, restaurants and bars. At the heart of its historic centre, the city also has the second largest pedestrian zone in Europe.

- The Good Move regional mobility plan has been in force since 2020 and promotes a pleasant and safe city, a city of proximity that favours soft mobility. As part of this plan, the Good Move 2023 Observatory indicates :

  - **a 5 %** increase in cycle flows (bicycles and scooters) automatically recorded on cycle paths in 2023 compared with 2022.
  - **a 7 % reduction** in distances travelled by heavy goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes in December 2023 compared with December 2019.
  - 4.7 times more cyclists manually counted at 26 count points between 8 am and 9 am between 2010 and 2023.
  - 375.8 million journeys recorded by the STIB in 2023.

- Brussels is a city where **cycling is becoming increasingly important.**

  - The capital's top cycling facilities, routes, locations and events are all listed on the visit.brussels website.
  - In collaboration with the non-profit organisation Pro Velo, visit.brussels has developed the Bike Friendly label, awarded to accommodation offering services for cyclists. 31 accommodation providers were certified in 2023. The aim of visit.brussels is to reach 50 certified partners by 2028.

- The Floya mobile application lets visitors plan, book and pay for different modes of transport in Brussels. It brings together the four public transport operators, a taxi service and shared scooter, bike, and car services.

Diversity and inclusion in its DNA

With 181 nationalities[3] cohabiting in its territory, Brussels is the **second most cosmopolitan city in the world** and the most cosmopolitan in Europe.

Diversity is rooted in its DNA and is reflected in many of its locations and institutions.

- 40% of Brussels' population is of foreign origin.
- The Brussels Regional Public Service equal.brussels implements a sustained policy of **equal opportunities** and **non-discrimination** for all.
- According to Rainbow Map & Index 2023, Belgium ranks second out of 49 European countries in terms of LGBTQIA+ rights.
  Its flagship initiatives include Brussels Pride, which attracted around 250,000 people in 2023 ; and RainbowHouse Brussels, which brings together various associations in the Region (information, legal, social, medical assistance, etc.).

Brussels aims to be **accessible** to all.

- visit.brussels is a member of the international social tourism organisation (ISTO), which, among other things, promotes accessible tourism for people with disabilities.
- CaWaB (Wallonia-Brussels Accessibility Collective) supports accessibility in the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Representing each specific group, it proposes solutions to politicians, public operators, and professionals.
- Access-i informs people with special needs about the accessibility of places and services. Each Access-i certified site receives a visual display of its level of accessibility by type of disability. To encourage more inclusive tourism, visit.brussels organises an annual call for applications from operators wanting to obtain Access-i certification. 21 museums, 18 venues and 6 accommodations in Brussels were awarded the Access-i label in 2023. The aim of visit.brussels is to reach certified 70 partners by 2028.

[3] *IBSA 2024.*

A region committed to the circular economy

By adopting the Programme for a Circular Economy (BRPCE) in 2016, the regional government defined a framework to encourage the **transformation towards a circular economy** (recover, produce, consume, reuse). The BRPCE comprises 111 measures and has a threefold objective : to transform environmental objectives into economic opportunities, to anchor the economy in Brussels and to help create jobs.

Created in 2018 as part of the BRPCE, the circlemade network brings together innovative companies that champion a more sustainable and environmentally friendly business model, working to develop production in the city. These companies base their activities on one or more of the four circular business models (circular sourcing, resource efficiency, product life extension, resource recovery).

The circulareconomy.brussels website contains all the information and activities carried out in Brussels as part of the circular economy strategy.

Investment in reasonable and sustainable food

Brussels is renowned for the quality and variety of its gastronomy. Beyond this offer, which delights all gourmets, Brussels has been investing for many years in sustainable and reasonable food through its Good Food strategy. This objective is twofold : to produce better (by growing and processing healthy and environmentally friendly food locally) and to eat well (by making a tasty and balanced local diet available to all).

This strategy is deployed in collaboration with the Horeca sector through the Good Food label, which aims to support and guide outlets, restaurants and canteens involved in sustainable food. With three certification levels, this label is aimed at fast-food restaurants as well as traditional restaurants and starred establishments. At the beginning of 2024, 106 restaurants in Brussels displayed the Good Food label.

Eco-certified venues and accommodation

Brussels boasts a large number of Green Key establishments.

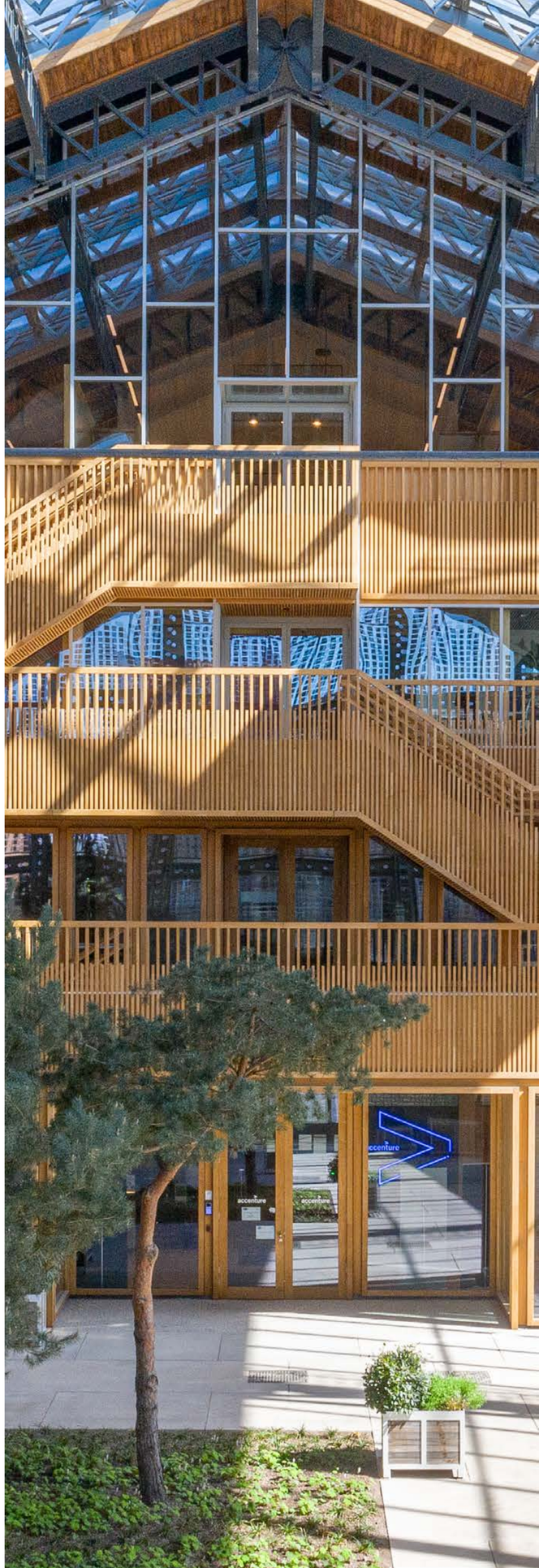
This international eco-label is awarded annually to tourist facilities, hotels, venues, and museums. Its assessment criteria cover overall environmental management, waste, water and energy management, green spaces, food, mobility, etc.

- **Venues :**
  - **15 %** of venues certified.
  - More than 1,000 people : 32% of events certified.
  - 500 to 1,000 people : 29% of venues certified.
  - 250 to 500 people : 19% of events certified.
  - 100 to 250 people : 8% of venues certified.

- **Hotels :**
  - **39 %** of establishments certified.
  - 6,184 rooms certified.

Two of Brussels' three major convention centres are also eco-certified.

- Square Brussels Meeting Centre (ISO 20121)
- Tour & Taxis (Green Key)



Controlled management of waste, energy, and water

Launched by the Brussels-Capital Region in 2022, the clean.brussels urban cleanliness strategy aims to mobilise all stakeholders to improve the quality of life, the environment and biodiversity in Brussels.

At the same time, the new legal framework for waste management, **Brudalex 2.0,** has introduced a series of new measures, such as the mandatory sorting of bio-waste for professionals (public and private), increased sorting and selective collection (metal, wood, plastic film, etc.) for businesses, administrations, etc., and the promotion of composting.

Brussels Environment, the environment and energy administration of the Brussels-Capital Region, advises and assists event organisers who want to adopt a sustainable approach in terms of waste, energy consumption, water consumption and wastewater management, etc. It also proposes a **charter of best practices for the events sector.** Any event organiser in the Brussels-Capital Region can become a signatory to this charter and commit to reducing their environmental impact.

Many sustainable, participatory projects

With respect for the environment and all individuals, whether Brussels residents or visitors, the Brussels-Capital Region is developing a number of sustainable projects, with the participation of its citizens.

Major urban renewal and rehabilitation projects are underway, such as :

- The canal area and its converted industrial heritage, a standard-bearer for the circular economy and inclusion with innovative, sustainable projects.

- The project to redevelop the Midi district into an intermodal hub integrating new public spaces and facilities and improving the quality of life and the role of active modes of transport.

- The Usquare.brussels project to convert the former Ixelles barracks into a lively, sustainable, and inclusive district.

- Projects combining **historical renovation and tourism development,** such as the conversion of the former Brussels Stock Exchange building into Belgian Beer World, and the redevelopment of Place Royale and its collection of 18th-century neoclassical buildings.

Overview of aids and services

Faced with social, environmental, economic and employment challenges, the Brussels-Capital Region has adopted a **transition strategy for its economy :** the Shifting Economy. At regional level, this strategy translates the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which set the economic, social, and environmental course for 2030. The Brussels strategy is also aligned with the European Green Deal, which aims to make Europe carbon neutral by 2050.

The Brussels-Capital Region also has a number of public interest organisations, associations and federations that can **help you, as an event organiser,** to adopt a sustainable approach.

The Brussels Region's Shifting Economy

The Brussels-Capital Region's Shifting Economy aims to bring about a paradigm shift to ensure that Brussels **develops a prosperous, local, sustainable and resilient economy that meets the needs of its citizens and businesses.** Led by four Brussels administrations (Brussels Environment, Brussels Economy and Employment, hub.brussels and Innoviris), it defines over 200 actions that aim to achieve this change by 2030.

The result of **real political will,** the Shifting Economy was co-constructed with several players in the Brussels ecosystem. As part of the Go4Brussels strategy, it was adopted by the Brussels Government on 31 March 2023 and submitted to the European Commission as part of the Brussels component of the Belgian National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

In this context, the Brussels Region is gradually **redirecting its public aid** to companies in the **shifting economy by 2030.** In short, companies that adopt an **exemplary environmental and social** approach can now - according to defined criteria - receive increased regional economic aid. The Shifting Economy is aimed at all entities carrying out an economic activity in Brussels, whether they are start-ups, self-employed, small, medium, and large businesses, associations, etc.

The Brussels Government Decree of 6 July 2023, on the social and environmental exemplarity of companies, sets out the legal framework (criteria, assessment committee, labels, support, etc.) for the recognition of exemplary companies.

A dual objective for 2030

- *to align economic policies with climate, environmental and social objectives*
- *to redirect the Region's support towards companies that demonstrate exemplary social and/or environmental performance*

« Social and environmental exemplarity have become criteria in its own right for access to subsidies and support from the Region. We are proud to support pioneering initiatives in Brussels.» - Véronique Renard, hospitality.brussels cluster coordinator, in hospitality.brussels/brussels-pioneer-of-positive-tourism/

Support organisations

As an event organiser, various **organisations in the Brussels institutional and associative landscape** can **support your sustainable approach.**

Public Interest Organisations

- Brussels Environment : Brussels administration responsible for the environment and energy.
- hub.brussels : Brussels business support administration, also home to :
  - the hospitality.brussels network that supports and promotes businesses in the tourism, events, and culture sectors[4]
  - the network of circular production companies circlemade.brussels
  - the network of medical technology and healthcare companies lifetech.brussels
  - why.brussels, the one-stop digital shop for foreign companies and investors planning to set up in Brussels

- Innoviris : a public organisation that finances and supports research and innovation in the Brussels-Capital Region.
- Brussels Economy and Employment : Brussels administration in charge of the economy and employment.
- Brussels Mobility : Brussels administration in charge of Equipment, Infrastructure and Transport.
- equal.brussels : administration that implements the Equal Opportunities policy.
- perspective.brussels : regional reference centre of expertise for regional and territorial development in Brussels.
- urban.brussels : administration that implements policy in terms of urban planning, cultural heritage, and urban regeneration.
- Paradigm : a public body that drives digital transformation.
- safe.brussels : public body that coordinates prevention and safety in the region.
- etc.

All the public players in Brussels can be found on be.brussels, the portal of the Brussels-Capital Region.

[4] *Cf. infra, Des initiatives bruxelloises pionnières.*

Associations and professional federations

- Brussels Hotels Association (BHA) : association of the Brussels hotel sector, representing over 90% of hotels and aparthotels, and advocating the development of sustainable tourism in Brussels.
- Brussels Special Venues (BSV) : non-profit trade association that brings together the main event venues (over 500 in all), offers free resources to help with venue selection and guarantees compliance with rigorous quality standards.
- European Society of Association Executives (ESAE) : leading European organisation bringing together Association Management professionals.
- Federation of European and International Associations established in Belgium (FAIB) : federation representing international associations based in Belgium.

Sustainable partners of visit.brussels

visit.brussels has developed the Sustainable Partners network[5] to guide the Brussels tourism sector towards greater sustainability.

These **sustainable partners** pursue visit.brussels' vision of making Brussels an **exemplary tourism and events destination.** They have implemented a rigorous, in-depth **sustainability management** system within their company, which is externally certified through annual audits. Each of these partners has **obtained a certification or label** approved by the Brussels-Capital Region as part of the «Exemplarity» Decree of the Brussels Government.

[5] *This network brings together all Brussels-based players committed to sustainability. To find out more, visit the dedicated page on the visit.brussels website.*

These labels, certifications and approvals are as follows :

- EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) : a performance analysis and improvement tool created by the European Commission as part of the Green Deal to guide organisations towards circularity and the reduction of their environmental impact.
- ISO 14001 : international standard enabling organisations to design and implement an environmental management system and improve their environmental performance.
- ISO 20121 : international standard providing the events industry with guidelines and best practices for managing events and controlling their social, economic, and environmental impact.
- Good Food Resto label : label awarded by the Brussels-Capital Region to support catering establishments committed to a sustainable approach and integrating the principles of the Brussels Good Food strategy (quality food, local and seasonal products, less animal protein, vegetarian dishes, respect for the environment and producers, minimisation of food waste, etc.).
- Eco-dynamic Company Label : label awarded by the Brussels-Capital Region that promotes eco-management and rewards companies, associations and institutions that act to reduce the impact of their activities on the environment.
- Green Key label : international ecolabel awarded to tourist facilities, hotels, guest houses, youth hostels, campsites, conference centres and attractions, based on their overall environmental management (waste, water, energy, green spaces, food, environmental education, mobility, etc.).
- Recognition in the circular economy : approval from the Brussels-Capital Region for micro, small and medium-sized businesses in certain sectors, that apply circular economy business models and best practices.
- Circlemade Cluster : network that brings together circular production companies in Brussels that champion a more sustainable and environmentally friendly business model, working to develop production in the city.
- Greenbizz.brussels : incubator dedicated to the sustainable economy in Brussels, supporting projects and startups in the green economy.
- Legal recognition for Artisans : approval awarded to artisans by the Federal Public Service Economy, which confirms the authentic character of the activity, the manual aspect of the work and the artisan’s expertise.

For more information on labels, visit the visit.brussels website.

The Brussels' Welcome Support of visit.brussels

Through its Brussels' Welcome Support[6], visit.brussels, via a specific fund, **supports** organisers of international professional events that meet certain criteria, particularly in terms of **sustainability** and **legacy.** This programme aims to define a new way of **promoting more responsible and committed business tourism in Brussels** by prioritising the organisation of **meaningful and sustainable** congresses, conferences, and events.

- The **main eligibility criteria** for this programme are as follows :
  - the event must be an international congress, conference or fair.
  - it must take place in the Brussels-Capital Region.
  - it must welcome at least 300 participants, at least 30% of them non-residents in Belgium.
  - it must last at least two days (of 8 hours), with an overnight stay in Brussels.
  - it must provide an action plan including at least one concrete action to enhance sustainability and/or inclusivity during the event.

- The evaluation of applications also considers certain **additional features,** such as :
  - the **theme of the event** is in line with one of the Brussels Region's five key **centres of excellence,** namely healthcare, sustainable economy, digital economy, biosciences, and finance.
  - special efforts must be made in terms of **sustainable development** and/or inclusivity (zero waste policy, accessibility to people with disabilities, addressing specific needs (both food and non-food), offering translation services, local catering, limiting carbon-intensive travel, paperless policy, etc.).
  - the event has a **positive impact on local communities** (legacy).
  - an offline and/or online communication plan is planned to promote Brussels.
  - the event takes place in off-peak periods.

[6] *For full programme regulations, visit the visit.brussels website.*

« The SolarPower Summit demonstrated a strong commitment to environmental sustainability. The conference venue (Radisson Grand Place) significantly reduced its carbon footprint thanks to investments in solar power and energy-saving technologies. In addition, carbon neutrality has been achieved through certified CO2 offsetting initiatives. Sustainability education sessions enabled participants to adopt renewable energy solutions, fostering a better understanding of environmental responsibility in the solar industry. All meals at the event were vegetarian, with surplus food donated to homeless shelters, minimising waste, and supporting local communities. The event also committed to eliminating single-use plastics and paper waste, further reducing its environmental impact. Participants were encouraged to use public transport, with free tickets provided by visit.brussels, improving accessibility while reducing CO2 emissions. »

Charlotte Otten, SolarPower Europe

The aim of visit.brussels is to **facilitate the development and growth of these events** by providing them with a range of **services,** such as :

- sustainable catering options;
- transportation tickets (STIB) for the delegates (single journey tickets);
- guided tours of Brussels for the delegates;
- local Belgian specialties for the speakers (such as chocolates and biscuits)*;
- a delightful culinary experience for the delegates during the event*;
- banner displays in the vicinity of the event venue*.
- one-year membership to The Association Place, the single point of contact for the international association community ;
- assistance in organising a press conference at the Press Club Brussels Europe
- access to the Brussels Town Hall for the event

** for the events being held in Brussels for the third time or more*

Enhancing the sustainability of your event in Brussels

The aim of this guide is to support you and **help you make sustainable and responsible choices** when organising your event in Brussels.

This chapter contains a step-by-step guide to the **main aspects you need to consider** in your organisation, with examples of **best practice from Brussels** for each one. By making the right choices, you can shift your event towards a more circular, ecological, and ethical model. And contribute to the sustainability of the sector as a whole.

1) Transport and mobility

Transport for visitors and organisers is the main source of polluting emissions before, during and after an event. **93.62%** of greenhouse gas emissions generated by visitors come from transport to their destination[8].

✔ To (and from) the destination

- Whenever possible, choose to travel by train.
- If flying is the only option, choose airlines that are the best choice in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. Choose direct flights where possible, as take-off causes the highest kerosene consumption. And encourage your visitors to travel light, as the weight of a plane is also a source of fuel consumption.
- Consider remote online interventions for speakers who live furthest away.
- When transporting equipment, optimise travel by lorry when necessary (routes, loading, etc.).

The average duration of an event varies from 12 to 72 hours. In this short space of time, resources can be overexploited. This scenario translates into massive waste (including food) and a negative impact on biodiversity. Some events can also generate 30% of our annual CO2 emissions in just a few days, making a massive contribution to climate change.

VO Event website

Consult the 'Improving access to major events' guide published by Brussels Environment (in French).

[8] visit.brussels study on the impact of tourism in Brussels, calculation of sector-specific emissions using parameters calculated by Rico et al. (2019), Carbon footprint of tourism in Barcelona, Tourism Management 70: 491-504.
[9] Good to know: Google Flights gives an estimate of emissions in flight search results and on booking pages.

- **On site**
  - Limit on-site transport, particularly by choosing the accommodation closest to the event venue for participants, ideally accessible on foot or by soft means (bicycle, public transport).
  - Encourage your visitors to choose soft mobility. Inform them of the options and tools available for this purpose (mobile applications, maps, timetables, etc.).
  - If possible, organise group transport for your visitors (shuttles, shared vehicles), and choose electric or hybrid vehicles.
  - When transporting equipment, optimise travel by lorry when necessary (routes, loading, etc.).

In Brussels...

- A central location in Europe. Easily accessible by train, thanks to the Brussels *hub* of the Eurostar network.
- A twenty-minute city on a human scale.
- A city that prioritises bicycles and supports bicycle tourism accommodation with its Bike Friendly label.
- STIB (Brussels Inter-Municipal Transport Company) public transport: all metros and trams run on 100% green electric power; more than half of STIB buses are hybrid or electric, and the entire bus fleet will be electric by 2035.
- STIB Congress Cards, offering access to the entire STIB public transport network for the duration of your congress.
- The unique Floya mobile application for planning, booking, and paying for your modes of transport (public transport, two-wheelers, shared cars, taxis).
- Travel advice and support are available from Brussels Environment, the Brussels environment and energy administration.
- Tootbus : hop-on, hop-off tours on board 100% electric buses.
- Electric carriage tours of the heart of Brussels with Carriage Tour Brussels.
- DiscoveRent : agency offering positive-impact activities and trips to nearby destinations (e.g. southern Belgium).

Brussels legislation requires a travel plan to be drawn up if an event attracts more than 3,000 visitors. This rule will soon apply to 1,000 visitors or more. - Further information on the Brussels Environment website

2) Venues and accommodation

The places where your event takes place (venues), and those where your guests, speakers and teams stay, also have an environmental impact (energy and water consumption, waste and wastewater management, equipment, catering, etc.) and a social impact (personnel policy, commitment to the local community, etc.). And don't forget that these venues will be associated with your event in terms of practices and image.

More and more venues and accommodations are following sustainability policies that can help you pursue your goals.

Venues

- Hold your event at a venue with a corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy in terms of the environment, employment, human rights, health and safety, support for local communities, cultural heritage, etc.
- Check the measures implemented (sustainable/passive building, materials used, waste management, water use, renewable energy, local and sustainable food, etc.).
- Avoid or limit paper consumption, for example by using eco-responsible marker boards rather than paper flip charts.
- Replace plastic water bottles with more sustainable options (jugs, tap water where possible, returnable glass bottles).
- Provide dedicated areas for waste collection and sorting that are clearly visible and identifiable to participants.
- Make sure you have electronic signage.
- Health and safety : make sure you have a clear emergency evacuation plan that staff are familiar with, and communicate it to your guests, contacts, and teams. Make sure first aid and emergency arrangements are in place.

Accommodation

- Choose accommodation with a corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy in terms of the environment, employment, human rights, health and safety, support for local communities, cultural heritage, etc.
- Check the measures implemented (sustainable/passive building, materials used, waste management, water use, renewable energy, local and sustainable food, etc.).

« The Gare Maritime is an energy-neutral building. Renewable energy is generated on site: heat and cold are produced by geothermal energy, and solar panels generate electricity. No fossil fuels are used for heating or cooling.»

Website of Tour & Taxis, whose buildings have all been awarded the Green Key label.

« Our sustainable initiatives cover various aspects of our operations : sourcing from local suppliers, technical innovations such as water pressure regulators, use of LED lighting throughout the hotel, etc.»

Brussels Marriott Hotel Grand-Place, awarded the Green Key label in 2024.

- Choose accommodation close to the event venue, ideally accessible on foot or by soft means (bicycle or public transport).
- And don't forget to talk to your guests, speakers and teams about sustainable practices and gestures (water consumption, use of towels and energy, waste management, etc.).

In Brussels...

- Waste, energy, water, etc. management advice and support are available from Brussels Environment, the Brussels Environment and Energy Administration.
- 57 Brussels establishments awarded[10] Green Key certification.
- 29 eco-certified venues : Square Brussels Meeting Centre (ISO 20121), Tour & Taxis (Green Key), BIP Meeting Center (Green Key)
- The BEL, headquarters of Brussels Environment and venue for eco-responsible events, in one of Europe's largest passive office and business buildings.
- 21 museums, 18 venues and 6 accommodations in Brussels certified Access-i[11]
- Raypath, ecological solutions for cleaning large, enclosed spaces.

3) Food and beverages

Food and beverage production methods and consumption patterns have an impact on sustainability through the use of pesticides, animal welfare, packaging, food transport, waste management, etc. According to Brussels Environment, food can account for up to a third of an event's overall impact. Choosing responsible catering options therefore helps to reduce the environmental and social footprint of your event, while keeping costs down.

More and more food and beverage suppliers are following sustainability policies that can help you pursue your goals.

- Select your suppliers based on their environmental and social sustainability.
- Choose a healthy, fair diet, based on seasonal produce and favouring short distribution channels.
- Limit meat consumption and make sure you offer a vegetarian menu.
- Avoid wastage by estimating your event's food requirements as accurately as possible (e.g. by meal registration when registering for the event), and by informing registrants of the food waste generated by their absence.

[10] March 2024 figures. The list of Green Key establishments in Brussels can be found on the website of Canopea, the federation of Belgian environmental associations.
[11] 2023 Figures.

- Avoid individual food and beverage packaging.
- Replace plastic drinks bottles with more sustainable options (jugs, tap water where possible, returnable glass bottles).
- Use traditional crockery, or recyclable or recycled plates, glasses, and cutlery.

In Brussels...

- The Brussels-Capital Region's Good Food strategy aims to support professionals in the food production and consumption chain in their transition to more sustainable models : local supply chains, innovative production and distribution models, waste reduction, etc.
- Waste, energy, water, etc. management advice and support are available from Brussels Environment, the Brussels Environment and Energy Administration.
- 9 Brussels caterers and 106 restaurants awarded the Brussels-Capital Region Good Food label, which rewards establishments committed to sustainable food production.
- Entropy : restaurant that offers more circular and fair food and reduces social inequalities by donating the profits to its Hearth Project non-profit organisation and redistributing leftovers.
- Artfood : catering service that combines passion and creativity with a human and eco-responsible approach.
- B-FOOD : catering service that takes care with its products and food waste.
- Belgobon: sustainable catering service that fights food waste and uses modular cargo bikes for events.
- Alpaca : company that recovers unsold goods.

4) Communication and equipment

Organising an event involves the use of equipment (communication, decoration, furniture, audio-visual equipment, etc.), much of which is destined to be thrown away. While recycling is a positive option, it is not enough. As an organiser, you can reduce your environmental and social impact by making the right choices.

You can also play a unifying role by communicating your sustainable choices to your guests, stakeholders, and teams.

- Select your suppliers based on their sustainable approach, both environmental (local, recyclable materials, circular economy, etc.) and social (employment of local staff, ethical rules, etc.).
- As far as possible, avoid printed materials (invitations, registrations, programmes, brochures, etc.) in favour of digital materials (website, mobile app).
- If printed matter is essential, make sure you use less polluting techniques and materials (recycled paper, sustainable ink, etc.). Prioritise content that can be reused over time (for example, by leaving the date blank on printed material that can be reused for subsequent events).
- Choose reusable badges and organise their collection at the end of the event.
- Reuse your event signage from one event to the next. Ask the people in charge of your venue about the equipment available (including digital signage).
- Give-aways : avoid giving objects, make sustainable and ethical choices, and choose options linked to a local social project.
- Audiovisual equipment : make sure your supplier uses energy-efficient equipment and give preference to equipment available on site.
- Furniture and decoration : rent, reuse or buy second-hand products, supporting the circular economy. If you must buy new equipment, choose products that are natural, traceable, recyclable, repairable and reusable.

10,000,000 tonnes of furniture are discarded every year in European Union countries, the majority of which is destined for landfill or incineration.

Source : furn360.eu

« The social economy plays a crucial role in the transition to the circular economy, particularly in the collection, sorting and reuse of a range of resources at the end of their first life.» - be circular, Brussels circular economy website

In Brussels...

- Information and support on waste and the use of circular economy resources are available from Brussels Environment, the Brussels environment and energy administration.
- The Brussels-Capital Region Government's Regional Circular Economy Programme (PREC), a framework to encourage the transformation from a linear economy to a circular economy - extensive information available on the be circular website.
- The Circlemade network of Brussels companies that base their activities on one or more of the four circular business models (circular sourcing, resource efficiency, product life extension, resource recovery).
- Numerous addresses for buying or donating equipment, available from RESSOURCES, the federation of social and circular enterprises in the reuse of goods and materials sector in the Walloon and Brussels Regions.

5) Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Values of openness and respect for diversity and inclusion are strongly embedded in Brussels' DNA, which, in turn, is reflected in many of the Region's venues and institutions. Make sure they are rooted in your event.

- Before the event, check the specific needs of your guests.
- All participants and speakers in your event, particularly persons with reduced mobility[12], must be able to perform the following actions with as much autonomy, security, and comfort as possible : access and leave an area or infrastructure, move through it horizontally and vertically, find their way around, be found, effectively use the functions and facilities, communicate, etc.
- Ensuring that your event is accessible to all means implementing a number of principles and tools (kiss&drive, access ramps, legibility of documents and presentations, quality of audio transmissions, etc.).
- The accommodation for your guests must also be accessible to everyone. Ensure access and facilities for people with reduced mobility or disabilities.
- Make sure your catering offer is respectful of different cultures, religions, and diets.
- Make sure that the content and communication used for your event (invitations, programme, presentations, etc.) are inclusive, respectful, and open to all (gender diversity, gender budgeting, inclusive communication, etc.).

[12] People in wheelchairs, people with walking difficulties, blind or partially sighted people, deaf or hard-of-hearing people, and people with comprehension difficulties.

In Brussels...

- The visit.brussels website brings together a wealth of information on diversity and inclusion for professionals in the tourism and events sector : adapted venues and guided tours, equal opportunities, accessibility, etc.
- Various publications are available on the equal.brussels website, including Brussels' equality, diversity, and inclusion plans (combating racism, gender mainstreaming and gender equality, integrating handistreaming into public policy, inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people, etc.).
- Access-i informs people with special needs about the accessibility of places and services (museums, shops, activities, hotels, etc.). Each Access-i certified site receives a visual display of its level of accessibility by type of disability.
- Created by visit.brussels, the event accessibility guide supports the organisation of events accessible to people with reduced mobility, from planning to evaluation.
- The handy.brussels - Brussels For All website brings together tourist information on Brussels for travellers with reduced mobility (accommodation, restaurants, museums, shopping, sports, and leisure facilities, etc.).
- Wheeltribe : a platform that connects people with reduced mobility with inclusive travel solutions.

6) Activities, Incentives & Legacy

Are you planning activities for your event participants ? Brussels is full of options for sustainable tourism experiences, including nature walks, bike rides, heritage, museums, and ethical shopping. While carrying out your missions, your event can generate value - social, cultural, economic, environmental - for the benefit of local communities *(legacy)*.

- Find out which sustainable activities are available at the time of your event. And then make a selection so that you propose a programme alongside your event, based on your guests' expectations.
- Choose activities with a positive impact, such as :
  - visits to local social and cultural projects.
  - fundraising activities that benefit a local project.
- Open certain days of your event to the public, local students, etc. Make local communities aware of the issues you care about.
- Organise a donation of leftover equipment or surplus food (in compliance with the relevant standards) to an association, school, adapted work company, etc.
- Inform your speakers, participants, and teams about sustainable activities in Brussels.
- Set yourself up as a role model and educate your audiences and the local community about sustainable attitudes.

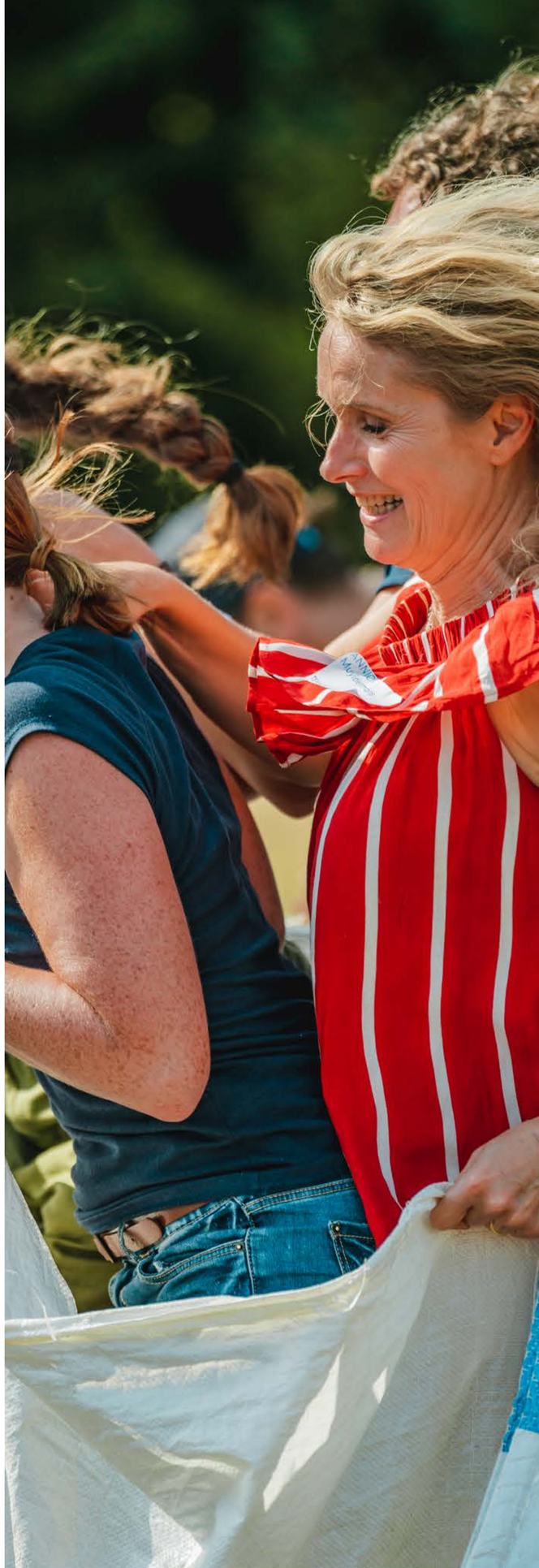
In Brussels...

- **Activities**

  - Information on sustainable activities and experiences in Brussels is available on the visit.brussels website.
  - The Greeters network offers unusual tours of the city and its districts in the company of passionate Brussels citizens, in a choice of 12 languages.
  - Discoveries and visits on the theme of «Heritage and climate change».
  - Unusual, gentle rides and tours : themed guided bike rides and bike rentals with Pro Velo asbl, guided bike tours and guided chocolate tours, the city's gastronomic heritage, with Groovy Brussels.
  - Villo! self-service bicycles and shared electric bikes (Blue bike, Lime, Dott, Tier, Bolt).
  - Tootbus : hop-on, hop-off tours on board 100% electric buses.

- **Legacy :** various associations and platforms offer social projects and volunteer work that you can support, depending on your interests, such as :

  - Give a Day (volunteer matching site for Brussels)
  - Serve the City (corporate volunteering projects and actions)
  - Association Volont'R (relationship-based volunteering for young people, within various institutions)
  - Social Guide (Agence pour le Non-Marchand directory)
  - Good Planet (sustainable development training and team building)
  - SOWoods (urban reforestation and ecological restoration)



7) Measuring the impact of your event

Once your event is over, it is important to assess it in terms of sustainability. In addition to quantifying the event's carbon footprint, this assessment is an essential source of information for improving your projects, reviewing your objectives, adapting your practices, etc.

A sustainability report by a recognised organisation will also enhance the credibility of your event. You can also share it with your customers and business contacts.

A few options :

- Tapio : a team of experts and a customisable platform for companies, offering a range of carbon footprint management tools (carbon footprint, recommendations, awareness-raising, etc.) and support in the transition to a sustainable business model.
- CO2logic supports organisations in their environmental approach, with environmental diagnoses, target setting, carbon footprint reduction, climate contribution, communication, CO2-neutral certification, etc.
- My Impact Tool : a tailor-made platform dedicated to improving the environmental and social performance of communication events and campaigns ; generates detailed impact reports in various fields (biodiversity, circularity, carbon footprint, contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, digital footprint, and inclusion).

To meet other players in the tourism, hospitality and events sectors involved in innovative and sustainable initiatives, join the hospitality.brussels network, supported by the Brussels entrepreneurship agency hub.brussels and visit.brussels.

visit.brussels