

# European Choral Association - Environmental Strategy & Policy

(version March 2023 for publication)

## Introduction

1. **Green Team**
  - 1.1. composition
  - 1.2. tasks
  - 1.3. cooperation with other green teams
2. **Measuring Carbon Footprint**
3. **Environmental Policy**
  - 3.1. **for the office**
    - 3.1.1. Purchase policy including cleaning material
    - 3.1.2. Digital footprint / digital waste
    - 3.1.3. Eco-friendly publications/marketing material/gadgets
    - 3.1.4. Building - heating, water, light etc.
    - 3.1.5. Recommendations to the team
  - 3.2. **For meetings and travels of team, board and youth committee**
    - 3.2.1. Travel policy
    - 3.2.2. Accommodation and meals
    - 3.2.3. Online and hybrid meetings versus live meetings
  - 3.3. **for events**
    - 3.3.1. Events organised by the European Choral Association
      - 3.3.1.1. Membership Weekend with General Assembly
      - 3.3.1.2. Physical Workshops
      - 3.3.1.3. Webinars and Zoom Cafés
    - 3.3.2. Events of the European Choral Association
    - 3.3.3. Events under the label of the European Choral Association
4. **Action Plan**
  - 4.1. Carbon Footprint Tracking
  - 4.2. Communication and Awareness Raising
  - 4.3. Training
  - 4.4. Possible future Green Certification
  - 4.5. Reflection on Climate Adaptation?
5. **Value contradictions / Need for Research / Open Questions**
6. **References**
7. **Appendix: SUMMARY of Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Policies**



## Introduction

This environmental sustainability strategy with detailed policies is based on the guidelines developed in the frame of the **SHIFT Project** (2019-2022), coordinated by the European Music Council and co-funded by the EU Erasmus+ programme. The European Choral Association was a partner in this project where the process for the SHIFT Eco Certificate for European cultural networks was started.

[www.shift-culture.eu](http://www.shift-culture.eu)

The starting point for this project was to explore how cultural networks can contribute to the **UN Sustainable Development Goals** (and for this part of the project especially SDG 13 Climate Action, but also SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production and SDG 14 Life below Water because environmental sustainability is also about clean air, clean oceans, avoiding plastic, protecting biodiversity, etc.

In autumn 2020 the membership of the European Choral Association approved a new vision, mission, strategy and action plan where the topic of environmental sustainability was explicitly mentioned under the first strategic aim: “implement and promote measures that contribute to an increased environmental awareness among network members and at events.”

[www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org](http://www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org) -> [About Us](#) -> [Our Strategy](#)

With the start of the project IGNITE in December 2021, the European Choral Association started working concretely on how the sector of collective singing can contribute to environmental sustainability and to the European Green Deal. This will be done between 2022 and 2024 by:

- Creating this environmental sustainability strategy and policies for the European Choral Association, approved by the board in May 2022
- Offering physical capacity building workshops and webinars
- Making presentations at other events
- Supporting projects that help raising awareness

[www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org/IGNITE](http://www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org/IGNITE)

We are aware of the fact that we are at the very beginning of a long path, and that there is still a lot to do. Yet we also know that there is urgency and we have to start now. As European Choral Association we have decided to set an example for the sector, and to start with ourselves (walk the talk). This also helps us identify possible challenges and conflicts of interest that can come up if you want to implement strict policies for environmental sustainability on the one hand, and you have other values such as the promotion of international cooperation and geographical inclusion on the other hand.



## 1. Green Team

### 1.1. composition

In early 2022 the European Choral Association decided to install a “Green Team”. It shall consist of 1 to 2 team members and 1 to 2 representatives of the board and/or youth committee of the association. The first green team established in April 2022 consists of: Sonja Greiner, secretary general / Beatrice Bonfé, communication manager / Neris Özen, member of the youth committee

### 1.2. tasks

The tasks of this Green Team include:

- preparing a draft environmental sustainability and policies (this document)
- gathering information and facts that can help the board and the team of the association as well as the membership make the right choices
- help to make sure that the strategy and policies are followed, reminding the team, the board, the youth committee and the membership regularly about this
- put in place some tools and procedures for certain situations (for example providing a carbon footprint calculator for travels) and preparing checklists and tables that can facilitate the process
- regularly include information in the communication tools of the association

### 1.3. cooperation with other green teams

The Green Team of the European Choral Association shall regularly cooperate with other green teams, for example those of other organisations which were partners in the SHIFT project, so that they can exchange experience and share information and documents. A first step was done by cooperating with the Green Team of the European Music Council in April /May 2022.

## 2. Measuring Carbon Footprint

One important element for the introduction of environmental sustainability measures is to measure the impact on the environment of everything the association does. The most common way of doing so is to measure the carbon footprint.

The board and team of the European Choral Association shall decide together:

- Which carbon footprint calculator to use  
*See SHIFT Fact Sheet on Carbon Footprint Calculators -> [here](#)  
And presentation on carbon footprint measuring at the Workshop in Novi Sad 11-2022*
- For what to measure the carbon footprint (travels only? Heating? Electricity? Other?)  
(minimum requirement: all travels paid by the association)
- Once this has been done: formulate an aim for each year from 2024  
(how much should the carbon footprint be reduced the following year?)



### 3. Environmental Policies

#### 3.1. for the office

Though a lot was already done here in the past, it is important to regularly review the decisions taken in the office in order to check where the environmental impact / the carbon footprint may be reduced further in the office.

##### 3.1.1. purchase policy including cleaning material

- The office shall only buy recycled paper, avoid plastic as much as possible, and buy eco-friendly material whenever possible (and where the office has an influence on the purchase).
- Printing shall be reduced / avoided as much as possible
- Where the office does not buy material directly (cleaning material, toilet paper etc.), the office shall attempt to ask for sustainable material

##### 3.1.2. digital footprint / digital waste

- Digital devices should be switched off when not needed, and when new equipment is bought, the sustainability of the equipment shall be checked. Also digital waste shall be reduced if possible after checking real impact
- Also the digital footprint of clouds etc. used shall be checked with the aim of using eco-friendly clouds and servers as much as possible

##### 3.1.3. publications / marketing material / gadgets

- publications should be printed on recycled paper
- marketing material should be sustainable – ordered from an eco-friendly provider (e.g. wooden or paper pencils and pens, no plastic if it can be avoided, no plastic packaging etc.)
- Make sure to order sustainable / eco-friendly marketing material / gadgets e.g. wooden or paper pencils and pens, etc.
- Where possible and it does not upset the layout, consider adding this logo on the material / flyers etc.



##### 3.1.4. building - heating, water, light etc.

Since the European Choral Association is renting its office rooms, it has limited decision-making power when it comes to the energy consumption of the building. Nevertheless, some influence is possible through the association of renting parties Haus der Kultur:

- Support sustainable decisions concerning heating and energy, even if costs may be slightly higher
- Make sure heaters in the office are not turned too high when nobody is working (on weekends it is switched off anyway, so this mostly concerns the longer absence of the team)
- Avoid unnecessary light
- Ask for and support other sustainable choices (e.g. bikestands instead of additional parking spaces)

### 3.1.5. Recommendations to the team

The European Choral Association believes that it cannot regulate what its staff members do at home. It therefore does not wish to impose any choices on team members, except when it comes to what travels paid by the association (see below) and other decisions taken about what is paid by the association.

However, the Green Team can and should give certain recommendations to the staff, especially if they are in home office a lot (not to be checked or measured), and encourage sustainable choices such as:

- Not using take-away containers for lunch
- Using public transport or the bike where possible

## 3.2. for meetings and travels of team, board and youth committee (for all travels covered by us)

### 3.2.1. Travel policy

Travel being the biggest producer of CO2 and thus the part of a European network's work where probably the carbon footprint can most likely be reduced, a travel policy is very important for the association. On the other hand it is also important not to systematically ban traveling or air travels, but rather to carefully evaluate the situation for each trip

- **Consider whether a physical presence is necessary** or an online presence might be sufficient in some cases / for some meetings
- Look at different aspects before taking a decision and **ask these questions:**
  - o Are we traveling there for the first time?
  - o How long would we be staying there?
  - o Have we been there many times or would this be the first visit?
  - o Can we combine this with another appointment / meeting?
  - o Is air travel really necessary or is it possible to get there by train or bus?
- **Avoid indirect flights**, consider a combination of train and plane or bus and plane to increase the possibility of choosing a direct flight - accept paying a bit more for a direct flight if needed

- For travels under 600 km, **take the train or bus** if possible at all, accept higher costs if needed, allow for **more time** for train or bus travels

For the team there must be a policy for the counting of travel hours as work

- Avoid using a car alone, use **public transport** rather than taxis unless you have heavy luggage or other valid reasons (e.g. bad connection, reduced mobility)

Some organisations also look at **carbon offsetting** as a way to contribute to environmental sustainability. However, this is a highly controversial method which is considered "greenwashing" or calming your own conscience by some, since you do not really reduce the carbon footprint of your flight. Also it is not clear whether the funding bodies would consider this as eligible costs. So the European Choral Association has decided against this, though of course privately anybody who wishes to do so can do carbon offsetting for their own trip.

However, also the **work-life balance** and the **personal needs** of people traveling for the association need to be considered. Not everybody needs to travel with the same means of transportation within the team, and if somebody has valid reasons for not taking the train, this should also be accepted.

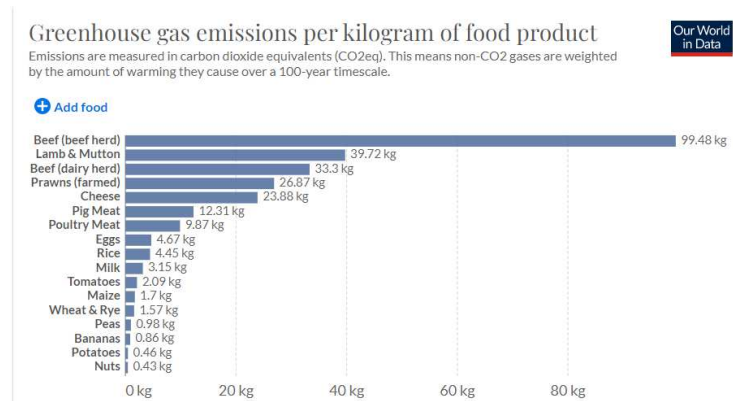
### 3.2.2. Accommodation and meals

**When booking hotels** during trips and for meetings and events (also see below)

- try to find hotels with ecolabel (checking which ecolabels are officially recognized). If this is not possible (in some cities / countries this is still difficult to find), give recommendations on how each person can individually contribute to reduce their personal carbon footprint in the hotel, for example using the Do-not-disturb sign or asking for less frequent cleaning and change of towels etc.
- find an accommodation that is located where public transport is available

**For meals and catering**

- Consider offering vegetarian and/or local food, especially when you are ordering food for all or a catering service (see carbon footprint of food -> not all vegan or vegetarian food has a lower carbon footprint than meat, choose carefully)
- In the restaurant when eating à la carte, let everybody choose freely



<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/ghg-per-kg-poorer>

### 3.2.3. Online and hybrid meetings versus live meetings

The pandemic has shown that on the one hand it is possible to organise a lot of meetings online, on the other hand physical meetings are also necessary from time to time in order to ensure a good communication, allow for personal networking time and “backstage” conversations. When planning the meeting cycle of the association, a careful mix of online, hybrid and live meetings should be foreseen

- Ideally two **physical meetings** of the board and youth committee per year
- Additional meetings should be **online** (for example additional board meetings on specific topics, most of the meetings of the executive board, working group meetings, regular meetings of the youth committee)
- **Hybrid** meetings can be a good solution when some people meet physically for another reason and decide to have a meeting, without the need to make the other people come just for this. If hybrid meetings are planned, a good technology is important (fish-eye webcam or even several cameras to show different angles / speakers, good room microphone, loudspeaker)

### 3.3. For events

#### 3.3.1. Events organised by the European Choral Association

##### Membership Weekend with General Assembly Physical Workshops

For events organised by the European Choral Association alone, the board and team have the decision-making power and they can make choices supporting environmental sustainability alone. The recommendations and rules are in this case similar to the ones mentioned above under meetings:

- look at how people travel to the event if the European Choral Association is covering the costs
- choose hotels (and venues) with ecolabel where possible, reachable by public transport
- arrange for sustainable catering (vegetarian and/or regional)
- ask people to bring their own water bottles
- encourage people to use public transport, walk or cycle locally

Yet, the European Choral Association also has to consider **other aspects and values** such as geographical diversification of its events, the inclusion of remote regions in Europe, accessibility for people in different regions. While an event in Belgium or Germany may seem “central” and easily reachable for everybody, this is only true for certain Central-Western European countries. For other countries these places are more difficult to reach than others which seem remote to people from Belgium or Germany. For the Membership Weekend 2022 a strategic decision was taken to host the Membership Weekend in a country which lies on the doorstep to the regional development target region and makes it possible for many people from central-Eastern Europe and the Balkan to travel cheaply. The reachability of the host town and the possible ecolabels can thus only form one part of the decision-making process.

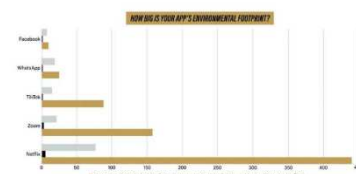
##### Webinars and formal and informal networking cafés and online meetings

While the points listed above are not relevant for pure online meetings, a mid-term and long-term environmental sustainability strategy must involve:

- checking the digital footprint of (streaming) platforms used?
- Encouraging participants to turn off their videos when they are not talking? (especially in Webinars – this does obviously not apply to networking meetings where people want to see and experience each other

##### Turn off that camera during virtual meetings, environmental study says

by Kayla Wilen, Purdue University



A new study estimates the approximate carbon, water and land footprints asso...  
It's not just to hide clutter anymore—add "saving the planet" to the reasons you leave the camera off during your next virtual meeting.

<https://phys.org/news/2021-01-camera-virtual-environmental.html>

### 3.3.2. Cooperation Events of the European Choral Association

In cooperation events of the European Choral Association (events designed by the association and where the association is strongly involved in the organisation and planning) a paragraph or several paragraphs should be included in the cooperation agreement to ensure that certain measures for environmental sustainability will be included (e.g. no plastic water bottles, more vegetarian and/or local food, choice of eco-friendly accommodation and venues, ideally free public transportation, etc. see above).

First tests were done in 2022 with vegetarian catering at Leading Voices, water tanks to refill water bottles and one vegetarian meal per day at Europa Cantat junior.

*For details see SHIFT Eco Guidelines*

### 3.3.3. Events under the label of the European Choral Association

At events under the label of the European Choral Association there are fewer possibilities for influencing the choices. However, the European Choral Association should include some basic recommendations for events (concerning travels, venues, accommodation, meals etc.) into the cooperation agreements and add a link to this policy.

## 4. Action Plan

### 4.1. Carbon Footprint Tracking

Once the association has found a good carbon footprint tracker (see chapter 3), the carbon footprint caused by the work of the association shall be tracked and documented, at least for the travels of the association, and for other aspects of the work to be defined.

### 4.2. Communication and Awareness Raising

The biggest impact a European cultural network can have in the field of environmental sustainability is to use the power of its network and communicate about and raise awareness for the topic and possible measures to be taken to contribute to the European Green Deal.

The European Choral Association will do this by

- publishing this strategy document on the Website of the association
- talking about the topic at the Membership Weekends of the association
- making presentations about the topic at different events of members and other organisations
- through the Green Team regularly reminding the board, youth committee and team about this strategy and the policies above
- including tips for environmental sustainability in its communication tools and publications (*to be considered for the publications from 2023*)
- engaging with the wider audience through Social Media
- supporting projects that help raising awareness for the topic, such as the “[choirs for ecocide laws](#)” project or the initiative “[Our voice for our planet](#)” by communicating about them



#### 4.3. Training

As part of the IGNITE project the European Choral Association will offer online and offline training on the topic of environmental sustainability

- A physical workshop in Novi Sad as part of the Membership Weekend 2022 in Novi Sad, Serbia
- At least one webinar about the topic in 2023 or 2024
- Disseminating this document with the strategy and policies through the “resources” section on the Website of the association

#### 4.4. Possible future Green Certification

During the SHIFT project (2019-2022) the European Choral Association signed a letter of intent expressing its intention to join the process of a SHIFT Eco Certificate for European cultural networks. Team members of the European Choral Association attended the meetings during which the process was prepared.

In 2022 the board and team of the European Choral Association decided that it would not be possible to commit to the auditing process to be started in 2023 due to a shortage in human resources. Instead the association shall focus the attention on pursuing the strategy and policies included in this document.

Once the SHIFT Eco Certificate will be in place, the board and team shall have to decide if they wish to enter the auditing process for it, with annual staff training, carbon footprint tracking and an external evaluation process approximately every two years, with a budget of approximately 2.000 EUR per year.

#### 4.5. Reflection on Climate Adaption

In the SHIFT Eco Certificate guidelines it is suggested as optional task that networks should reflect upon adaptation and risk assessment with regards to the impact of climate change on their activities and operations. It is suggested to base this upon research and/or a brainstorming activity, identifying at least:

- Reasons for the network to tackle climate adaptation
- a general reflection on the extent to which climate change may impact the network’s activities and operations in the short-term and long-term future
- an examination of which next steps might be necessary
- a risk assessment

First steps have been done in this direction by discussing the possible impact the climate change may have on choirs traveling to international events since especially young people in countries such as Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium or Denmark have decided not to travel by plane anymore. This may mean that events have to be more regional, that it may be sensible to offer several events in different regions in one year, that events may have to be smaller in future.

*For inspiration exercises A9 and B2 from the “Adapting Our Cultural Toolkit” document could be usefu, see -> [here](#)*



## 5. Value Contradictions / Need for Research / Open Questions

The board, youth committee and team of the association discussed this document with the strategy and policies during a strategy retreat in May 2022. Despite the clear wish to do something and contribute to the European Green Deal, put environmental sustainability in focus and take sustainable decisions, there were also some questions and doubts:

- How can we have a real/concrete impact as organisation? How can we have an influence on governance/industry?
- Even though we need policies with rules and regulations, we need to take into account personal choices versus the needs of the association and the sector
- The association can do a lot to raise awareness for the topic and its important, however, the association mostly cannot tell people what they have to do, it mostly can give recommendations
- Since the impact of awareness-raising and training can be much better than that of the environmental sustainability measures the association can take itself, the focus should be on providing tools for members and others in the sector, while still trying to talk the walk / be an example as much as possible
- Investing in environmental sustainability can mean a financial investment (when environmentally sustainable choices are more expensive than others) and in human resources. The fear not to have enough time to deal with this topic was the dilemma most quoted when the teams of the European networks were asked about this in 2021 (see graphic below)
- There are changes that are more easy to implement than others, the association should start with those (e.g. at events choice of venues, choice of meals, reduction of plastic etc., for travels avoiding indirect flights as much as possible)
- The way to environmental sustainability is not always straight and easy, there can be a contradiction of values that can make decisions difficult (for example geographical diversity of host towns/cities versus accessibility by train and bus)
- For some decisions more information / research is needed (what is the digital footprint of an online meeting? How does a paperless meeting compare to a computer-less meeting? For choirs and vocal ensembles: how does singing from paper scores compare to singing from tablets?)
- It is also important to avoid greenwashing and to remain transparent and honest

### What are your sustainable dilemmas?



## 6. References

### 6.1. Strategy and Action Plan of the Association

Approved by the membership in 2020 -> [-> here](#)

### 6.2. Legacy of the SHIFT project (for complete links go to google doc, see link p.1)

Website: [shift-culture.eu](http://shift-culture.eu)

SHIFT Fact Sheets on Environmental Sustainability [-> here](#)

SHIFT Research articles on Environmental Sustainability [-> here](#)

SHIFT Annotated Bibliography on Environmental Sustainability [-> here](#)

SHIFT newsletter on best practices concerning Sustainability [-> here](#)

SHIFT collection of resources on Environmental Sustainability [-> here](#)

- Fact Sheet on Green Certification [-> here](#)

- Fact Sheet on Carbon Footprint Calculators [-> here](#)

- EMC Conference Reader - Music as a Driver for Change [-> here](#)

- Green Orchestras Guide [-> here](#)

- Take the Green Train - initiative of Europe Jazz Network [-> here](#)

SHIFT ECO-Guidelines for cultural networks [-> here](#)

### 6.3. Research

For example studies comparing the impact of online programme books with printed programme books etc.

### 6.4. Examples of initiatives / repertoire collections

<https://www.deutsche-chorjugend.de/projekte/earth-choir-kids/>

<https://www.deutsche-chorjugend.de/chorbuecher-earth-choir-kids>

<https://www.wirsingenimchor.de/natur-und-umwelt1>

<https://www.justicechoir.org/#about>

<https://www.justicechoir.org/songbook/>

<https://our-voice-for-our-planet.com/?lang=en>

Choirs for ecocide law

(Core team: Merzi Rajala, Kirsi Kaunismäki-Suhonen and Peder Karlsson. The project website will be available here:

[www.stopecocide.earth/art](http://www.stopecocide.earth/art)



#### WHY

Choirs for Ecocide law is a project with the purpose to raise awareness of Ecocide Law as an effective tool for a global transition to sustainability.

## 7. Appendix: SUMMARY of Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Policies

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**  
What will we do?

**Environmental strategy and policy of the European Choral Association**

- Policy or policies
- Communication
- Training
- Certification?
- Climate Adaptation?

**OUR GREEN POLICY**

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**  
What can Organisations do?

• Some ideas for inspiration

- Walk the talk!
- Reducing travels
- Discuss options with your partners
- Online & hybrid workshops
- Green Web Check: <https://www.europeanchoralassociation.org/en/web-check/>
- Green Team
- Environmental Strategy & Policy
- More sustainable offices (save electricity, etc.)
- Training members and participants
- Advocacy Wak
- Go through a green certification process for organisations

What?

**Policy for the office**

- Purchase policy
- Gadgets / Marketing
- Building (Heating, water, ...)
- Cleaning Material
- Digital Waste
- Recommendations to the team

**BENEFITS OF SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT**

- Cost Savings: Reduce or Avoidment
- Legal, Economic Growth
- Energy Efficiency & Environmental Benefits
- Social Items Reduction
- High Road Worker Benefits
- Innovative Solutions & Strategic Partnerships
- Positive Public Relations

www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org  
STADT. CITY. VILLE. BONN.  
Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend  
Co-funded by the European Union

What?

**Policy for Meetings & Travels**

- Travel policy
- > indirect flights
- > train whenever possible
- > pay more if sustainable?
- > also respect work-life balance

Least sustainable: Airplane, Car, Bus, Bicycle, Walking  
More sustainable: Walking, Bicycle, Bus, Car, Airplane

www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org  
STADT. CITY. VILLE. BONN.  
Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend  
Co-funded by the European Union

What?

**Policy for Meetings & Travels**

- Accommodation and meals
- > hotels with ecolabels
- > tips for individual actions
- > reachability with public transport
- > vegetarian catering?
- > local / regional food?

**EU Ecolabel**  
www.ecolabel.eu

www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org  
STADT. CITY. VILLE. BONN.  
Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend  
Co-funded by the European Union

What?

**Policy for Events**

- Events we organise ourselves alone
- > actions
- Events of the European Choral Association
- > paragraph in contract / agreement
- Events under the label of the European Choral Association
- > recommendations

**GREEN EVENTS**

www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org  
STADT. CITY. VILLE. BONN.  
Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend  
Co-funded by the European Union