



# SUSTAINABILITY PLAN



# Foreword

With 'Travel to Tomorrow', VISITFLANDERS has an ambitious vision of the future, with the aim of strengthening the positive power of tourism. This way Flanders can flourish as an innovative, inspiring and qualitative destination for the benefit of the place, its inhabitants, entrepreneurs and visitors.

Sustainability in all its dimensions is an integral part of this vision, but within tourism it is a complex issue. VISITFLANDERS has therefore drawn up a sustainability plan that takes into account the impact of tourism on every aspect of our destination. This plan will serve as a basis for further structural development around sustainability, both for Flanders as a **destination** and for our **internal organisation**. We don't just want to support our industry and destination to meet future challenges. We are convinced that we can also make an important contribution to reducing the impact on the environment of our own internal operations.

Insights into carrying capacity and sustainability are developing rapidly. Our sustainability plan is therefore primarily the starting point of a dynamic trajectory that will continue to evolve. We turn words into deeds by formulating concrete objectives and immediately linking the right actions to them. In doing so, we are not only building on existing processes, but also taking numerous new steps.

During the course of one year, VISITFLANDERS went through an intensive process to come to this plan. A lot of pieces of the puzzle were put together to reach the right ambitions, objectives and actions. What exactly does sustainability mean for tourism in Flanders? And what about our own organisation?

Continue reading and discover how our plan took shape. If you have any questions or suggestions, please let us know. I wish you pleasant reading.

Peter De Wilde  
CEO ad interim VISITFLANDERS



VISITFLANDERS

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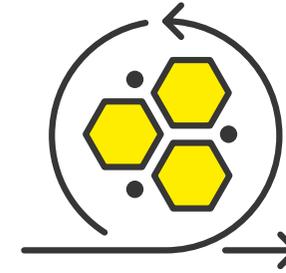
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# The Process

In June 2021, we started developing this plan with the entire organisation and in cooperation with the consultancy firm Sustenuto. The sustainability plan was created in several phases.

The first phase of the project consisted of identifying and mapping out the sustainability aspects. In concrete terms, these are the factors on which VISITFLANDERS has an impact, both externally and internally.

Based on the input of the working group and management, the strategy and vision of VISITFLANDERS, the destination barometer, the Global Destination Sustainability Index and the inspiring plans of partners and comparable destinations, a list of 20 sustainability aspects was drawn up.

Regarding the destination, Tourism Flanders chooses to work on the following aspects in 2022:

- Inclusiveness and accessibility
- Transport
- Communication and access to information
- Ecological sustainability of our tourism offer, conferences and events
- Liveability
- Greenhouse gas emissions

In 2024 the action plan will be expanded to include the other aspects:

- Economy and employment
- Health and well-being
- Quality of the natural environment
- Overtourism
- Use of raw materials
- Tourism amenities
- Waste management
- Range of accommodation, attractions and touristic sights
- Personal safety

The aspects selected for the internal operations of VISITFLANDERS are fully included in the action plan:

- Waste management and use of raw materials
- Water management
- Energy consumption
- Green products and services
- Ecologically sustainable personnel policy

In a final phase, all available information was converted into SMART goals (goals that are specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound) and completed with main actions. The targets have 2030 as their horizon and include intermediate targets whenever possible.

In May 2022, the board of directors and the Minister of Tourism Zuhair Demir approved the action plan.

## ..... JUNE - JULY 2021

- Composition of the Sustainability team
- Analysis of possible sustainability aspects

## ..... AUG. - SEPT. 2021

- Polling of management's ambition
- Choice of VISITFLANDERS' sustainability aspects

## ..... OCT. - DEC. 2021

- Determination sustainability internal operations

## ..... JAN. - MARS 2022

- Determination of ambitions and indicators

## ..... APRIL - MAY 2022

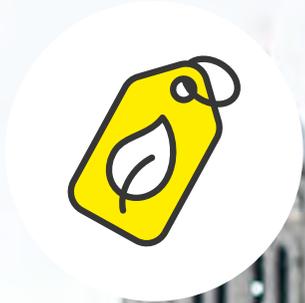
- Format objectives and actions
- Determination implementation
- Approval



# Sustainability aspects for our destination



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## Inclusiveness — and accessibility

### AMBITION

Visitors feel like welcome guests, are warmly received and have meaningful encounters with residents and other visitors, regardless of their age, gender, religion, orientation, origin, etc.

Visitors and residents experience Flanders' entire tourism options in an affordable and accessible manner, with a focus on young people, families, people with disabilities, minorities, people facing (multiple) barriers and non-native speakers.

### OBJECTIVES

- The share of approved accommodation with an A or A+ label increases by 25% by 2030 and by 5% by 2024 compared to 2021.
- All dedicated conference locations <sup>(1)</sup> within the conference cities and all conference locations financed by VISITFLANDERS have the M label by 2030.
- All conference locations that are part of the Flanders Heritage Venues and Special Meeting venues will complete an accessibility track by 2030 with a view to maximising accessibility.
- The satisfaction score of international residential tourists with regard to the hospitality of the local population in the art cities, regions and the coast amounts to at least 200, compared to 170 according to the current Travelsat statistics.

### ACTIONS

1. **Accessibility** is always included as a **basic condition** <sup>(2)</sup> in all grant applications, projects, quality trajectories and concession agreements.
2. We supplement our **plan** for **hospitality** and **local ambassadorship**.
3. Through the **accommodation grants** we continue to stimulate **investment** in **accessibility** in tourism accommodation. We are also examining whether VISITFLANDERS can once again support accessible investments in youth accommodation.
4. We are considering how we can introduce certain **target groups** to Flanders' **tourism offer** more effectively and how we can optimally communicate **information about accessibility**.
5. The support programme related to the accessibility of conference locations will be continued and expanded.
6. We are developing a method to determine **satisfaction with the hospitality of the local population** in the regions and at the coast.
7. We will organise 5 **meetings** a year within the network 'Everyone Deserves a Holiday' on the theme of accessibility.

(1) BMCC Brugge, Corda Campus, FMCCA, Gent ICC, Kursaal Oostende, Thor Central  
 (2) At the end of a project benefiting from a grant, one must comply with the agreements made: for accommodation, this means that one must obtain a label; in other cases, for example, where no label is available, one must comply with the agreements made on the basis of a recommendation.



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## — Transport

### AMBITION

Visitors reach and visit Flanders and all tourist locations quickly, safely, comfortably and efficiently using sustainable transport, without causing nuisance in the surrounding area.

A wide range of energy-friendly modes of transport that connect seamlessly, spread over space and time, is available to visitors, taking into account the needs and barriers facing those who use them.

### OBJECTIVES

- The satisfaction score of international residential tourists related to public transport in the art cities, regions and at the coast is at least 200, compared to 164 according to current Travelsat statistics.
- The share of residential tourists in art cities that travel by car (currently 46%) and train (regular train + HST, currently 41%) is reversed by 2030.
- At least 15% of residential tourists in the Flemish regions staying in a hotel or B&B travel by public transport and/or bicycle by 2030. Currently, this is 8% for hotels and 6% for B&Bs.
- At least 25% of residential tourists at the coast staying in commercial accommodation travel by train in 2030. Currently, this number is 14%.
- At least 80% of our own and subsidised

projects achieve the 'Better' performance level for accessibility by bicycle, on foot and public transport in the GRO's mobility test. <sup>(3)</sup>

### ACTIONS

1. We include the **mobility test** (GRO) in grant files and also calculate it for our own assets in order to arrive at actions for improvement.
2. In our own **communication**, we invariably focus on the efficient use of public transport and cycling to **VISITFLANDERS**.
3. We encourage tourism operators to enter into partnerships and also promote the use of **public transport and cycling**.
4. We develop a method to establish **satisfaction with public transport** of residential tourists in the regions and at the coast.

(3) The GRO sustainability meter is applied to infrastructure and aims to achieve ambitions in the field of sustainability and circular construction. GRO can be used for all functions: office buildings, tourist infrastructure, residential buildings, mixed functions, ... regardless of the size of a building project.



## Communication and — access to information



### AMBITION

Via various communication channels, information is provided that allows visitors to plan and execute their trip and holiday experience independently and sustainably. The tourism sector is, partly through the communication channels of VISITFLANDERS, well informed about the latest trends in sustainability and the opportunities in sustainable investments.

### OBJECTIVE

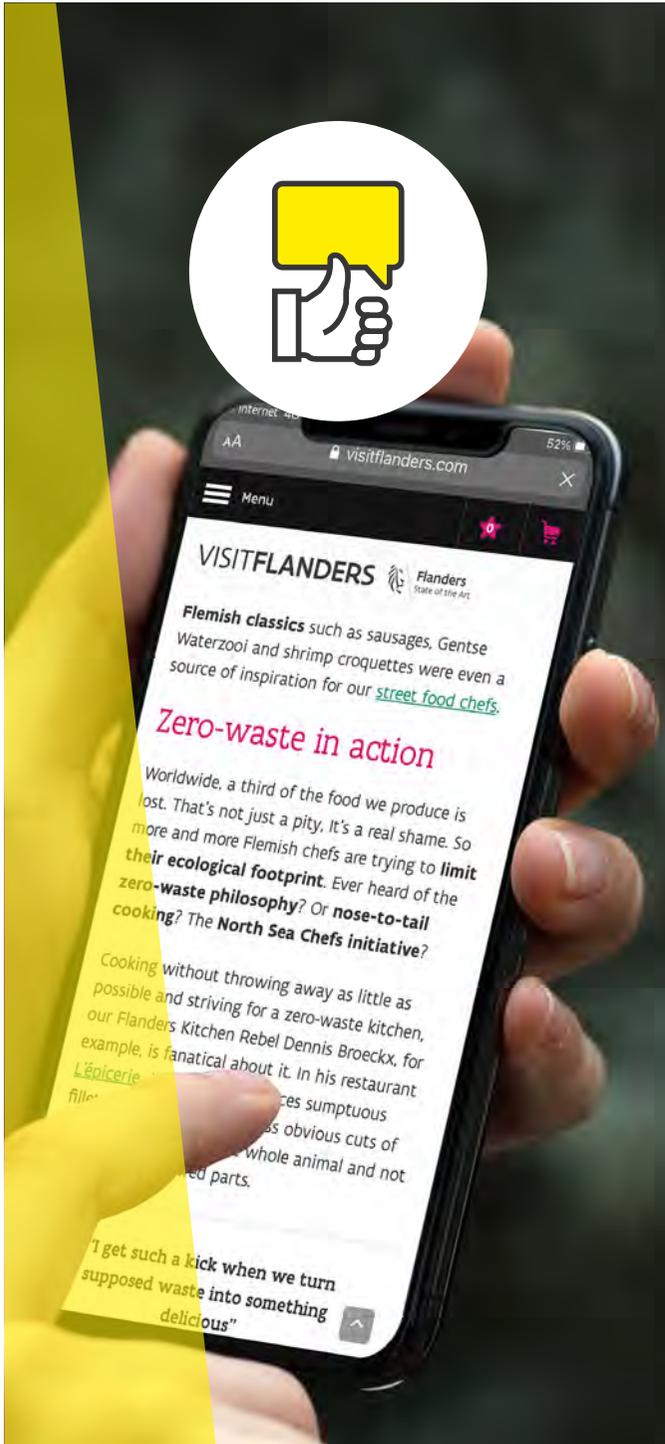
- At least 70% of the foreign travellers familiar with Flanders considers Flanders to be a sustainable destination.
- The sector's satisfaction with regard to the information provided by VISITFLANDERS on sustainability reaches at least 8 out of 10.
- Entrepreneurs, visitors and residents have access to transparent and unambiguous information about the sustainability efforts of VISITFLANDERS, which it reports on every year.

### ACTIONS

1. We interweave **all aspects of sustainability into communication** on the themes and range of options VISITFLANDERS has to offer, for visitors, residents and the sector.
2. We ensure that the elements relating to accessibility, family-friendliness, planning a visit,

public transport, trips with a lower ecological impact, etc. are prominent and available in various languages on all our relevant **communication channels**.

3. We develop a method to ascertain the **perception of sustainability** with regard to Flanders as a destination.
4. We actively promote trends in sustainability, opportunities in sustainable entrepreneurship, etc. in our **network**.
5. We make complex information about sustainability **clear and accessible to operators and providers**, for example, by means of unambiguous instructions to reduce environmental impact.
6. **Sustainability performance** is monitored and communicated either annually or, where possible, on a permanent basis, to the sector, residents and our visitors.





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## Ecological sustainability of tourist facilities — and events

### AMBITION

The tourism offer and events in Flanders are credibly sustainable. Visitors experience how sustainability is applied in operations and are well informed about it.

Tourism entrepreneurs primarily opt to work with green products and services, without creating additional barriers to a holiday, such as financial ones. Operators are aware of the opportunities they have to make their business more environmentally and socially sustainable.

### OBJECTIVES

- The **material footprint** of tourism businesses decreases by 30% by 2030.
- Tourism businesses in Flanders reduce their consumption of single-use plastics.
- The total number of businesses with a **Green Key label** increases by 44% by 2030 and 8% by 2024, compared to 2022.
- The number of locations with a **Blue Flag label** increases by 18% by 2030 and 3% by 2024, compared to 2022.
- Every concession and project financed by VISITFLANDERS complies with the sustainability conditions specified in the agreement.

- Of the dedicated conference locations <sup>(4)</sup> in the conference cities and the conference locations financed by VISITFLANDERS, 25% have a third-party sustainability certificate in 2024 and 100% in 2030.
- All conference locations that are part of the Flanders Heritage Venues and Special Meeting venues follow a sustainability training course in the context of the support programme.
- As of 2023, every conference and event VISITFLANDERS supports will operate based on a sustainability framework, in order to optimally reduce our ecological footprint.

### ACTIONS

1. Together with a strong partner such as 'Circular Flanders', we develop **projects and programmes** to make tourism businesses in Flanders more circular in the future.
2. We examine other **certification** options that apply to our sector.
3. We **set up programmes for the tourism sector** involving local production and consumption, single-use plastics, food waste and reusable materials.
4. We evaluate the current accommodation grants and examine the possibility of supporting tourism operators through grants for achieving the **sustainability label** or installing **energy-saving measures**.

[read more next page >](#)

(4) BMCC Brugge, Corda Campus, FMCCA, Gent ICC, Kursaal Oostende, Thor Central



5. We include conditions for reducing emissions, energy, water, waste, the circular use of materials and cooperation with partners with a sustainability certificate in all our subsidy cases within our themes, and consider the extent to which **certification** should be included **as a condition**.
6. We develop operations for **Green Key, Blue Flag** and any other eco-labels, with active **communication and awareness-raising** and the development of a learning network, together with Good Planet, umbrella organisations, cities and the provincial tourism organisations, both for accommodation and attractions.
7. We examine the possibilities of **sustainability certification** for conference and event locations and develop a certification process.
8. The 'quality in conference locations' **guideline** is expanded to include a section on sustainability.
9. The **support programme** for Flanders Heritage Venues and Special Meeting Venues is expanded to include a section on sustainability.
10. We develop **sustainability guidelines for events and conferences** that we support and build a network around making the event and conference sector more sustainable with maximum dissemination of our own best practices.
11. We use our **network** to spread best practices, tips and information about circularity.
12. We develop a **method** to estimate the **material footprint** and **waste production** of our tourism industry wherever possible. This allows us to develop SMART objectives for waste management.
13. We raise **awareness** among our visitors, together with partners inside and outside the tourism sector, about local production and consumption, single-use plastics, food waste and reusable materials.
14. We translate the strategic core principles "nature first" and sustainability into concrete guidelines for (potential) providers of nature and landscape experiences.



## — Liveability

### AMBITION

Residents have an important voice in tourism. In relation to the economical use of space, we make tourism infrastructure as multifunctional as possible so that it can be used by residents and visitors alike. Residents live in a safe environment without any nuisance from tourism where the DNA and the individuality of a place and social cohesion are guaranteed and where the balance is maintained between residents, visitors, entrepreneurs and the place itself.

We know when a capacity or liveability threshold is exceeded by tourism and how this can be prevented.

Entrepreneurs of tourism businesses adopt the principles of sustainable entrepreneurship in their daily operations and in their development.

### OBJECTIVES

- The share of residents indicating that an increasing number of tourists are reducing the liveability of art cities and regions remains below 25%.
- The share of the top three months in total overnight stays does not exceed 40%.
- At least 40% of residents of the art cities indicate that they have a say in ideas about tourism developments in the city.
- 90% of VISITFLANDERS' contacts in the tourism

sector are familiar with the Travel to Tomorrow Vision and 75% of this group agree with the vision.

### ACTIONS

1. In our product development and communication, we focus on **distributing visitors in time and space** via our themes.
2. We work with partners to **monitor** and safeguard an area's **liveability**.
3. We continue to work on **expanding support** for the Travel to Tomorrow vision and sustainable entrepreneurship in the tourism sector, including through the Travel to Tomorrow Academy.
4. We look at how we assess liveability within the context of tourism in the **ambassador study**.



## Emissions of — greenhouse gases

### AMBITION

Greenhouse gas emissions from tourism in and to Flanders are reduced in line with international guidelines such as the European Green Deal and the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism. We focus on sustainable, yet comfortable and affordable transport from our main European markets. The range of local transport options offers international tourists sufficient green mobility alternatives.

The tourism sector achieves climate-neutral infrastructure heating and sustainable resource production and processing for tourism consumption.

### OBJECTIVES

- Greenhouse gas emissions generated by the movements of foreign visitors decrease by 25% by 2030 compared to 2019. Emissions from their stay will be reduced by 50% by 2030.
- VISITFLANDERS includes the aspects of climate neutrality such as green energy as a condition in its next subsidy projects, taking into account the possible heritage value.

### ACTIONS

1. We develop a guideline on **partnerships** with sustainable transport operators to achieve greenhouse gas reductions.

2. We continue to monitor the **carbon footprint** of our visitors and organisation.
3. We measure the **emissions resulting from our events**, whether organised by us or co-organised within our 6 themes and develop **guidelines** to reduce this impact.
4. Within the culinary theme, we encourage the **shift from animal to vegetable protein** and the use of local products in the hospitality industry.
5. We sign the **Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism** and the **Net Zero Carbon Events Initiative** and use these networks to enhance our sustainability performance and share knowledge.





# Sustainability aspects for our internal operations



## Waste management and — use of raw materials



### AMBITION

Sustainable goods and services are used for both our substantive and logistical operations. Maximum reuse of the available raw materials is fully taken into account for the construction, renovation, development of promotional infrastructure and refurbishment of offices and own assets. For construction projects, an alternative is sought if the negative impact on raw materials, both when using new and existing materials, appears to be too significant.

Hardly any waste is generated at our office and assets and at our own events

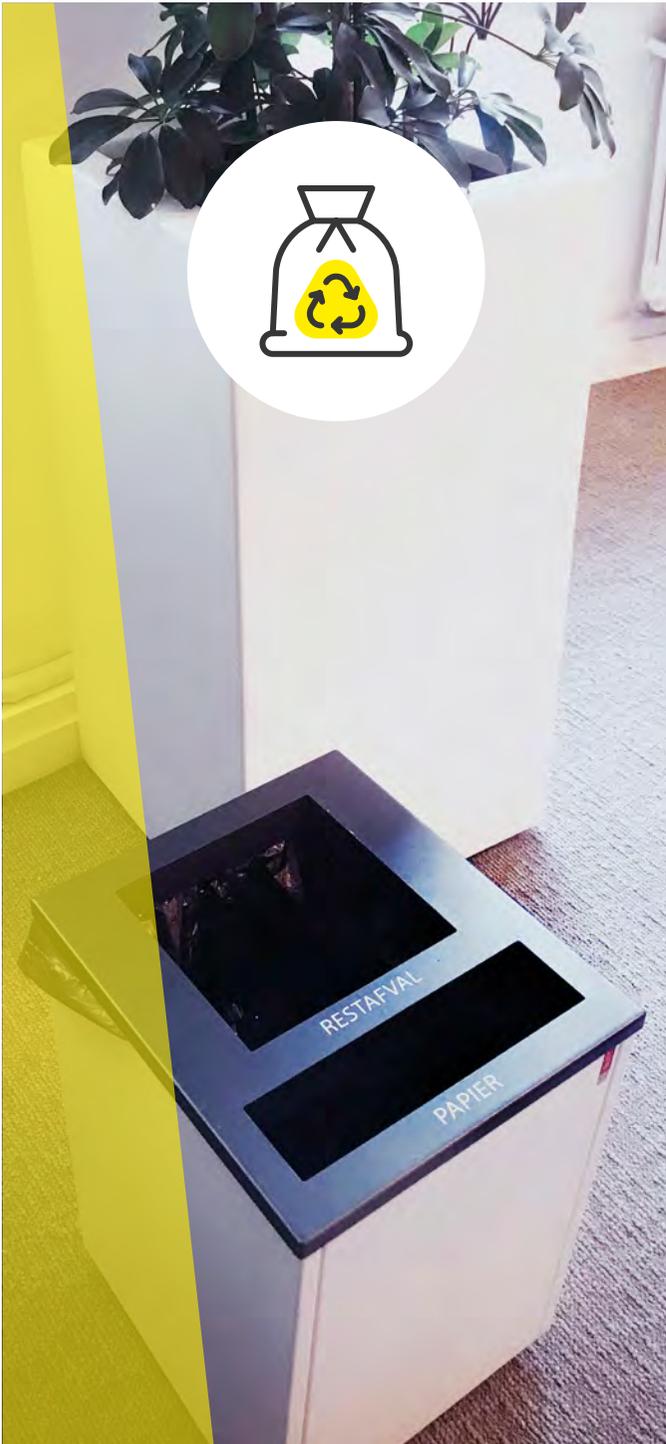
### OBJECTIVES

- Every purchase within VISITFLANDERS is based on a sustainable purchasing policy.
- The amount of domestic waste at the head office of VISITFLANDERS and assets decreases by 75% by 2030 and is collected after being fully sorted in the right way.
- VISITFLANDERS reduces the material footprint of the internal organisation by 30% by 2030.

### ACTIONS

1. We develop a **sustainable purchasing policy** for our substantive and logistical operations in cooperation with Het Facilitair Bedrijf.

2. We closely monitor the **amount of waste** generated at our head office and our sites under own management, in relation to their use. This as a basis to develop a plan to **reduce** the amount.
3. We set up actions to increase **purchasing awareness and waste management** among VISITFLANDERS' employees.
4. We monitor the **material footprint** of our assets and draw up a programme to reduce it in **association** with Circular Flanders.





## — Water

### AMBITION

Less drinking water is consumed and water is collected and reused as much as possible in our own assets. Rainwater has the chance to filter into the soil by avoiding hard surfaces at our sites. We also expect the same standard for projects that do not require a permit.

### OBJECTIVES

- The consumption of drinking water at our head office and assets is reduced by 40% by 2030 and 20% by 2024.
- Maximum de-sealing of hard surfaces and rainwater collection are implemented in both our new construction and renovation plans.
- All new-build projects related to our assets pass the Governmental Water Test Instrument and are not located in areas prone to flooding.

### ACTIONS

1. We implement the **water-saving measures** in the VISITFLANDERS real estate plan.
2. We monitor **water consumption** at our head office, if possible also at our foreign offices and our sites under own management, in relation to their use.
3. We inform our employees about how to **reduce water consumption** at the office.

## — Energy consumption

### AMBITION

Taking the heritage value into account, energy consumption at our head office and other assets is considerably lower. The electricity consumed comes from renewable energy sources.

### OBJECTIVES

- Primary energy consumption at our head office and, where possible, our assets decreases by 35% by 2030, compared to the reference year 2015.
- We purchase 100% green electricity for our assets under own management.
- In our assets, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions resulting from gas and fuel oil consumption decrease by 55% by 2030, compared to the reference year 2015.

### ACTIONS

1. The VISITFLANDERS **real estate plan** will be further developed and delivered in 2023.
2. We monitor the **energy consumption and emissions** of our head office, if possible our foreign offices, and all our sites under own management, in relation to their use.
3. We inform our employees about how to **reduce energy consumption in the office**.



## Green products — and services

### AMBITION

VISITFLANDERS primarily opts to work with green products and services. We always set a good example and choose the most sustainable materials and service providers.

### OBJECTIVES

- By 2024, 50% of our suppliers have a sustainability label or strategy.
- 100% of the materials used for stand construction, badges, give-aways, etc. are of a sustainable origin, reusable and close the material loop.

### ACTIONS

1. We develop **guidelines for reusable materials** for all resources used at our own events, trade fairs, conferences, etc. (decoration, goodies, communication, catering, etc.)
2. We always actively enquire whether a supplier has a **sustainability certificate, strategy or what sustainability efforts** he or she makes.
3. We measure the **impact of our own events** and always examine how these can be organised in a more sustainable manner, both at an organisational and substantive level.
4. We examine the possibility of obtaining a sustainability certificate for our **own sites**.

5. We opt for **plant-based and seasonal** meals at our own events as much as possible and devote attention to participants with intolerances and allergies.



## Environmentally sustainable personnel — policy

### AMBITION

Environmental sustainability is an integral part of VISITFLANDERS' personnel policy, in addition to the existing human-related dimension, through which employees actively collaborate on making our organisation and destination more sustainable. It devotes extra attention to work-related travel and the impact of our purchasing policy, water and energy consumption in the office and reducing waste.

### OBJECTIVES

- Emissions from all work-related travel by all VISITFLANDERS employees decrease by 25% by 2030, compared to 2019.
- All VISITFLANDERS employees are familiar with the sustainability policy within the organisation and integrate its principles in their daily activities.

### ACTIONS

1. We develop a **mobility policy** for our organisation to reduce emissions from travel within our organisation as part of a business trip or commuting.
2. We **compensate 100% of all air travel** by members of our organisation through a CO<sub>2</sub> compensation system

3. We continue to monitor our organisation's **carbon footprint**.
4. We organise **communication campaigns** to inform our employees about our **sustainability objectives** and our impact (energy, water, waste, emissions, etc.).
5. We organise **training courses** to offer all employees greater **insight** into sustainable purchasing, water and energy consumption, and waste reduction, etc.
6. We **report** our performance to employees on an annual basis, based in part on mandatory reporting that our organisation already carries out.

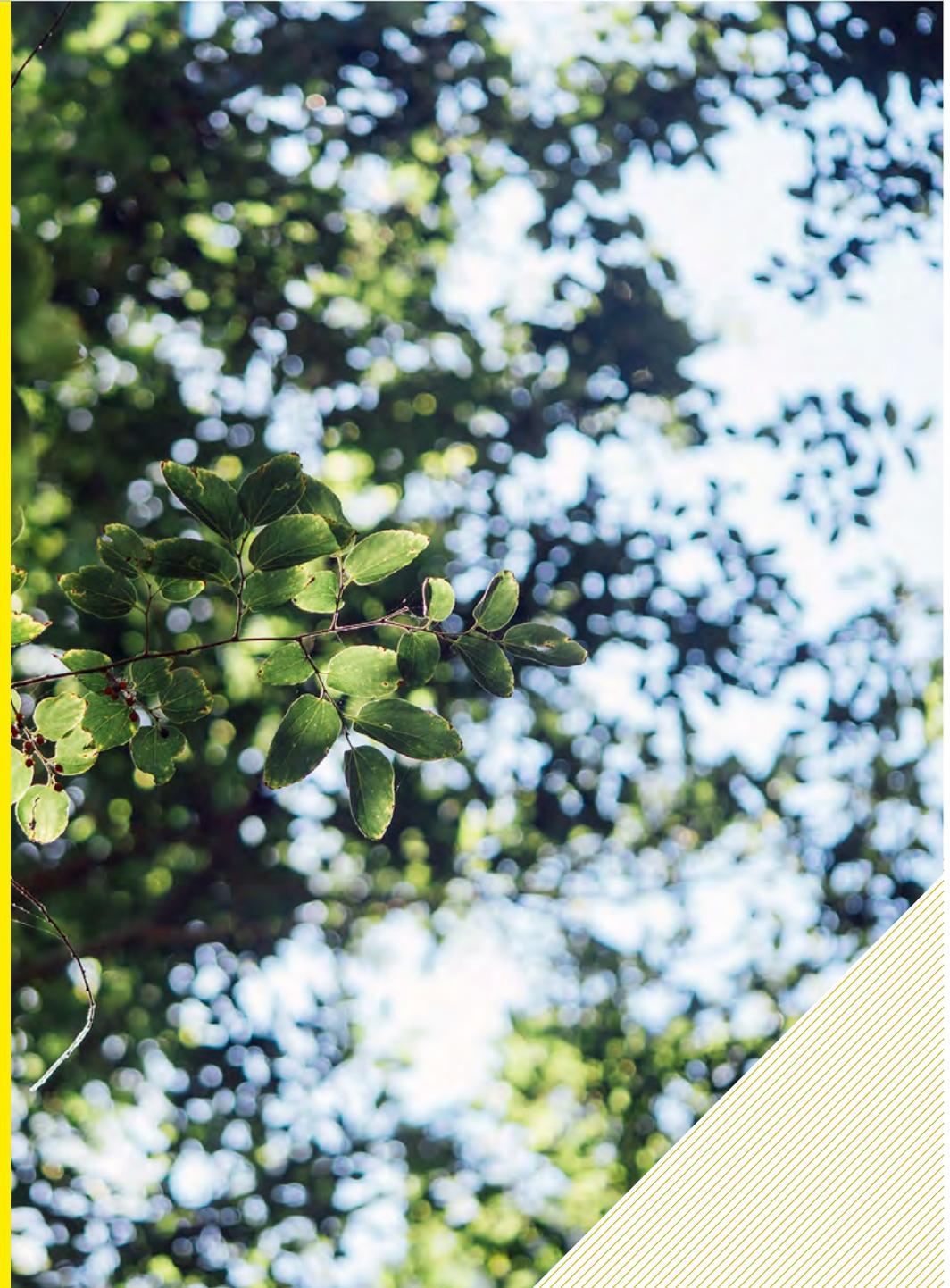


# Implementation

The success of this sustainability plan depends on the practical implementation of the goals and actions. **VISITFLANDERS** can only realise its sustainability ambitions if the plan is supported by the entire organisation. Sustainability will become a story of each hub and each theme.

A sustainability coordinator and a team of internal ambassadors will keep the overview. Not only do they ensure the integration of sustainability in the regular operations of **VISITFLANDERS**. They also provide the necessary inspiration so that every employee can set to work with the objectives.

Together, we will turn words into actions. Because only then will **VISITFLANDERS** become a sustainable organisation ready for the challenges of today and tomorrow.





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**QUESTIONS?**

Contact us via  
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