



© Government of Canada

## SUSTAINABILITY IN SPORTS

Sports clubs are places where many people come together and exchange ideas. Sports clubs and different kinds of sporting events have the potential to spread positive and powerful messages to a broad audience, and thus contribute to greater sustainability as defined by the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sport is particularly suitable in this respect because it appeals to diverse interest groups and has the capacity to address several of the goals simultaneously.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – also known as **Agenda 2030** – was adopted at a high-level UN summit in 2015. All 193 member states of the United Nations – including Austria – pledged to work towards implementing the 2030 Agenda with its **17 sustainable development goals** at a national, regional and international level by 2030.

Sports clubs and sporting events have a major responsibility and can set a positive example for sustainability challenges through proactive approaches to environmental and climate protection, as well as to social justice.

The unifying and positive qualities of sports already contribute in part to the SDGs. But sports clubs could do a lot more to increase the sustainability of their **everyday** activities and the **events** they organise by taking deliberate measures in areas from transport between training sessions and matches, to sustainable trophies, right through to accessibility. **But how exactly can sports operate in a more effective and sustainable way?**

This factsheet provides practical tips for everyday club life and small to medium-sized events, which is where the greatest potential lies.



© iStock

## What is sustainability?

In Austria, we are living far beyond our means. From a global perspective, we need more sustainable development. Sustainability means using our resources efficiently. People today should not be living at the expense of people in other regions of the world and of future generations. Sustainability affects all areas of our lives and economies and is thus a task for the whole of society. It requires societal development that is ecologically viable, socially fair and economically efficient. Sustainability must have a “lasting” value and contribute positively to the 17 goals listed above.

## In which areas can we increase our sustainability?

Sports clubs have many options for adapting their activities to make them more sustainable. To communicate these options as clearly as possible they have been divided into categories of **everyday club activities** and **sporting events** (with some overlaps, naturally). Following each measure is an indication of which of the 17 SDGs is being addressed.

## EVERYDAY CLUB LIFE

The daily activities of every sports club include a wide range of activities and products that can be tailored to support the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. Below are some suggestions for sustainability in the areas of **(office) management, transport, club headquarters, communication** and **social sustainability**.

### (Office) management

- ▶ Sustainable office equipment (printers, computers, scanners, etc.) and materials (ISO Type I), incl. (toilet) paper (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Reduce or eliminate paper usage (e.g., digital invoices) (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Ethical sportswear and equipment: uniforms and sports-related clothing that is ethically produced and/or made of recycled materials (SDGs 8, 10, 12, 13)
- ▶ Clubs organise swap events, support local traders and encourage using second-hand clothing and sports equipment (SDGs 8, 12)
- ▶ Sports equipment that is no longer needed is recycled or donated (SDG 12, 13)
- ▶ Find options for borrowing or leasing rather than purchasing new items (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Use bicycle courier services for orders and deliveries (SDGs 12, 13)

- ▶ Use environmentally friendly detergents and cleaning products (ISO Type I) (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Lighting, heating and air conditioning that operates with automatic control systems (motion-sensitive lighting) (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Use LED light bulbs (SDGs 12, 13)

## Transport

- ▶ Since athletes, coaches, administrators, etc. regularly need to travel to training or competition venues – sometimes several times a week – clubs should consider sustainable transport options such as carpooling (SDG 13)
- ▶ Sustainable transport includes adapting training times or timing of events to accommodate public transport (SDG 13)
- ▶ Organise side events so that they are within walking distance of the main event or easily accessible for all (!) by bicycle or public transport (SDG 13)
- ▶ Clubs support privately organised carpooling (SDG 13)
- ▶ Clubs incentivise, support or “reward” environmentally sustainable travel (carpooling, bicycles, etc) to/from events or training sessions, e.g., through discounted admission, free drinks, parking fees, etc. (SDG 13)
- ▶ Clubs partner with sustainable taxi companies (SDG 13)

## Club headquarters

- ▶ Ensure all bathrooms have appropriate waste containers (SDGs 6, 13)
- ▶ Water-efficient plumbing systems (SDGs 6, 13)
- ▶ Train and educate grounds maintenance staff (SDG 13)
- ▶ Adapt watering of grassed areas to demand and time of day/season (ideally at night) (SDG 13)
- ▶ Collect rainwater from stadium roof to use for watering (SDGs 6, 13)
- ▶ Ecologically restore grounds (taking accessibility concerns into consideration i.e., ensuring that grounds are accessible to all) (SDGs 3, 10)
- ▶ Ensure maintenance of green spaces and plant protection (eco-friendly plant protection products) (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Club grounds can also be used as bee pastures (SDG 15)
- ▶ Mow lawns on club grounds with a GPS-guided, solar-powered lawn mower (SDGs 7, 13)
- ▶ Install solar panels on the stadium roof (SDG 7)

## Communication

- ▶ Adopt the SDGs in all club communication and public relations (all SDGs, especially 17)
- ▶ Aim for a barrier-free website (i.e., all information is fully accessible to all) (SDGs 3, 10)
- ▶ Use gender-sensitive language for all club communication (i.e., language that includes every person and every gender identity) (SDG 5)

## Social sustainability

- ▶ Respectful conduct (in terms of equal treatment and equal opportunities) at clubs and beyond (SDG 5)
- ▶ Clubs support social projects (SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 16)
- ▶ Clubs facilitate courses on social issues (like mental health, environmental protection or diversity) and encourage club members to participate (SDG 4)
- ▶ Clubs offer additional courses for younger club members on topics such as bullying, anti-sexism or anti-racism (SDGs 4, 5, 10)
- ▶ A gender sensitive approach includes budget management i.e., levelling budgets for men’s and women’s sports, even in amateur sports (SDG 5)

## SPORTING EVENTS

While there tends to be more focus on major sporting events with regards to concerns about environmental impact or social injustice, small and medium-sized sporting events play at least as important a role, if not more so, since they are more frequent and have a broader impact.

Below are some considerations to improve sustainability in **event activities, catering, accommodation** and **social sustainability**.

### Event activities

- ▶ Provide prominent recycling options for visitors (SDGs 6, 13)
- ▶ Reuse and/or recycle goods and supplies used during the event; record and monitor overall volume and proportion of unsorted waste produced (SDGs 6, 12, 13)
- ▶ Adapt trophies, starter/finisher bags, competition numbers, barrier tape and similar items to sustainability criteria, i.e., self-produced or fair and/or ecologically produced items that have utility value (e.g., sustainable potted plants as gifts instead of flower bouquets) (SDG 12)



© iStock

- ▶ Giveaways are limited (and sustainable/ethical) or eliminated (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Promotional items and clothing are perennial (no annual numbers) (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Support local businesses and second-hand supplies, and hire, share or re-use as much as possible (SDGs 8, 12)
- ▶ Use flower petals or biodegradable paper confetti instead of plastic confetti (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Laser shows instead of fireworks (SDG 13)
- ▶ Bubble machines instead of balloons (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Water-based fog machines instead of conventional fog machines (SDGs 13, 15)
- ▶ Keep the event venue as tidy as possible to avoid the vicious circle of the untidier it gets, the more likely visitors will leave trash behind (SDGs 6, 13, 15)
- ▶ Use the opening ceremony for social messaging (SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 16)
- ▶ Keep event volume within official guidelines (excessive volume affects not only people but wildlife too) (SDG 15)
- ▶ Avoid plastic, disposable bottles and cans (use a deposit system) (SDGs 12, 13)
- ▶ Offer tap water to drink (SDGs 6, 13)
- ▶ Offer regional, seasonal, organic food and beverages with particular attention to ensure sustainably sourced meat and fish. Provide vegan and vegetarian options (SDGs 12, 13, 15)
- ▶ Self-produced catering (SDGs 3, 12)
- ▶ Calculate food needs carefully to reduce waste as well as costs. Donate leftover food or dispose of sustainably, avoid unnecessary food waste (by distribution of food or donating to a food bank) (SDG 12)
- ▶ Accommodate special dietary needs where possible (SDGs 3, 10)
- ▶ Avoid single-serve packaging (e.g., ketchup) (SDGs 12, 13)

### Catering

- ▶ Ensure that there is a waste management concept for sorting and recycling waste (SDGs 6, 13)
- ▶ Serve all food in reusable or compostable dishes, avoid plastic or disposable items (SDGs 12, 13)

### Accommodation

- ▶ Choose accommodation options that have been certified as eco-friendly. Clubs could start partnerships with eco-friendly accommodation providers for e.g., by offering special discounts to event participants and visitors (SDG 13)
- ▶ Choose accommodation easily accessible by foot, bicycle or public transport (SDG 13)
- ▶ Choose and recommend accessible accommodation (SDGs 3, 10)

## Social sustainability

- ▶ Plan and implement events that are accessible and barrier-free (make website and online booking barrier-free) (SDGs 3, 5, 10)
- ▶ Allow for the space requirements of wheelchairs, walkers or prams for seating and table arrangements (SDGs 3, 10)
- ▶ Publicise accessibility options for participants and visitors with mobility, hearing or visual impairments. Ensure that scores etc. are visually and acoustically displayed (SDGs 3, 10)
- ▶ Ensure that emergency exits and alarm systems function for people with special needs (SDGs 3, 10)
- ▶ Ensure that the environment, products and event activities are intelligible and functional for all (!) and that conditions are safe. This requires a holistic overview of basic needs (vision, mobility, hearing, allergies, psychological, etc.) (SDGs 3, 10)
- ▶ Carefully address barriers or obstacles that may hinder underrepresented groups from participating (SDG 10)
- ▶ Fair play and socially oriented pedagogical responsibility, i.e., responsibility for a successful game and for the teammates and opponents (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13)
- ▶ Appoint specially trained security staff (e.g., sensitive to LGBTQI+ issues, anti-racism training, etc.) (SDGs 5, 10)
- ▶ Offer special deals, e.g., for seniors, students, families (SDGs 3, 10)
- ▶ Ensure decent and fair employment and safety conditions for all participants, including subcontractors, volunteers and competitors
- ▶ Offer trial sessions for the public to try out the respective sport for themselves (SDGs 3, 5, 10)
- ▶ Aim for diversity and a balanced gender ratio of competitors, spectators, team members, volunteers, referees, awards presenters, artists, etc. (SDGs 5, 10)
- ▶ Take into consideration the local residents whose surroundings are likely to be affected by the event: initiate dialogue to determine, for e.g., the optimum timing for the event to avoid negative impacts on the local community (SDGs 11, 15, 17)

## Sources

*Eugene Cascades & Coast Sports; Council for Responsible Sport.* (n.d.). Responsible Sports Events 1-2-3. Simple steps to producing a more environmentally friendly and socially conscious sports event.

*Forest Green Rovers Football Club.* (n.d.). Another Way. *Green Events Austria Netzwerk.* (2020). Nachhaltig zum Green Event.

Hugaerts, I.; Scheerder, J.; Helsen, K.; Corthouts, J.; Thibaut, E.; Könecke, T. (2021). Sustainability in Participatory Sports Events: The Development of a Research Instrument and Empirical Insights. *Sustainability*, **13**, 2-16.

*LandesSportBund Niedersachsen e.V.* (2020). Maßnahmen für mehr Nachhaltigkeit in Sportvereinen.

*Nachhaltiger-Sport.at.* (n.d.). Sport und die UN-Nachhaltigkeitsziele (SDG).

*Österreichisches Umweltzeichen.* (2020). Ecolabel Guideline Uz 62. Green Meetings and Green Events.

*Österreichisches Umweltzeichen.* (n.d.). Nachhaltiger Sport.

*Swedish Sports Confederation.* (2020). Aspects of Sustainability - that Inspire.

## Additional information

### Self-tests for clubs to assess current sustainability as well as success stories:

<https://www.nachhaltiger-sport.at/en/>

### Poster ideas to download:

<https://vereinshelden.org/engagieren/sdgs-im-sport/>

### Success stories, options for courses of action:

<https://www.green-champions.de/index.php?id=26&L=1>



# GLOBAL FAIRPLAY

## Contact

Dr. Hanna Stepanik  
fairplay Initiative

Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC)

+43 1 713 35 94-66

stepanik@vidc.org

**fairplay.or.at | vidc.org**

**Publisher and media owner:** Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC),  
Möllwaldplatz 5/9, 1040 Vienna | Tel +43 1 7133594-0, office@vidc.org | Editors: Hanna Stepanik, Martin Kainz |  
Photos: Austrian Federal Chancellery, iStock | Graphic design: typothese | Vienna, 2022