

# Environmental – Sustainability Strategy & Resources

## Initiatives for service providers and EPR Activities and Operations

2024



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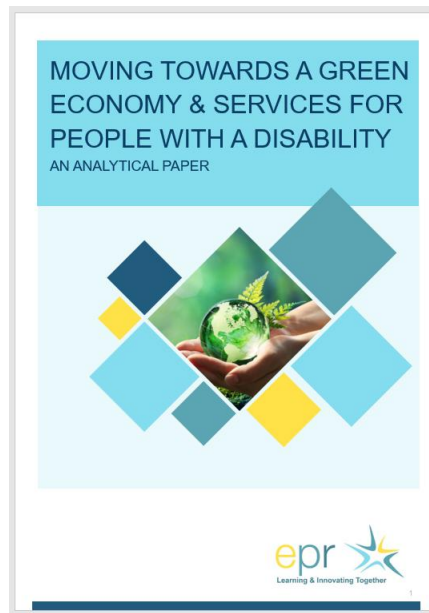
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## Introduction

Before the energy and cost of living crises, EPR decided to make sustainability a focus topic as it became a high priority of service providers. EPR aims to support members in working towards more sustainable organisations as well as improve the sustainability of the network and the secretariat's activities and operations.

In 2021 EPR published a paper entitled *Moving Towards a green economy and services for people with a disability* (download it [here](#)). It investigated the topics of the green transition and the green economy. The focus was on the impact that moving to a green economy will have on the provision of social services to people with disabilities and on identifying the main opportunities and challenges for the sector in terms of employment, social inclusion, skills needs and education. The aim was to help service providers across Europe in the green transition and to identify EU policy support needed for the sustainability of services and the development of an inclusive green economy. It included initiatives from members in the field of employment and skills of people with a disability, as well as some examples of initiatives to improve organisational sustainability and awareness-raising.



This document builds on this analytical paper, and gathers more information, resources and examples of actions service providers can take towards more sustainable organisations, gathering and promoting good practices from within and outside of the network. It also outlines actions that EPR will take to support members as well as to improve the sustainability of EPR member activities and the secretariat's operations.

EPR will continue to encourage and facilitate the sharing of experiences, environmental and sustainability strategies and actions among members. In 2023 the topic of EPR's Annual Conference was sustainability, with a strong focus on a socially inclusive green transition. In 2024, the topic of the Annual Conference was AI and New technologies for inclusion. We held the Conference at a venue, ILUNION hotels, renowned for their sustainability commitment. The ILUNION hotel has high targets for environmental sustainability: contemporary eco-efficient building, its location means that guests can walk and forego using transport, all electricity is from renewable energy sources, the company plans to roll out solar energy for self-consumption (most outstanding project is the ILUNION Laundry Services Green Roofs initiative).

This document will be implemented, monitored and reviewed at the end of 2043 for possible adaptation, including the addition of other initiatives.

## Initiatives for service providers

### Energy efficiency & production

The quality of the building and its features affect the energy demand, depending on the quality of insulation of walls and windows, the use of passive cooling and shading options, and its location and exposure to climate and weather.

Heating, ventilation and air conditioning ductwork pipes should also be regularly assessed to ensure they are in good condition and supported adequately by the facility building structure. Older air conditioners, refrigerators and other appliances and medical equipment should be replaced with energy efficient models in order to reduce energy costs (e.g. A+++ washing machines).

Organisations could ask for an assessment of their buildings to identify points of greatest heat loss in buildings (such as roofs, especially flat ones) or energy poor areas to determine how and where energy use can be reduced or increased, or which alternative sources of renewable energy could be used.

Sometimes there are no clear recommendations from government, but there might be government incentives available for specific kinds of renovation works aimed to increase thermal insulation and sustainability e.g. changing windows, insulating the building, installing solar panels etc. These incentives differ across countries and often change every year according to the state budget, however they can support renovation works by covering a part of the expenses.

Some examples of energy efficiency:

Installing solar panels is a common solution. In some cases, it is also worth considering where geothermal energy could be used in new buildings (URI Soča, Slovenia).

A vertical garden at a residential home for older people helps purify the air and reduce the temperature of the building during hot days, thus limiting the use of air conditioning and increasing energy efficiency (FRRA, Spain<sup>1</sup>).



**The European Commission has put together a list of the national contacts providing advice and information about current rules and support measures for building renovation; click [here](#) for more information**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reyardid.org/servicios-mayores/residencias/zaragoza/residencia-rey-ardid-rosales/>

## EPR Actions

- From 2022, in collaboration with Social Services Europe (SSE) partners, EPR will advocate for increased funding for service providers to be able to become more energy efficient, and for support for increased energy costs.
- In 2023, with SSE EPR will gather further information on EU funding for energy efficiency and similar initiatives to share with members and promote its take-up

## Data storage

Data storage, both on computers and in the cloud can harm the environment since storage hardware can use a large amount of energy and electricity, to keep the ambient temperature safe for equipment, power to run servers, lighting and physical security systems etc. cloud storage consumes a lot of energy, but corporate data centres often transmit data locally, to a storage device in the same building.

Organisations can develop a data storage strategy. They can check environmental studies on the providers, what they are doing to reduce their environmental impact, whether they use renewable energy etc. Deleting data not needed should be a regular exercise. There are also data storage methods and hardware that are more energy efficient.

For more information and ideas, see [here](#).

## Re-use, recycling and waste disposal

Organisations should make sure that all their facilities are equipped with sorting bins for recycling, making sure to respect the rules of the municipality or region for disposing of certain materials. Pharmaceuticals are produced in facilities that use a great deal of energy and emit significant pollutants. Disposing of pharmaceuticals in the right way is essential in order to limit environmental damage.

Other actions can include:



Eliminating single use items, using jugs of water, (smaller jugs to prevent water waste). Offering personalised mugs to replace single use and offering the possibility to visitors and clients to buy a reusable cup. (CRM, France)

Waste sorting including biowaste, reduction of food waste e.g. putting bread at the end of the canteen so people can choose it depending on the menu instead of taking it at the entrance by default.

Flea market of downgraded equipment, used vehicles offered to employees at a reduced price (CRM, France).

## Transport & travel

Organisations can purchase electric vehicles for work travel trips and community based services, install electric charging stations on site. They can offer bikes or facilitate cycling.

Transport allowance for employees using bikes, loaning bicycles and cycling equipment to staff and installing bicycle storage facilities to support their use. (CRM, France)

They can monitor their climate footprint and consider offsetting initiatives.

## Behavioural change

In parallel to the abovementioned measures, organisations can promote a change in attitude and behaviour of workers and clients.

Organisations could establish education and awareness campaigns to reduce energy use with the participation of all staff or develop a system of good practices of energy use conservation with incentives. One example is the Energy Battle (<https://www.energybattle.nu>), a competition where participants try to save as much energy as possible in a certain period. With the combination of an advanced energy monitoring system (consumption insight), knowledge exchange (saving tips and meetings), competition elements and targeted communication, the Energy Battle inspires participants and motivates them to save energy through behavioural change and targeted saving measures.

Other examples include:

Vegetable gardens for employees on site (local sourcing, reducing transport emissions and food waste), delivery of local food produce boxes to the centre. (CRM, France).

Workshops for homemade cleaning products and cosmetics/DIY. (CRM, France)

Lessons on environmental training and recycling programmes tailored to the specific needs of people with intellectual disabilities, such as using imitation, task analysis, repetition, visual display, etc. (Panagia Eleousa, Greece)

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## EPR internal activities and initiatives

### Meetings with members and travel

Meetings among members are the main method for collaboration within the network. Travelling for meetings and activities adds value to the exchange, but also has an impact on the environment, as well, of course, of incurring related costs. For this reason EPR is reflecting on the most suitable and environmentally sustainable format for its meetings, and has developed some guiding principles to decide whether to organise them in in person, hybrid or online only.

#### In-person meetings

The most important and strategically relevant meetings will continue to be in-person in order to enable fruitful and productive discussion and promote networking among members.

Situations where an in-person meeting would be advisable:

- when a working group is new, or has many new members, in order to give them the opportunity to meet the other members face to face, facilitate collaboration through informal exchange, do networking and establish new contacts.
- When a detailed output is being developed and in-person discussions facilitate the gathering of information or discussion of good practices.
- When a study visit is valuable. EPR organises study visits once a year for some working groups. In-person study visits allow members to visit the facilities of a member and experience first-hand their services and activities, as well as facilitate engagement of other staff at that organisation that wouldn't usually join the meetings.



- ➔ EPR Annual Conference 2023 “Beyond Green: Innovation and Inclusion” highlighted the organization and its members’ commitment to topics such as sustainability, green economy and innovation. Sustainability was treated in service provisions, jobs and training for service users and within organizational strategies for employers.
- ➔ EPR Annual Conference 2024 took place at ILUNION hotel in Málaga. The ILUNION hotel has high targets for environmental sustainability: contemporary eco-efficient building, its location means that guests can walk and forego using transport, all electricity is from renewable energy sources, the company plans to roll out solar energy for self-consumption (most outstanding project is the ILUNION Laundry Services Green Roofs initiative). EPR offered an eco-gift made of recycling materials like cotton and bamboo and there was no single plastic use throughout the event.

### Online only meetings

Meetings among members should be held online when they are more about exchanging updates, information and good practices, and where a study visit isn’t relevant (e.g, the ICF working group). For this reason, some working groups only meet online, or meet in person every other year.

Other cases where online only meetings are suitable is when the meeting is not long enough to make it worth the travel of the speakers or participants.

### Hybrid meetings

The hybrid format can be considered for some in-person working group meetings to facilitate involvement, but in-person participation should be encouraged.

Some particularly relevant EPR meetings that are open to the public are organised in a hybrid format to increase the visibility of the organisation at international level, for example the Public Affairs event.

As well as regular hybrid meetings, having a set up where people can present or speak remotely facilitates the involvement of international speakers at in-person events; not streaming the event.

### Travel

When travelling for meetings, EPR staff and members should favour trains where practical, even if more expensive, and to make use of public transport. Taxis should be used only under specific circumstances.

- ➔ In 2023 EPR will develop an internal policy to evaluate and help promote the usage of trains over planes; taking into account distance, cost, time etc.

EPR or the host organisation where there is one, will provide detailed public transport guidance to reach the venue and accommodation.

- ➔ In 2023 EPR chose a method to calculate the carbon footprint of its activities and will use it for all in-person meetings, and will consider offsetting.
- ➔ For the 2023 conference (on the green transition) EPR offered a method for members to offset their carbon footprint for their travel.

### Venue and Accommodation

Accommodation should be accessible to the venue and airport by public transport in order to limit the use of taxis. The venue should be accessible by public transport from the airport or train station.

Sustainable options should be preferred when looking for conference or meeting venues, and green labels taken into account in decision making.

EPR staff and meeting participants could consider using Ecolabel tourist accommodations or select the filter of Travel Sustainable properties when using Booking.com when choosing their accommodation.

## Material

EPR always carefully checks the quantity of promotional and conference material that it brings to the venue and tries to limit the use of printed materials, for instance by using online evaluation forms rather than paper forms using QR codes that participants can scan with their phones, or by printing a limited number of publications. EPR does not print programmes for events, but makes them visible to participants at meeting venues instead.

- At the Annual Conference 2023, the EPR team aimed to limit non-reusable and plastic items.
- Also, the agenda of the event was not printed but sent to the participants digitally. The Evaluation Form was also available, through QR Code, online, instead of on printed paper.
- Ultimately, the number of gadgets to giveaway was highly reduced to one pencil, carrying EPR's logo, which once finished releases seeds that can be planted.
- For the 2024 EPR's Annual Conference venue was located at a close distance to a train station to ensure speakers and local participants reached the conference by train and public transportation. As a social activity, a tour around the city was offered, the Conference dinner was held at a local restaurant offering mainly local products. EPR offered an eco-gift and continued the strategy of limiting print outs of publications, evaluation forms, and using QR Code instead.

## Catering

If ordering in, EPR will aim to work with sustainable catering services with reusable or ecological packaging.

Within EPR's current office, the caterer sources locally and provides vegetarian and vegan options.

Single-use plastic cutlery, plates and cups etc will be avoided, and glass jugs with filtered water used instead of bottled water.

EPR will continue to check participants' preferences for food and drinks in order to reduce food waste, and considers going full vegetarian when ordering catering.

To make sure or request bins for separate collection of waste and recycling, including organic waste.

When eating out, considering restaurants that source locally.

- At the Annual Conference 2023, the EPR team strongly limited meat-based products/dishes, offering a great deal of vegetarian and vegan options.
- At the Annual Conference 2024, EPR catering were based on local products.



## EPR operations

### Office building

EPR aims to rent offices located in buildings with proactive sustainability and efficiency policies.

### Mundo Madou's initiatives

The EPR Secretariat has its office at Mundo Madou, an eco-designed and eco-managed office and meeting center dedicated to associations, NGOs and social enterprises.

Mundo Madou is applying a wide range of measures and providing recommendations to contain energy costs and to be more sustainable and environmentally friendly. The team discusses the energy and waste reduction policies of Mundo Madou, and possible additional actions.

The measures that are required or suggested are listed below, along with additional initiatives that EPR is taking or will take.



#### Heating

- Using the ventilation system instead of heater as long as the average outside temperature is above 10°
- Using thermostats in offices to reduce heating when it is not occupied
- Setting automatic start/end of heating to reduce operating hours (from 8:30AM to 17:00 and 19:00, no weekends)
- Setting a default temperature of 20 degrees, no more than 21 degrees
- Using only one of the two radiators

#### Electricity

- Using solar panels on the building's roof
- Using LED lightbulbs
- Turning off computers at the end of the day, not leaving them in standby mode
- Turning off lights when not needed (both in offices and in communal areas)
- Using natural light during the day
- Using smart locks of coffee machines to so they turn off at a certain point
- Turning off electrical appliances and power strips/chargers when leaving office or not using them, including PCs, coffee machines
- Considering launching an awareness raising campaign on rising energy costs



## Reduce, re-use, recycle, waste

- Sorting bins for recycling including organic waste
- Providing special bins at the reception for the recycling of batteries, light bulbs, Brita cartridges, print cartridges, plastic caps, corks and small electrical appliances
- Advertising second-hand office furniture suppliers, equipment rentals or donations from other companies, local and sustainable manufacturers on the Mundo Madou website
- Reinforcing messaging about water use through signs and notices to promote saving

- EPR will develop a data storage strategy in 2024 to reduce the energy consumption of online file storage.
- The team carefully considers when printing is necessary; not for documents to be used once internally for example. Reading on large screens encouraged as an alternative to printing. Printing only on recycled paper, on both sides, in black and white, and two pages to a side if for internal necessary use.
- Ultimately, the coffee machine works with grounded coffee and not capsules.

## Other

- People working in the building can order organic bread, delivered to the reception, as well as occasional produce boxes
- EPR offers a monthly public transport allowance and does not offer a company car.
- EPR researches and considers organising teambuilding activities in or with organisations that promote sustainable initiatives or activities in this area.

- EPR will discuss each year as a team how to be sustainable outside the “office” context; reducing/zero waste initiatives.

EPR will only consider investments in sustainable financial products (e.g. via Triodos)



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*EPR is a network of service providers to people with disabilities committed to high quality service delivery. EPR's mission is to build the capacity of its members to provide sustainable, high quality services through mutual learning and training.*

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