

# Environmental Responsibility Strategy of Finland's National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes 2021–2027

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## Introduction

Environmental and climate actions are some of the key [priorities](#) of the European Union's strategy for 2019–2024. [European Green Deal](#) has set the goal of turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. These plans are based on the understanding of the fundamental threat that climate change and environmental degradation pose to Europe and the entire world. The Green Deal, on the other hand, is underpinned by two global agreements signed by the EU and Finland:

1) [the Paris Agreement](#) aimed at limiting the increase of global mean temperature to 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels; and

2) [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(Agenda 2030\)](#), the 17 goals of which aim for ecologically, economically and socially sustainable development, with emphasis on interlinkages between the goals: when promoting one goal, any impacts on others should also be addressed

All European Union actions should together support the EU in a successful and just transition towards a sustainable future. The purpose of Erasmus + 2021–2027 is to contribute to mainstreaming climate action and to support the achievement of the EU's target of 30% of Union budget expenditure

supporting climate objectives ([Regulation \(EU\) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council](#)).

Erasmus+ is regarded as a key tool for building up and supporting knowledge, skills and attitudes related to climate change and sustainable development. Its actions concern millions of people directly, in addition to which wider communities can be reached through participating organisations' stakeholders.

## 1. Content

The purpose of this strategy is to guide the decision-making and work of Finland's National Agency

**All the European Union's actions must help the EU to make a successful and just transition towards a sustainable future.**

for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes with the aim of achieving environmental and climate objectives. The importance of this work is stressed by Prime Minister Marin's Government Programme (2019), which aims for carbon neutrality as early as in 2035.

The strategy points the direction for how we will

- promote environmental responsibility in our own work
- support project actors and those going on mobility periods to ensure that they have both an interest in and the necessary knowledge and skills for taking environmental responsibility into account

c) encourage actors to plan projects and cooperation networks that promote knowledge, skills and practices related to climate change mitigation and advancing sustainable development in practice.

Ideally, the activities will help stakeholders to understand how local actions and decisions are linked to broader, EU-wide, and global issues.

The target group of the strategy consists of participants in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes and parties potentially interested in them:

- 1) pupils, students and other learners and young people as well as teachers, instructors and other staff participating in project and mobility activities under these programmes
- 2) the current and potential beneficiary organisations of the programmes, including organisation management and international coordinators
- 3) National Agency personnel
- 4) those evaluating project applications and reports

When preparing the strategy, Finnish National Agency for education experts, National Agency personnel, and customer and development panels in certain sectors were consulted. The panels will have a stronger input in the drawing up of the Action Plan based on the strategy

## **2. Goals**

The goal is that, by the end of the programme period, we will have achieved the following objectives:

- 1.** We ensure environmental responsibility and aim for carbon neutrality in our own work – we live as we teach
- 2.** Organisations implementing projects act in an environmentally responsible manner and share their competence and experiences in different networks

- 3.** We receive innovative and high-quality project proposals on the theme of developing and disseminating sustainability competences.
- 4.** The funded projects take environmental responsibility principles into account in their different phases
- 5.** Persons going on mobility periods are aware of the impacts that their consumer choices (including travel, accommodation, meals) have on the climate and the carrying capacity of nature, and are motivated to make environmentally responsible choices. They also share their experiences of environmental responsibility with friends and family and in the social media
- 6.** We have agreed on and adopted common environmental responsibility indicators for our own activities as well as for projects and mobility periods.

Finland's National Agency for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes will promote the achievement of these goals by providing training and information as well as supporting networking and exchanges of experiences, both nationally and internationally. We will support cooperation between formal and non-formal education as well as informal learning. Collaboration or exchanges of experiences between such actors as educational institutions, NGOs, the youth sector and companies may result in new ways of thinking that promote environmental responsibility.

The idea of seeing environmental responsibility as one of the overarching key priorities is an essential principle. When making policies and decisions, we will also consider the other programme priorities (digitalisation, inclusion and diversity as well as participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement) and their interdependencies. For example, this means that offering possibilities for online participation also supports the goals of both digitalisation and environmental responsibility. Or, when we support the participation of disadvantaged people in mobility periods abroad, we should consider in addition to environmental perspectives also participants' possible

restrictions to participate in long-term mobility periods or to use environmentally friendly travelling modes.

### **3. Partners**

#### **Collaboration within the Finnish National Agency (EDUFI)**

We will highlight good practices that promote environmental responsibility developed in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects within the Finnish National Agency for Education, leveraging the lessons learned from them for the greater benefit of national development. Where possible, we will organise joint seminars, webinars, and information sessions on calls for proposals related to supporting sustainable development. We will consider any national Erasmus+ priorities together with the national units responsible for education development.

We will collaborate with EDUFI's working group on the Agenda 2030 and coordinate as well with other activities related to sustainable development, for example with the Development programme on Sustainable education (2021–2023) and Development programme on sustainable development and green transition in vocational education and training (2022–2023).

Examples of the collaboration include organising events on Sustainable Development, gathering information on sustainable development activities in different units, examining the possibility of obtaining an environmental certificate, such as the Green Office quality label, finding common indicators for sustainability reporting, and general coordination of activities.

The units providing internationalisation services will closely cooperate on environmental responsibility issues, in addition to which we will emphasise collaboration with the Support for Development Unit as well as with other units being part of the Department of Education, Training and Competence. The aims of internal cooperation include

promoting synergies between international programmes and state aid by highlighting the beneficiaries' possibilities of initiating work with the help of one grant and using some other funding instrument to expand and develop it. This will improve the long-term impacts and effectiveness of project work. The goal of internal cooperation is to enhance environmental responsibility in the work of the whole agency.

#### **National partners**

We will draw on customer and expert panels in different sectors for customer-centric development of our Action Plan. We will also work together with national sustainable development networks.

We will develop our activities by benchmarking and comparing them to other organisations' work and advice provision on green practices.

We will determine if we need partners to implement our strategy; if so, we will agree on the principles followed in partner selection.

We will also collect on our website a list of proven information sources on promoting sustainable development used by other organisations.

#### **Transnational partners**

Transnationally we will participate in the Green SALTO action as well as with the "Long-term activity on Sustainability and Greening in the new generation of the Erasmus+ programme" (LTA Sustainability) led by Germany. We will also explore the possibility of working together with the other Nordic countries and the Baltic countries.

In cooperation with the European Commission and some Erasmus+ National Agencies, we have published [a report](#) on the programme's carbon footprint in 2016–2018, its future scenarios, carbon offset markets and ways of reducing the carbon footprint.

## Indicators

**Indicator 1.** Good practices for environmentally responsible advisory work have been mapped

**Indicator 2.** Number of events on environmental responsibility organised with other organisations and other units of the Finnish National Agency for Education

## 4. Environmentally responsible action in the National Agency

As a National Agency, we will set an example for project participants through our own activities. We undertake to raise environmental awareness and promote sustainable choices in our office, remote work, business travel and event organisation alike. We will get together regularly in the Green Action Group to discuss issues related to environmental responsibility in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. Dedicated officers will be responsible for each sector. We will share experiences and practices with National Agencies and actors in other countries and develop proposals for greener internal and external action.

### Travel

We undertake to use more environmentally friendly modes of travel in our office.

In domestic travel, we will choose trains and buses and, as often as possible, participate virtually in events. We will avoid unnecessary travel. When travelling abroad, we will choose green modes of travel or, when flying, direct flights as far as possible. If we travel by air, we will offset the emissions caused by this, as we are already doing.

We will also encourage and guide our projects towards environmentally friendly travel, among other things by sharing information on support for green travel provided by Erasmus + and by collecting experiences. We will strive to influence the Commission's willingness to organise opportunities for remote participation in its meetings.

### Checklist for green travel:

- Calculate, reduce, offset (general principle)
- Choose green modes of travel: a train, ship, or bus
  - Avoid using air travel for journeys of less than 500 km if the flight can be replaced by rail, ship, or bus connections within a reasonable time, taking into account the total duration of the journey and the emission impacts (Strategy for Travel by State Employees recommendation)
    - Within Finland, travel by other means than by air, if the flight can be replaced by train or bus connections within a reasonable time.
- When flying, select itineraries without stopovers, or with as few stopovers as possible
- Find out about hotels' attitudes to responsibility and select the most ecological option
- Think about which materials, if any, you need to print
- Use carbon calculators to find out about the emissions generated by different modes of travel

### Event organisation

We undertake to introduce more environmentally friendly meeting practices in our office. An effort will be made to organise events virtually, and emissions generated because of physical events will be reduced, for example by paying attention to the venue, materials and catering.

The ideal solution will be determined by the nature and needs of each event. It makes sense to continue organising general information events remotely. When the goal is networking and brainstorming together, a physical event will produce better results. The duration of the event should also be taken into consideration. In case of an event that takes less than a day, the organisers should consider if loading the environment by travel is necessary. When it comes to shorter events, organising them remotely is more environmentally friendly and efficient.

When planning a physical event, the participants' different geographical locations and arranging travel from them to the venue using modes of travel that are as environmentally friendly as possible should be taken into consideration. If the venue cannot be reached by public transport, the possibility of organising shared transport for the participants should be considered. In physical events, we will offer an opportunity to follow part of the programme remotely if this is compatible with the nature of the event. If participation in a physical event requires overnight stays, accommodation close to the venue and operators who address environmental responsibility in their activities should be selected.

As far as possible, we will serve meat-free, climate-friendly, ethically produced food at our events, especially vegetarian, seasonal and local foods. We will avoid food waste by stressing the binding nature of registrations and by limiting the order of refreshments to what is strictly necessary.

We will avoid handing out printed materials at physical events and otherwise. We will not hand out gift items to participants at our events, such as pens, writing blocks, small plastic items and reflectors, and we will inform the participants of our reasons for not doing so. We will explore the possibility of showing hospitality by supporting such activities as tree planting or conservation of old-growth forests to offset for the emissions caused by events. If this can be managed, we will include a pedagogical session in the event where we discuss the emissions caused by the event and offsetting them.

To thank speakers and performers we may, at our discretion, also hand out sustainable tangible gifts. We will develop alternative ways of attracting people to our stand at fairs.

## **Environmental responsibility and procurement in office work**

In our offices, we will strive for resource-wise practices: we will avoid unnecessary energy use and paper consumption as well as printing and handing out materials. Our environmental

responsibility is supported by the Finnish National Agency for Education's policies on compact office spaces, an electronic archiving and signature system and enabling hybrid work. We will also encourage a resource-wise approach in remote work.

We will continue to use electronic archiving systems to share and store documents. We will encourage our staff to choose climate-friendly meal options and reduce waste. In business travel, we will encourage the use of low-emission modes of transport. We will reduce virtual emissions by deleting unwanted emails, avoiding the sending of unnecessary emails and, at participants' discretion, turning the webcam off at meetings (for example at larger events). We will encourage employees to clean up electronic folders and use direct web addresses to reduce emissions from unnecessary data. We will strive to influence the Finnish National Agency for Education, encouraging the Agency to offer more benefits that promote green choices, including bicycle benefits and commuting vouchers.

We will provide training and information related to green practices to our personnel. We will encourage the Finnish National Agency for Education to acquire an environmental certificate if this proves an effective tool for supporting our environmentally responsible activities, and communicate about this to our stakeholders. Especially in international cooperation and from the funding provider's perspective, such certificates often are of significant value in terms of communication and content.

In the future, we will organise an annual data clean-up day and develop a system that enables clear monitoring of the numbers of remote/physical events.

## **Indicators**

- **Indicator 3.** Greenhouse gas emissions from travel by Erasmus + and European Solidarity Corps staff and their annual trends

## **5. Support for beneficiaries**

By our example, we will encourage beneficiaries and project participants to choose more environmentally responsible practices. We will disseminate the National Agency's responsible operating culture to project organisations and encourage more environmentally responsible travel, event organisation and procurement following our principles. We will support project organisations in a transition to more responsible project activities through advice, communication and training.

### **Principles of an environmentally responsible operating culture**

We will showcase the National Agency's more environmentally responsible practices in all activities with applicants, beneficiaries and participants. We will bring up environmentally responsible practices transparently and use them as an example of good practices.

We will justify our choices by environmental responsibility in advice, training and communication activities, for example when organising events, recommending surface travel and serving responsibly produced foods.

We will collect feedback and development ideas from project and event participants.

### **Environmentally responsible project activities from planning to reporting**

We will stress the opportunities that Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps offer for more environmentally responsible project implementation and cooperation network building in all our advice, training and communication activities. We will include a section on environmental responsibility in all our programme presentation slides and provide information on environmentally responsible operating methods for projects on our website.

We will give concrete examples of what environmental responsibility means in practice in projects and how increased programme funding or longer

travel times can help carry out projects more responsibly. We will collect good practices from final reports and use them to create stories of experiences for our website.

We will provide links to materials that facilitate the planning of environmentally responsible projects on our website. We will collect examples and experiences of practices as well as links to various services (emission calculators, offset, choosing itineraries) that provide guidance for informed, low-emission choices on our website. We will create simple guidelines and checklists that beneficiaries can use to plan and carry out their projects.

We will help project actors think about environmental responsibility at all stages of the project. We will recommend online meetings instead of travel to short meetings and encourage the development of new digital practices that help make project activities environmentally responsible.

We will encourage project actors to discuss environmentally responsible choices with their participants and partners and to create shared practices.

We will encourage project actors to make greener choices both in the organisation's internal operations and in the procurement of outsourced services. We will encourage actors to choose vegetarian and local foods, use responsible event organisers and accommodation providers, and critically examine their organisations' practices and make them more environmentally responsible.

We will create discussion forums for project actors where participants can share their experiences or ask questions about anything that is unclear. We will organise seminars on environmental responsibility for project actors to promote awareness of environmentally responsible project activities, share good practices, examine inspiring examples and set a practical example of responsible action. We will organise an international TCA Sustainability seminar in 2023.

We will offer project organisations an opportunity to develop tailored, more environmentally responsible project practices with the help of an external expert organisation. We will begin by determining the best way of organising the activities. (TCA/NET)

### **Environmentally responsible mobility**

We will encourage project actors to choose more environmentally friendly travel methods during their project.

- Calculate, reduce, compensate
- Choose a train, bus or car-pooling whenever possible
- When flying, avoid stopovers

We will encourage project actors to spread the principles of greener mobility in their organisations among students, pupils and other participants and to help these groups make greener travel choices.

We will also encourage project organisations to communicate the principle of environmental responsibility to international partners, enabling students, pupils and other participants to choose low-emission modes of travel when arriving in Finland if they so wish.

We will encourage actors to choose online activities whenever travel is not essential.

We will chart good practices, put them together and present them clearly. The results will be presented either generally or field by field, depending on the applicability of the data to different situations.

### **Indicators**

**Indicator 4.** Information and advisory sessions on environmental and climate issues have been organised in all sectors

**Indicator 5.** Trend in the amount of green travel grants for KA1 mobility periods

**Indicator 6.** Number of blended mobility participants in KA1 mobility periods

## **6. Environmental sustainability as the content of funded projects**

Projects dealing with environmental responsibility can take many forms. For example, they can

- promote a transition to environmentally responsible consumer habits and lifestyles (incl. reducing waste and energy consumption, promoting low-emission travel and the circular economy)
- improve knowledge, skills and attitudes related to environmental and climate issues
- develop an environmentally responsible operating culture
- develop competence strategies and methods or practical applications for dealing with environmental themes
- support the preparation of sustainable development plans
- promote the use of art in support of environmental education
- develop study units and courses on environmental responsibility
- resolve challenges related to environmental sustainability through concrete actions
- build thematic networks or partnerships that focus on environmentally themed projects
- build strategic activities that promote environmental issues
- create opportunities for influencing decision-makers in environmental and climate issues
- build up knowledge and competence related to sustainable agriculture and management of natural resources

### **Promoting environmentally responsible content in different project types**

We will encourage all applicants and project actors to develop projects in which environmental responsibility is part of the content and which put environmental thinking into practice in their own and their partner organisations.

We will show how environmental and climate issues can be taken into account in content planning and provide advice on what practical forms this can take in different operating sectors. We will also highlight the possibility of using the European sustainability competence framework to support the planning.

We will urge project actors to discuss environmental issues with their target groups and map the needs of the target group, organisation or stakeholders when preparing projects related to the environment and climate.

We will introduce environmental responsibility as a permanent element of advisory services, both in general information provision and individual projects. In advisory services, we will bring up environmental responsibility in a positive light through project examples and stories of other actors' experiences.

We will find examples of good projects elsewhere in Europe and spread them in applicable sectors. We will create opportunities for organisations interested in environmental issues to meet, build partnerships and plan projects that focus on environmental responsibility.

We will continue to work together with long-term TCA projects in the education and youth sectors and send participants to events organised under their umbrella.

### **Training for evaluators of project applications**

We will train application evaluators to identify projects relevant to the environmental theme and to take into account high-quality environmental projects when scoring project proposals.

We will train the evaluators in each sector to understand what kind of content related to the environmental theme is essential in the sector being assessed. We will train the evaluators to select the correct theme entries (typology issues) for environmental projects.

We will produce shared infographics and PP presentations for training events.

### **Indicators**

**Indicator 7.** Share of projects that support the achievement of climate objectives in approved KA2 projects

## **7. Communication plan**

We will communicate about our environmental responsibility goals and actions and encourage participants to address environmental responsibility from the very start of the application and project planning phases. In particular, we will encourage and support projects that have been granted funding. We will offer projects and participants channels for sharing their experiences of and good practices for going green.

We will share information about green modes and choices of travel and justify our policies. We will highlight surface travel in stories of actors' experiences and other suitable contexts, and present more environmentally friendly modes of travel. Environmental friendliness is a complex theme that involves the risk of green-washing, which is why we will be consistent in our choices and communication and justify our choices.

We will also draw on information produced by others to communicate about environmental responsibility. In our communication, we will highlight the way in which Erasmus + mobility differs from other types of travel, especially tourism and other leisure travel, and why travel is justified in projects.

We will encourage participants to become green drivers of change and highlight the importance of even small changes in modes of travel and other project activities. In information provided on our calls for proposals and on our website, we will present projects whose themes have addressed environmental responsibility and showcased it successfully.

We will organise social media and other campaigns on the theme of environmental responsibility and offer tips for media stories related to the environmental responsibility of international mobility and projects, and to how projects can promote green and sustainable lifestyles.

Our communications will be encouraging and have a positive attitude; we will avoid attaching blame. We will remind actors of the fact that going green will also be important if we wish to ensure that the programmes and project activities remain attractive, especially for younger participants, and that the programme is an opportunity to spread good green practices internationally. We will also bring up examples related to our own activities.

We will offer participants checklists for ensuring that their activities are environmentally responsible. We will collect experiences and bring up going green at information sessions. We will produce communication materials, including infographics, to support the work carried out in projects and organisations. At kick-off information sessions of projects, we will tell the actors how projects can be carried out responsibly. We will produce a guide on environmentally responsible activities to support projects. We will encourage environmentally responsible projects to highlight this perspective in the social media and their other communications.

We will communicate about our actions and going green internally within the Finnish National Agency for Education and the entire administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture as well as to other National Agencies and the European Commission. If we obtain an environmental certificate, such as a Green Office quality label, we will communicate about it not only within the organisation but also externally on our website and in the social media.