

On 14 February 2023, the French National Assembly submitted a request (5338) to the ECPRD network regarding sustainable development in parliament. Specifically, they were interested in learning more about good practices in a number of areas, for example, the reduction of energy consumption, paper consumption or the evaluation of carbon footprints. For this purpose, they sent a questionnaire to 34 national and supranational chambers including the European Parliament. In the end, parliaments in 20 countries and the European Parliament answered this request by filling out the requested questionnaire. The Parliaments that are part of the analysis here are the European Parliament and those situated in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. A summary of their respective answers can be found below. Like the questionnaire, this summary is organised around six major topics that are then divided into further sub-topics.

Governance and management of ecological transition within the assembly

Organisation and responsibility within the assembly

Looking at the answers of the different chambers regarding the organisation of ecological transition and the distribution of the responsibilities, it can be said that most chambers, 16 out of 21, made ecological transition in their parliament a matter for decision at the top level. This is the case for the European Parliament, and Parliaments in Belgium (Senate), Canada (Senate), Denmark, Finland, France (National Assembly), Germany (Bundestag), Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland (Senate), Portugal, Spain (Congress of Deputies), Sweden and Switzerland (National Council). In these chambers, it is mostly the task of the Bureau, the Presidium, the Speaker, the Secretary-General and/or the Director to define and set the guidelines for ecological transition of their parliaments. In addition, four of these chambers have created a specific unit or a specific team to deal with questions regarding sustainability in parliament. These chambers are the European Parliament that set up, among other bodies, an EMAS & Sustainability Unit and an EMAS Steering Committee, the Canadian Senate that employs a consulting working group for environment and sustainable development, the Danish Folketing that works with a small sustainability team and the Swedish Riksdag that appointed its own environmental controller. Beyond that, in two of the chambers analysed here, the organisation of ecological transition is the responsibility of another part of parliament. More specifically, in Greece, it is done by the Directorate for Technical Services while it is the Clerk of the House's task to fulfil this role in the United Kingdom (House of Commons). Lastly, Estonia stated that they have not appointed any working group or made any specific amendments while Austria (National Council) and the Netherlands (House of Representatives) did not provide an answer to this question.

Establishment of a "carbon footprint" of the parliament's activities

In order to accurately assess the environmental impact of their activities, seven chambers answered that they have established a carbon footprint recording their parliaments' activities. These chambers are the European Parliament, the Austrian National Council, the Danish Folketing, the German Bundestag, the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, the Spanish Congress of Deputies, the Swiss National Council and the British House of Commons. While the European Parliament has calculated its carbon footprint since 2006 and includes all direct, semi-direct and indirect emissions, the Spanish chamber started in 2013, the Portuguese in 2019, the Danish in 2017 and the German as recently as in 2022. Additionally, the Norwegian Parliament registers some emissions partly, but aims to achieve full registration in 2023. The twelve other national chambers do not register a carbon footprint of their activities. However, some of them generally monitor their environmental impact like the Swedish Riksdag or plan to do so in the near future like the Canadian Parliament.

Energy sobriety and efficiency

Binding measures to reduce energy consumption of buildings

Analysing binding measures that the different chambers adopted in order to reduce the energy consumption of their buildings, it is possible to observe some similarities as well as differences between the different countries. At the same time, Canada did not provide an answer to this question while Greece answered that there are no binding measures in place.

Indoor temperature

Many chambers regulated the room temperature of their buildings, i.e., defined maximum temperatures for heating in winter and minimum temperatures for cooling in summer. More specifically, many parliaments defined 19°C or 20°C as the maximum heating temperature including the European Parliament, the Austrian National Council, the Danish Folketing, the Luxembourgish Chamber of Deputies, the Polish Senate and the Swiss National Council. Beyond that, the Hungarian Parliament lowered the indoor temperature to 18°C while the Parliaments of Belgium (Senate), Finland, France (National Assembly), Germany (Bundesrat), the Netherlands (House of Representatives), Norway and Portugal did not explicitly state their maximum indoor temperature, although they reported having one. Furthermore, the European Parliament and the Polish Senate set 25°C as the minimum cooling temperature in summer. Furthermore, many chambers including the European Parliament stated that they shut down the cooling, heating and air conditioning to a bare minimum after working hours, at weekends and during holidays.

Lighting

Second, many chambers stated that they have adjusted the indoor and outdoor lighting of their building. This is the case for chambers in all analysed countries as well as the European Parliament except for Canada, France, Greece and the Netherlands that did not explicitly state that they had changed their policies on lighting. Examples include the European Parliament, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and Luxembourg that limited the illumination of their buildings' facades. Furthermore, several chambers also reduced the level of their indoor lights (e.g., European Parliament, Germany, Spain etc.), used motion-controlled sensors to turn down the light in areas that are not used (e.g., Norway, Poland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom etc.), reduced the number of decorative lights (e.g., Luxembourg, Portugal) and/or shut down indoor lights entirely or almost entirely after working hours, at the weekend or during holidays (e.g. Sweden).

Energy-efficient equipment

A third area in which many chambers introduced binding measures was the use of energy-efficient equipment. Several chambers reported that they pay special attention to buying only energy-efficient equipment (e.g., Estonia, Spain) or plan to renew parts of their older IT equipment in the near future (e.g., Belgium).

Optimising the use of energy consuming equipment

Beyond that, measures have been introduced to optimise the use of energy consuming equipment. This includes collecting additional radiant heaters or entirely banning single heaters from offices (Austria, Poland). Furthermore, several chambers stated that they banned individual printers from their offices to use multi-user or floor-printers instead (e.g., European Parliament, Luxembourg) or they turn printers into standby mode after ten minutes of non-usage (Austria). Other chambers simply noted that they optimise the use of their energy consuming equipment (e.g., European Parliament, Denmark).

Other binding measures

In addition to the measures in the aforementioned four categories, there are some chambers that introduced other, very specific measures. For example, the Polish Senate installed sensors that automatically turn off the air conditioner once windows are opened. Furthermore, the same chamber uses an intelligent controlling system for their air conditioning and ventilation systems, while Switzerland (National Council) entirely relinquished air conditioning systems and uses air-renewal systems instead.

Information campaigns among Members to encourage eco-friendly behaviour

Regarding information campaigns, most parliaments answered that several information campaigns have been undertaken. This includes the European Parliament, the Austrian National Council, the Danish Folketing, the French National Assembly, the German Bundestag, the Hellenic Parliament, the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, the Spanish Congress of Deputies and the Swedish Riksdag. However, this last chamber admitted that these campaigns were not very effective. Beyond that, five chambers did not answer this question or stated that they are not aware of previous campaigns. Furthermore, Estonia, Luxembourg and Norway stated that they sent out an e-mail, while Belgium answered that there was an exchange of ideas with the consultant for sustainable development in every department. Additionally, the British House of Commons published information on its intranet and employed a special Environmental Sustainability Team that ran awareness-raising campaigns in Parliament. Lastly, some parliaments, such as the one in Portugal, said they have taken part in the annual Earth Hour for a number of years.

Renovation of buildings to reduce the “carbon footprint”

From all the answers received, five chambers said their parliamentary buildings have not undergone major renovations or reconstructions lately. However, in contrast, there are three parliaments that have built entirely new buildings or completely renovated their old buildings, namely the European Parliament, Austria, Finland and the Netherlands. More specifically, the European Parliament replaced all its buildings in Luxembourg with a very energy-performant building that is heated by cogeneration, geothermal and solar energy, while in the three other aforementioned Parliaments, buildings underwent major renovations. Additionally, many other chambers started to renovate their buildings in specific parts to reduce the carbon footprint.

LED lights

To start with, almost all chambers that started renovating their buildings, including those that stated to not have made large investments, replaced the old lightning by new and energy-efficient LED lights.

Windows and Insulations

Several parliaments tried to reduce the carbon footprint by replacing old windows with better insulated, modern windows (e.g., Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Portugal) or better insulating the walls and the facade (e.g., Austria, Canada, Finland). Concerning the same topic, the Polish Senate answered that it would be impossible for them to thermally insulate the parliamentary building as it is part of the Registry of Cultural Property. In addition, the Belgian and Canadian parliaments went as far as insulating their roofs for the same reason.

Eco-friendly energy production, heating and cooling

Some parliaments installed solar panels on the roofs of their buildings in order to produce their own eco-friendly energy. This includes the European Parliament, the Belgian Parliament, the Canadian Parliament, the Finnish Parliament, and the German Bundestag and there are plans to do the same in the near future in Portugal. Beyond that, some parliaments also invested in eco-friendly heating systems. For example, the European Parliament heats its newly-built buildings in Luxembourg with cogeneration, solar and geothermal energy. The Hungarian parliament uses geothermal and air sourced heat pumps, while the Swedish Riksdag makes use of the district heating and cooling system. Additionally, there are several other parliaments such as the French Senate or the Hungarian National Assembly that modernised their heating and cooling systems or made energy-saving modifications to them such as the Greek Parliament. Finally, there is also one parliament that can claim to use only green electricity, which is the Austrian National Council. The German Bundestag answered that all its buildings will be climate-neutral by 2045.

Other measures

Besides, there have also been other renovations to parliamentary buildings that were not mentioned under the previous headings. These include the installation of two rainwater tanks in the Belgian Senate to capture and use the rain and a green roof on one of the buildings of the Swedish Riksdag. Finally, many parliaments reported having installed an automation system that automatically controls the heating and cooling system among other things (e.g., Finland, Greece).

Waste reduction and recycling

Measures to limit waste production

Papers and printers

One area in which many parliaments try to reduce the waste produced is by limiting the use of papers and printers. More specifically, seven chambers answered that they banned individual printers from offices and installed multi-user or floor printers instead (European Parliament, France, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Sweden). Moreover, several parliaments try to limit the amount of paper used with the help of digitalisation. Some try to provide documents mainly in electronic form (European Parliament, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Sweden), while others only send out invitations in a digital format (Belgium). Furthermore, the Austrian National Council uses screens in the plenary hall instead of papers. In addition, there are other measures used to reduce the amount of paper waste. This includes reusing single-page printed papers and printing on both sides (e.g., Belgium), using only 100% recycled paper (e.g., Spain), generally limiting the amount of paper delivered (e.g., Portugal) and reducing the storage limit for warehouse purchases (e.g., Hungary).

IT equipment and furniture

Another area in which many parliaments try to avoid and limit waste is linked to IT equipment and furniture. Several chambers said they donate IT equipment or furniture they no longer use to charity (European Parliament, Estonia, Greece) while others reported that they resell it (Denmark). Furthermore, some parliaments try to extend the life of older IT equipment by repairing and reusing it (Denmark, Sweden), others generally use procured laptops (Estonia), while others commit themselves to adequately recycle equipment that is no longer in use (Norway).

Food and water packages

Finally, several parliaments introduced measures to limit waste originating from food and water packages. The European Parliament and the Danish Folketing no longer provide bottled mineral water as they installed water fountains in their buildings. Similarly, the parliaments of Canada, Denmark, Latvia and Spain banned single-use plastic cups from their premises and provide reusable to go, paper or compostable cups at their water fountains. Furthermore, the Hungarian National Assembly banned all plastic bottles and only sells glass bottles. Regarding food packages, the Austrian Parliament and the German Bundestag stated they provide reusable tableware for take-away meals, while the Parliaments of Canada, Estonia, Latvia and the British House of Commons only use environmentally-friendly disposable tableware, if they have not entirely banned them, or increasingly switch to new compostable alternatives.

Sorting of waste and recycling

Regarding this topic, almost all chambers stated that they are sorting their waste and recycling it. For example, the European Parliament uses five-waste-compartment bins for plastic, glass, paper, metal and other waste and could provide a recycling rate of 73.7% in 2021. The Austrian National Council receives certificates from the respective recycling company on correct disposals. Beyond that, it is worth stating that the Finnish Parliament achieved a recovery rate of waste of 99.8% in 2022. However, Latvia and the Netherlands did not provide an answer to this question and the Luxembourgish Parliament stated that they are not sorting their waste.

Measures to limit waste in restaurants and catering facilities

Regarding waste from restaurants and catering facilities, many parliaments adopted similar guidelines. First, five chambers answered that they reduced the portion sizes in order to reduce waste (European Parliament, Belgium, Greece, Norway, Sweden). Beyond that, some chambers try to estimate in advance the number of meals that will be served during the day and only prepare a limited amount of meals that could be increased if needed (Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, United Kingdom). If there should still be leftovers, five parliaments said they reuse leftover dishes on another day, for example, by using vegetables for different meals or serving smoothies (Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom). Similarly, many chambers adopted a “too good to go” concept and decided to donate or sell leftovers at the end of the day (European Parliament, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Norway, United Kingdom) or make use of bio tanks to turn food waste into bio gas that can be used elsewhere (European Parliament, Denmark). Other measures that were only mentioned by a single chamber

include removing self-service buffets at fixed prices (European Parliament), eliminating daily show plates outside of the cafeteria (Portugal) and using the first-in/first-out principle when stocking (United Kingdom).

Healthy and sustainable food

Advantage for seasonal products or products from local farms

Analysing the answers regarding the use of seasonal products or products from local farming, it can be said that 15 out of 21 chambers answered to give an advantage to those kind of products. More specifically, seven chambers even fixed this requirement in the contract with their supplier (European Parliament, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden), while eight other chambers did not require it in their contract or at least did not explicitly state that in their answer (Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Norway, United Kingdom). While the Luxembourgish Chamber of Deputies does not have its own restaurant, the Estonian Parliament and the Polish Senate answered that they do not give specific advantages for seasonal or local products.

Promotion of healthy and sustainable food

To start with, most chambers that provided an answer to this question answered that they would sell one vegetarian dish a day. However, for some of them this seems to be the only contribution to promoting healthy and sustainable food (Canada, Estonia, France). Beyond that, the European Parliament specified that they also have a “Green corner”, while the German Bundestag and the Austrian National Council answered that they provide daily vegan meals as well. Furthermore, the Austrian National Council provides a salad with every meal. Other chambers use some kind of indicators or more specific descriptions to promote healthy and sustainable food, for example, by labelling menus with colour codes (Hungary), indicating the climate footprint of menus (Sweden), providing a calorie count (United Kingdom) or using other indicators (Denmark). Beyond that, the Spanish Parliament requires 40% of the food to be healthy and it must be labelled as such. Moreover, they ask their supplier to use low-fat cooking methods, virgin olive oil and fewer preservatives. The Parliament of Greece answered that they mostly serve a Mediterranean diet that they say could generally be considered as healthy.

Reducing the “carbon footprint” of travels

Members travelling between the parliament and their constituency

Concerning official travel for Members of Parliament, most chambers answered that they are fully reimbursed if the trip is linked to their mandate, e.g., when travelling from the parliament to their constituency. Most of the time, this reimbursement does not depend on the mode of transportation; hence, there is no bonus for eco-friendliness and no incentive to use public transport. This is the case for the European Parliament, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. However, seven of these parliaments, including the European Parliament, plus Switzerland provide a railway pass allowing Members free use of public transport system in the country during the entire year. One of these countries is Poland which, at the same time, also explicitly specified that members are reimbursed for all domestic flights linked to their mandate. Furthermore, there are other more specific rules in other parliament, such as the reimbursement for Members of the Belgian Senate which is valid for an unlimited number of trips, however, the amount depends on the means of transport. Beyond that, in Canada, they use a point system that requests Members to choose the most direct route and the cheapest means of transport; however, there is no general incentive or advice to use public transport. Furthermore, Greece provides a fixed monthly travel allowance for its members regardless of the means of transport, while Luxembourg reimburses one trip per half a day. France reimburses members for all travels by train, but not for all journeys by aeroplane and Finland only reimburses trips by car if it is not reasonably feasible to travel by public transport. By contrast, Hungary has an entirely different approach. They provide Members with a fuel card that they can use or, if they do not use it, they are reimbursed for travel up to the limit of the fuel card. Lastly, the exception is Switzerland that only reported providing Members with a first-class train pass for the entire country without mentioning any other form of reimbursement.

Staff members travelling between the parliament and their home

As well as considering the situation for Members of Parliament, questions were also asked about provisions for members of staff. Generally, it can be said that none of the chambers, except the Belgian Senate, fully reimburses staff members for their way to or from work. However, many chambers provide subsidies or discounts on monthly travel passes for modes of public transport. This is the case for eight of the chambers asked. While the European Parliament, the Hellenic Parliament and the Swiss National Council do not specify the percentage of their subsidy, Austria provides a subsidy equivalent to the annual ticket for the Viennese public transport system. France and Germany provide their staff members with 40€ monthly for the travel pass and Finland subsidises their staff members with 150€ annually. Furthermore, Hungary reimburses 86% of the ticket price or the travel pass. Beyond that, France finances bicycles and carpooling. Finally, there are ten further national chambers that reported having no reimbursement or subsidy for staff members in place, while Latvia and the Netherlands did not provide an answer to this question.

Adaption to climate change

Anticipated consequences for working conditions and functioning

Regarding this question, 15 chambers did not provide an answer or answered that they have not anticipated any consequences for working conditions or the functioning of the parliament yet. Beyond that, the European Parliament and the Luxembourgish Chamber of Deputies said that the effects of climate change are already being felt and that they expect them to worsen in the future. The Danish Folketing already drew up with a plan that includes the prevention and management of high temperatures, flooding, heavy rain and rising levels of groundwater. Lastly, the Hellenic Parliament and the Spanish Congress of Deputies referred to their sustainability plan or scheme.

Measures as a response to these consequences

In the end, eight of the chambers that sent in answers to the questionnaire by the French National Assembly also answered this last question. The European Parliament and the Austrian National Council designed their buildings and their cooling installations in a way that can protect against overheating in the summer and can provide comfort even during heatwaves. The Belgian Senate, for the same purpose, created a room for up to 15 people with a cooling system and installed one in the plenary hall as well. The French National Assembly reported that it does no longer expects MPs to wear ties, while the Danish Folketing installed water fire extinguishers at the basement level. The Polish Senate referred to a strategic document for the entire city of Warsaw, while the Luxembourgish Chamber of Deputies considers it has a special responsibility that requires the adoption of an exemplary and proactive behaviour with regard to climate change.

The above is a summary of the replies, if you need further elaboration on the specific replies by national Parliaments to this request, please feel free to contact Christine Detourbet: christine.detourbet@europarl.europa.eu.

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