

Environmental policy of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP)

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The 2019 UN Environment's sixth *Global Environment Outlook*¹ provides clear evidence of the continuing degradation of planetary ecosystems essential to human and other life, and calls for urgent action to decrease the human footprint on the environment.

In view of this situation, when designing, organizing and implementing IUSSP activities, care should be taken to limit their potential adverse effects on the environment to the extent possible, and in ways that do not significantly compromise the quality of these events.

Actions could include:

Limiting greenhouse gas emissions associated with air travel

"The IUSSP's mission is to promote the scientific study of population, encourage exchange between researchers around the globe, and stimulate interest in population issues." (<https://iussp.org/en/about/mission>) To do this, core IUSSP activities include the organisation of international seminars and workshops to further scientific knowledge, training activities to improve the research capacity, and the International Population Conference (IPC) that bring together world specialists in the field.² While we do not propose eliminating IUSSP physical conferences, seminars and workshops that provide for enormously enriching exchanges between population specialists from across the world, there are a number of actions the IUSSP can take to reduce substantially the carbon footprint of these activities. Specifically:

Conference, seminar and workshop organization

- When selecting among good proposals for hosting the IPC, one important criterion among others (e.g., ensuring regional diversity) should be the conference site location in terms of ease of access, so as to limit air travel. Similarly, IUSSP scientific panels should be encouraged to choose seminar locations that are relatively central to limit air travel.
- The IUSSP should entertain proposals to hold the IPC in conjunction with other major events like regional population conferences, conditional on addressing satisfactorily the difficult complications regarding financing and organizing joint conferences.
- When possible, IUSSP seminars and workshops should be organized to occur at the same time as other meetings (the IPC, regional conferences, etc.). In that manner, one trip rather than two will be required of participants wanting to attend both events.
- Along the same lines, the IUSSP should more actively promote and facilitate the organization of side meetings at the IPC, again leading to fewer trips for those wishing to attend both events.

¹ See: <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6>; https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27652/GEO6SPM_EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

² Note that, as the IUSSP IPC occurs just once every four years in contrast to many other professional associations that organize annual or bi-annual conferences, the IUSSP environmental footprint is already relatively low.

- The IUSSP should rapidly move towards live streaming of presentations (especially at the IPC, but also at seminars). Registered participants could opt to remotely follow presentations and discussions in direct, and exceptionally speakers could make their presentations remotely via the web. This will also allow for handling visa and other unanticipated problems (health...) that impede some presenters from attending the conference. In the longer term, fully interactive conferences may become feasible, where online participants can ask questions or make comments over the web. (Note that the June 2019 *PopPov* conference provided live streaming of plenary sessions, and plans are for the 2021 IPC to have sessions streamed over the web.)
- The IUSSP should continue experimenting with cyber and hybrid (cyber and onsite) seminars and workshops, and to develop more systematically online training resources that allow people to access and learn the material without physically being present.
- For meeting participants covered by the IUSSP – travel awardees to conferences or seminars, council members –, pay for carbon offsets when they are not already included in the ticket price. When possible, seek additional funds from donors to support this extra – fairly minor – cost.

Motivating meeting participants to reduce their carbon footprints. This might include:

- When carbon offsets are not fully included in the ticket price,³ facilitate the ability of meeting participants to compute and purchase carbon offsets for travel.
- Encourage the use of other methods of travel when possible (e.g., trains or buses for domestic participants).
- Promote people’s awareness that direct flights and economy class tickets are much less polluting on a per capita basis and should be privileged.

Other actions

- When possible, priority should be given to conference centers that are comparatively “green”: energy efficient, providing recycling bins and drinking/purified water for refilling reusable water bottles, catering (prioritising locally sourced foods, providing a range of good vegetarian meal options, use of reusable or fully recyclable plates and ware, etc.). Ensure that at least several conference hotels are certified green, making serious efforts to limit energy consumption, conserve water, recycle, etc. Panels should similarly be encouraged to hold seminars at or in association with green-certified hotels and venues.
- Cease systematically producing paper books with detailed programs descriptions and abstracts of presentations. To the extent possible, also limit other non-essential printing and distribution of other paper documents. (For the 2021 IPC, the decision was made that participants could order and pay ± \$20 for a paper book when registering.)
- When possible, modulate temperatures in meeting venues to further reduce energy use; e.g., when the conference is held in a hot climate, limit air conditioning to around 25-26 °C (77 °F) or, in a cold climate, limit heating to about 20-21 °C (68-70 °F).

³ By 2021, airlines will be required to cover the cost of carbon offsets from the ticket price for most international flights; see: <https://www.wired.com/story/airline-emissions-carbon-offsets-travel/>.