

Ecological Sustainability: our action plan for the 2026 edition

The Migros Culture Percentage Dance Festival Steps has been organising Switzerland's largest dance festival every two years since 1988. Across the country, Steps brings contemporary dance closer to its audiences. In 2026, 12 national and international dance companies will be on tour for nearly a month, performing in 38 Swiss theatres. Steps acts as a touring organiser in collaboration with a network of local presenters.

Since 2022, improving the ecological footprint of the festival has been one of its strategic priorities. We are committed to a sustainable dance sector in harmony with the environment. For the 2022 and 2024 editions, the environmental compatibility of the festival format was analysed by external experts. Both the organisation and the implementation of the festival were evaluated. With the support of four partner theatres, we determined the footprint of a typical Steps tour during the 2022 edition. Theater Basel, Bühnen Bern, Théâtre du Jura, and Phönix Theater served as model theatres, recording the emissions associated with the Steps performances in their venues. The data collected were then scaled to all partner theatres for the analyses in 2022 and 2024. For the 2024 edition, we additionally focused on emissions caused by overnight stays and travel during the festival. Furthermore, we analysed emissions directly generated by our activities, such as the impact of our national advertising campaign, the ecological footprint of scouting trips, and office-related emissions.

The results are available online at steps.ch for stakeholders in the cultural sector. Here are just two key figures: The analysis for the 2022 edition revealed greenhouse gas emissions of 158.6 tonnes, corresponding to 10.4 kg per visitor. For the 2024 edition, emissions amounted to 144.1 tonnes, or 12.6 kg per visitor. For comparison: a restaurant visit including meat on the menu produces around 12.7 kg of CO₂ emissions. More detailed figures and evaluations can be found in the reports for the 2022 and 2024 editions.

Thanks to these analyses, we now have a clearer understanding of which levers the dance festival can use within its own fields of action, allowing us to refine our action plan accordingly.

We will also continue to identify opportunities for local theatres and invited companies to reduce their emissions. In addition to the guidelines we have been publishing online since 2022 at steps.ch, we recommend the website of reflector. The "Green Guides" produced by our sustainability partner describe measures in areas such as mobility, production, and catering.

Measures for CO₂ reduction in our fields of action

The analysis of both years showed that mobility accounts for around 69 percent of the festival's total emissions. This represents a highly effective lever — one that we cannot operate independently, but in which cooperation with companies and theatres allows for significant progress.

For the 2024 edition, we defined an emission reduction package focused on tour mobility and established processes enabling annual carbon accounting. In other fields of action, we expanded our preventive measures, though without measuring outcomes. For the 2026 edition, these measures will be adapted and expanded based on the new results.

General

- We develop all measures collaboratively within the team.
- We appoint responsible persons for all fields of action.
- We continuously review and refine the measures. Learnings are shared with our partners.

Organisation

- We avoid printing correspondence, technical riders, or contracts. Contracts are signed digitally.
- When printing is unavoidable, we print double-sided on recycled paper.

Programme design

- Our programme selection consciously incorporates sustainability aspects. We take into account factors such as material consumption, travel distances, flights, and the number of people involved in a production. For international productions from overseas, we ensure that participation in Steps is part of a larger European tour.
- Based on the emission calculations from 2022 and 2024, we have developed CO₂ factors for the transport of people and goods, as well as for overnight stays. Starting with the 2028 edition, these factors will be used in program selection, allowing us to calculate a CO₂ value per company, indicating the expected emissions generated by each company's tour. This value will be considered alongside other selection criteria.

Mobility

Transport of goods

- For transport of materials, we use low-consumption, low-emission vehicles (Euro 5 standard, minimum 3 stars according to the VCS Environmental Car List).
- We strive for optimal vehicle load utilisation and reduce trips whenever possible.
- We select the appropriate vehicle category, considering what can be transported by car instead of van, or by rail when feasible.
- Whenever possible, we use vehicles with alternative drives (applies to rental cars and freight companies upon request).

Team mobility

- In our daily work, we travel on foot, by public transport, or by bicycle.
- To spare travel time for employees living outside Zurich, we hold hybrid team meetings.
- Coordination meetings with partners take place online.
- Program scouting: for journeys up to 9 hours, we travel by train. When possible, we combine several scouting trips or organise additional local meetings with stakeholders and companies.

Artists' mobility

- We reimburse travel costs for artists travelling by train or car (when public transport is impractical). Flights are reimbursed only when train/car travel is not feasible or would exceed 9 hours.
- Artists travel for multiple performances, ideally combined with other engagements within the festival (e.g., workshops, talks) — preferably in the same city as their performance.
- For transport during the festival, we use public transport or low-emission vehicles (Euro 5 standard, min. 3 VCS stars).
- If artists attend other Steps performances, we provide public transport tickets.

Audience mobility

- Steps performances take place throughout Switzerland, reducing audience travel distances.
- We encourage visitors via our communication channels and social media to use environmentally friendly means of transport.
- We identify which partner theatres offer combined tickets in cooperation with public transport providers and share these best practices (e.g., shuttle buses) within the partner network.

Accommodation

- Artists are accommodated within walking distance of the venue.
For longer distances, we provide public transport transfers.
- Whenever possible, we use accommodation provided by partner theatres.

Communication

- Since 2022, we have placed a stronger focus on digital communication channels.
- Our print agency is experienced with CO₂-neutral printing, recycled paper, environmentally safe inks, and other sustainability-relevant processes.
Print products are produced domestically.
- Since 2024, we have replaced the extensive program booklet with a concise program flyer.
- We ensure the environmental friendliness and reusability of our giveaways:
 - 2022: ecological T-shirts made from organic cotton
 - 2024: shift from T-shirts to socks
 - 2026: socks
- For events such as the festival opening, invitations are sent digitally.
- Press kits are made available in digital form.

Hospitality

- At events we organise — such as the festival opening, premiere dinners, or partner meetings — we offer vegan or vegetarian catering, preferably using seasonal organic products from the region.
We avoid disposable products, including compostable tableware, aluminum cans, and single-use glass bottles.
We work with local suppliers.
- We refrain from giving flower bouquets to artists and look for more climate-friendly (and practical) alternatives.
If flowers are used, they are seasonal and locally grown.

Sustainability partners

- **Amstein + Walthert** offers consulting and support in all areas of sustainability: analysis, strategy, data collection and evaluation (carbon footprint), sustainability reporting, measures, and goal setting. Amstein + Walthert supports clients from the cultural sector and beyond.
amstein-walthert.ch
- **reflector** develops concrete recommendations for action with pilot theatres, enabling performing arts professionals across Switzerland to make their operations ecologically sustainable. These recommendations are published by topic as “Green Guides” on a digital platform.
reflector is supported by m2act (Migros Culture Percentage) in cooperation with the Migros Pioneer Fund.
reflector.eco

- **Tasty Future**

Tasty Future helps cultural institutions realign their gastronomy operations — making them as environmentally friendly and plant-based as possible — thereby contributing to a climate-conscious, ethical, and future-oriented food culture.

From theatre cafés to canteens, from cloakroom snacks to premiere buffets, Tasty Future works where there is scope for action and leverage.

It supports a step-by-step operational and culinary transformation and provides impulses for discursive and artistic projects that can accompany this process.

tastyfuture.ch

- **Vert le Futur** advocates for a sustainable cultural and events sector. As an

interdisciplinary network of presenters, mediators, cultural workers, and sustainability experts, Vert le Futur promotes knowledge exchange and transfer in the field of ecological sustainability in arts and culture.

vertlefutur.ch