

# Sustainability strategy 2021-2027



BIOSPHERE



GLOBAL  
DESTINATION  
SUSTAINABILITY  
MOVEMENT

Bilbao Convention Bureau

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This document has been prepared with the collaboration and knowledge of all of the Bilbao Convention Bureau team and the approval and signature of its director.

**Kepa Olabarrieta**



# Introduction

We are in a region with a long history and great potential with respect to industrial development.

These practices have been gaining weight since the 20th century and have generated changes that have not always been positive for the biodiversity and natural resources or for society.

As a result of the actions and activities of human beings, often damaging to the planet, sustainability is a pressing issue today.

Looking around Bilbao, you can appreciate how we live in an ecosystem with plenty of water and green landscapes with lush vegetation.

As such, we have a challenge and a competitive advantage when it comes to integrating our actions into the surrounding environment, without changing it.

Bilbao city council has been working on the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change for several years.

These activities help to build a more efficient and environmentally-friendly Bilbao.

At the end of the day, the environment is the foundation which allows us to inhabit this planet and it is up to us to look after it.

There have been many varied measures including: transforming and promoting low or zero-emission means of transport, restric-

tions and limitations on transport, the use of renewable energy sources, the creation and maintenance of green zones and the correct management of waste for its reduction, reuse, repair and recycling ("the 4R").

At Bilbao Convention Bureau we continue rowing in the same direction.

This document has been drafted for this purpose. It lists the strategic lines and the direction established as necessary to achieve sustainable practices with respect to events and tourism linked to the MICE sector.

It is important to remember that our role is to promote Bilbao as a venue for corporate and associative meetings of every type and format, acting as a strategic ally for organisations and addressing their increasingly sophisticated requirements, without losing sight of the concern for the sustainability of the destination and the environment.

Consequently, a number of figures are recognised as having a key role in our activities.

These figures include event organisers, the tourism promoted by the events, the event providers, the authorities, the welfare services at the destination, the surrounding society, and of course, Bilbao Convention Bureau as the link and provider.

This document considers all the stakeholders involved, as the sustainability of the sector is directly related to each of these parties.



# The reinvention of a city used to reinventing itself

- **Management of the reconversion** (*Guggenheim Effect*)

The internationally known and studied “Guggenheim Effect” was the coordinated response of the Basque institutions to the industrial re-conversion that crippled Bilbao-Bizkaia in the 80s.

A process which, based on the iconic image of our titanium museum, has allowed us:

- Make peace with our estuary and recover our natural environment.
- Rediscover and enrich our cultural heritage.
- Build up the weight of the tourist sector and its complementary activities..

- **From industrial reconversion to the 2008 recession**

Converted into a true “work in progress” at city scale, the initial impetus was maintained over more than two decades, incorporating new projects and adapting to the times without losing its hallmarks.

- Inter-institutional collaboration and networking.
- Environmental regeneration and sustainable development.
- Backing of training, research, the cultural industries and the tertiary sector
- Support for the local economic network but with an international vocation
- Large infrastructures at the service of residents and visitors.



- **Sustained growth until the world ground to a halt**

A formula we knew how to maintain and adapt over time, and which helped us to minimise the damage from the 2008 recession.

We came out of it with an increasing weight from the tourism sector which, for the MICE segment, stabilised around 2019.

At that time, Bilbao-Bizkaia was getting ready to present an ambitious tourist marketing Plan 2019-2025... but the world had other plans.

More than a year has gone by since the first #BilbaoAurrera when the priority was to minimise damage to the tourist industry, trade and the social network in general.

We believe it is time to confront what is important, to rethink our strategy, prioritising more than ever:

- Inclusion
- Health
- Sustainability
- Safety

- **New allies and old friends**

If there is a common link in the recent history of Bilbao, it is our city's capacity to reinvent itself after the crises, to face them united and to maintain a vision and values over time.

It is not the first time, and we are sure it will not be the last.

This time we have a new ally, the GDS Movement with its well-known international ranking, the GDS-Index, and many old friends we have walked alongside through all or part of this process:

- Institutions
- Private companies
- Associations
- Universities

- **Let the stakeholders have their say**

Faithful to one of the UN slogans described in their SDG, "Leave no one behind", we sought to involve the maximum number of stakeholders in the task of rethinking the tourism business model we want for Bilbao.

First, we launched an open participation process to the general public, industry, associations and the workers at Bilbao Convention Bureau.

Then we cross-referenced the data obtained with others provided by:

- Other municipal areas (Bilbao Balioren Hiria).
- Associations in contact with neighbourhood groups (Urban Bat).
- Public institutions (BBAG/BM-30).

- **#BilbaoArimaBerdea movement**

The information obtained was put on the table at the working sessions of #BilbaoArimaBerdea.

At these meetings, a multidisciplinary team with representatives from industry, associations, universities and private business agreed on a DAFO analysis of our destination, analysed the GDS with greatest relevance for the sector and agreed on a series of measures for improvement.

With the aim of maintaining the project over time, the #BilbaoArimaBerdea team will continue to meet regularly to monitor the process, share experiences, review the objectives and continue moving forwards together.

# Survey results

The procedure for obtaining the strategy includes surveys of the groups concerned to include their opinions.

The goal is to move forwards, addressing their concerns and improving the results and the performance of the activity from all points of view.

- **Industry**

48% of the companies have been successfully surveyed. These believe that sustainability is important for the sector (9.5/10), that they are ready to deal with change (9/10) but at present few have started to work on the integration of sustainability (6/10).

- *Social*

*Awareness and education with respect to sustainability and Social inclusion.*

- *Enviromental*

Waste management/circular economy (includes food) and Nature, biodiversity and transport.

- *Economy*

*Innovation and technology and Quality throughout the chain.*

The following are the SDG most repeated by industry:



- **BiCB workers**

35% of customers have been successfully surveyed. These believe that after Covid-19 sustainability must be accorded more relevance. 62% already assume social and/or environmental practices in their regular activities. In addition, 80% monitor the supply chain. Lastly, they highlight the communications network and the proximity of accommodation to the place of activity in Bilbao.

- *Social*

*Awareness and education, social participation and inclusion.*

- *Enviromental*

Waste management/circular economy, nature and biodiversity, and carbon emissions.

- *Economy*

*Innovation and technology, job creation and quality.*

The following are the SDG most repeated by industry:



- **Cientes**

35% of customers have been successfully surveyed. These believe that after Covid-19 sustainability must be accorded more relevance. 62% already assume social and/or environmental practices in their regular activities. In addition, 80% monitor the supply chain. Lastly, they highlight the communications network and the proximity of accommodation to the place of activity in Bilbao.

Summarising their activity and importance in the SDG, the following are underlined:



- **The general public:**

A total of 607 members of the general public have been surveyed in Bilbao Bizkaia. These give MICE type events an average satisfaction score of 8.37/10, events with an international standing a score of 8.13/10 and national events of tourist interest are rated at 8.66/10. 98% rate the celebration of events with a score of more than 5/10.

Perceived impact and effect on the local economy, on the image and prestige of the destination and on the promotion of tourism. With regard to negative aspects, they do not agree with the fact that it revitalises life in the city (6.9%) and that it creates local jobs (11.9%).

An absolute majority positively rate the events provided the size of the event is monitored, and the performances are controlled to prevent dissatisfaction of the local community.



# Taskforce

Our cooperation and working session is made up of a varied and representative group from each subsector, which aims to give voice and vision to a whole community.

For the same reason, the first activity at our meetings was to identify who we are and define each member's strong points.

From this rewarding work we identified the various commitments adopted to move forward with respect to sustainability. The creation of the group was a great success as the dedication and experience of the members is immense.

These are some of the qualities that came to light:

*Certifications, Policies, Sustainable Food, Reduction of Carbon Footprint, Circular Economy, Plastics No, Aligned and Sustainable Providers, Social Inclusion, Development of talent, Donations of Material, Prioritise Local Economy, Public-Private Collaboration, Social Innovation...*

The DAFO is also a notable activity that leads us towards a global vision of the environment.

Following a process of self-criticism, two points stand out: Bilbao is not an internationally well-known destination and its offer is fairly concentrated in the city centre.

The strengths observed are the huge capacity for transformation, the excellent transport system and amenities within a 15-minute walk, the cuisine and the culture.

The working sessions of the #BilbaoArimaBerdea movement have been and continue to be essential from the start of this strategy.

The collaboration has guided the plan of action defined for the forthcoming years and fuels the feeling of a group with the same purpose, sustainability in MICE business tourism.



# Corporate values

The corporate values of Bilbao Convention Bureau include the values defined by Bilbao Ekintza, the structure to which it belongs. It is a public company belonging to Bilbao City Council which remains relevant and accessible for and involved with the people of Bilbao. It displays proactive and dynamic attitudes, embracing opinions and responding to local needs, which is why it is defined as flexible and resilient and able to successfully adapt to change.

Its main work is to respond to social concerns and to be inclusive, supportive and cohesive. In addition, the work is carried out, fully aware of the need to optimise resources and manage them efficiently.

The organisation is ambitious and pragmatic, pursuing the projects at hand to obtain tangible results.

Lastly, the organisation has a policy of transparency highlighting its reliability, and its work is directed at achieving results for the common good.

These actions are carried out by including innovation as a fundamental pillar.

With respect to the project, and together with the different stakeholders involved in the working sessions of #BilbaoArimaBerdea (*Groups in contacts with neighbourhood associations, different representatives of subsectors of the destination tourist industry, associations for inclusion, circular economy and environmental protection associations, etc.*) the following values have been defined:

**Quality of life**

**Inclusion**

**Collaboration**

**Progress**

# Mission and vision

- **Mission**

Following a process of assemblies, debates and group work with the various issues on the table and the data obtained in the surveys launched, certain conclusions regarding the sector have been reached

The concerns of the stakeholders involved are the points to be addressed in forthcoming years with respect to sustainability.

These include:

- The adoption of circular economy systems.
- The use of materials with a lower ecological footprint.
- Job reconversion to encourage social inclusion.
- Drawing attention to and maintaining the strong culture and identity at the destination.
- Placing the environment in the spotlight and raising awareness in this area.
- Training and implementation of measures in sustainability

Integrated in this way in the role of promoting Bilbao as a venue for corporate and associative meetings of every type and format, acting as a strategic ally for organisations and addressing their increasingly sophisticated requirements, without losing sight of the concern for the sustainability of the destination and the environment.

In short, Bilbao Convention Bureau works to improve the overall image of the destination, to put the city on the map as a corporate venue and to build an international reputation.

This leads to the attraction of events in line with the needs of the industry, local economy and principles of the region.

Once the venue has been defined, the Convention Bureau acts as a link and facilitator between the parties, advising and guiding them towards the organisations that best meet their requirements.

Lastly, the impact of the actions is assessed, working on the improvement of the less favourable aspects and taking note of the good practices as keys to success.

- **Vision**

Bilbao is a destination known for the cleanliness of its streets and establishments. The quality of the air is excellent and the freshness of nature can be felt in the city centre which, in combination with its advanced services, offers a high standard of living to both residents and visitors.

The society enjoys a deep-seated culture and values of respect, innovation (especially industrial and technological), tolerance and a general sensation of social inclusion, incorporated into tourist activities for many years, defining a wellknown legacy.

# Alignment

As mentioned, Bilbao actively intends to develop with respect to sustainability in all sectors, and this is something on which it has already been working.

In addition, the destination City Council has integrated the SDG in its strategic lines, as has Bilbao Convention Bureau, affording the destination a certain amount of experience.

As Bilbao Convention Bureau is an agency belonging to the City Council, all objectives are aligned with the City Mandate Plan, as indicated in the BiCB Sustainability Action Plan.

Furthermore, Bilbao Convention Bureau is a member of ICCA (International Congress and Conventions Association), an association which views sustainability as the basis for events via a number of different programmes.

Moreover, it connects different stakeholders and DMOs, unifying tendencies and sustainability policies, and it currently also offers training in event management.

In addition, we form part of the European Cities Marketing (ECM) association. The association has teams focused on specific aspects of the city and urban tourism development.

They share best practices, discuss and undertake activities through the ECM knowledge groups. Similarly, we are associated with Meeting Professionals International (MPI), said to be the largest association for the meetings and events industry in the world.

This brings together the global communication of the community and provides education, innovation, a network of opportunities

and changes in the sector and events for the promotion and growth of the industry.

It does so by placing people at the centre and empowering the sector by means of good practices and values of integrity.

Most recently, Bilbao Convention Bureau has joined the international ranking of sustainable destinations, GDS-Index, part of the GDS Movement (Global Destination Sustainability Movement)

An objective that will enable Bilbao to become established as a sustainable destination at international level.





# Sustainable development goals

The GDS complete the document that defines the path towards sustainability, and we include them in our philosophy such that they form part of its backbone. This took place following the process to consult all the subsectors of the destination and all the groups involved that do not form part of the industry, and with consideration for our own understanding of the matter. Identifying for business tourism in Bilbao, that the focus is on the following SDG, due to the performance of the activity:

- **Quality education**



To provide young people and adults with the necessary skills to carry out decent work. Acquiring theoretical knowledge and putting it into action to promote sustainable development.

- **Decent work and economic growth**



To promote policies aimed at the development of new jobs and decent work. To improve the efficient consumption of resources. To foster sustainable tourism as a promoter of local products and culture.

- **Industry, innovation and infrastructures**



To promote inclusive and sustainable industry. To increase access to small businesses by fostering local trade. To modernise infrastructures, making them sustainable.

- **Sustainable communities and cities**



To allocate resources for protecting and safeguarding the cultural and natural heritage. To reduce the negative environmental impact by improving municipal waste management. To support economic, social and environmental links.

- **Responsible production and consumption**



To accomplish sustainable management and an efficient use of natural resources. To reduce food waste. To accomplish the environmental management of the waste, minimising its adverse effects.

- **Alliances for achieving objectives**



To increase the stability of the sector by coordinating the policies and their coherence for sustainable development. To add social policies for inclusion and sustainable development.

# BiCB objectives

Using the same crowdthinking process within #BilbaoArimaBerdea, and based on a common DAFO analysis, the future objectives to be addressed in this plan of action have been developed. Each entity has enlightened the path with their knowledge, enabling the definition of the true challenges to be addressed.

- **#1 Commitment and visibility (diffusion) of sustainability**

*Values: Collaboration and Progress*

To reach the stakeholders in the sector and to collaborate with at least 70% of the stakeholders involved from industry by the end of 2022.

- GDS-Index.
- #BilbaoArimaBerdea Working Session.
- Close contact with businesses (concerns, training and strengths).
- Consultation of stakeholders, in particular the general public.

- **#2 Increase sustainability policies and certifications for the companies from the MICE sector at the destination.**

*Values: Collaboration and Progress*

- Practical training to obtain relevant sustainability policies.
- Grants for sustainability certifications.

- **#3 Awareness and diffusion of the importance of sustainable food in a region with such a high level of gastronomy.**

*Values: Collaboration, Progress and Quality of Life*

**Sustainable food:** *Organic, eco-friendly, locally sourced food, plant-based diets, allergen requirements.*

- Sustainable food with a low environmental footprint.
- Training in sustainable food.

- **#4 Diffusion, training and introduction of circular economy systems in the management of food and material waste.**

*Values: Collaboration, Progress and Quality of Life*

- Training in sustainable materials.
- Work on circular economy systems for materials.
- Promote a system of surplus food donations.
- Encourage the composting of food waste.

- **#5 Generate social impact and/or legacy with the event activities.**

*Values: Collaboration, Progress and Quality of Life*

- Create and systematise networks to generate a positive social impact together with the NGOs, associations and others

# Indicators

A system of regular monitoring with twoyearly reviews is set up to control the following objectives.

The reviews will be used to update compliance with the proposed milestones and correct the deviations arising during the attainment of the goals.

These meetings will also serve for the training of the different members of the Bilbao Convention Bureau team, so that all the staff will be actively aware of the sustainable practices of the DMO.

In addition, the results will be shared with the working groups of the #BilbaoArimaBerdea movement to seek their opinion and contributions, considered of great importance in the collective learning process.

The data obtained will be summarised in the following indicators published openly on the web page, as a measurement and control system, which is simplified with the following dashboard:



Lastly, the indicators to be followed for the completion of the reports and the detailed measurement of the strategy milestones will be controlled by surveys at the events, contact and collaboration with the associated companies and the indicators defined for each objective, including the following:

- Percentage of stakeholders from the industry who are monitored and trained.
- Percentage increase in number of sustainability policies and certifications among stakeholders from the industry.
- Percentage diffusion of knowledge and validity of these actions for sustainable food.
- Percentage of partners (hotels, restaurants and catering companies) who take part in the compositing system.
- Percentage of annual events which generate a positive social impact.

# Anexx I.

# Update of BiCB 2025

# KPIs

- **2021-2027 Strategy**

Within the framework of the 2021-2027 Sustainability Strategy, we present the monitoring for the 2025 financial year, the purpose of which is to compile and analyse the values of the defined Key Performance Indicators (KPI).

This monitorin provides a detailed overviwe of the progress made and the level of achievement of the planned lines of action, based on the continuous monitorinf of the initiatives and activities carried out by Bilbao Convention Bureau. It also includes the results obtained from surveys conducted at the conferences held in the city, providing a solid basis for impact assessment and decision-making aimed at continuous improvement.

- **Environmental KPIs**

- *Measurement of carbon footprint at the office & FAMTrips*

Every year the carbon footprint of the office will be measured and a report submitted. The aim of this calculation is to monitor our footprint and to be able to offset the environmental impact generated by Bilbao Convention Bureau in its activity.

The FAMTrips organised by Bilbao Convention Bureau are measured and this footprint is subsequently offset by calculating the impact of participants' transport and stay.

	2024	2025
<i>BiCB's carbon footprint T CO<sub>2</sub></i>	6,93	8,43
<i>FAMTrips' carobn footprint T CO<sub>2</sub></i>	1,7	-

- *Mobility of congress participants*

An analysis is conducted on the mobility of congress participants, focusing on two aspects: on one hand, how they arrived in the city of Bilbao; and, on the other, their mobility once in the city.

	2024	2025
<i>% participants who arrived by plane</i>	63,8	58,5
<i>% used public transport or walked</i>	75,7	93,3

- *Sustainability of congress organisers*

The opinion of congress organisers with respect to sustainability is monitored, specifying their perception of the meeting venues, of the service providers and of the city of Bilbao as a destination.

In addition, the opinion of congress organisers is assessed regarding the importance of sustainability policies or certificates in the value chain of the MICE sector. Measurement of carbon footprint at the office and FAMTrips

	2024	2025
<i>Opinion on commitment to sustainability</i>	4,57 /5	4,8 /5
<i>% Positive opinion on the importance of sustainability certifications and policies</i>	57	66

• **Social KPIs**

• *Accessibility according to congress participants*

Every year, we measure the opinion of congress participants regarding the commitment they perceive in relation to accessibility during the congress held in Bilbao. Lastly, congress organisers who have carried out responsible activities (social, cultural or environmental) are quantified.

	2024	2025
<i>Opinion on commitment to accessibility</i>	4,71 /5	4,6 /5

• *Equity, inclusion and positive impact for congress organisers*

The recruitment by congress organisers of people with some form of disability and of people at risk of social exclusion is monitored from BiCB.

	2024	2025
<i>Hiring of people with disabilities</i>	1,75	3,25
<i>Hiring of people at risk of social exclusion</i>	1,43	2,91

• *Positive impact action measurement*

Lastly, congress organisers who have carried out responsible activities (social, cultural or environmental) are quantified.

	2024	2025
<i>% organizers who have proposed positive impact actions</i>	10,8	79,6

• **Economic KPIs**

The economic impact generated by both congress participants and their companions is estimated. Likewise, the delegates' average daily expense is analyzed, breaking it down into different categories: congress registration, accommodation, and other expenses such as food and leisure.

	2024	2025
<i>Participants' economic impact</i>	377 M €	179 M €
<i>Companions' economic impact</i>	105 M €	70 M €
<i>Average expense delegate/day</i>	785 €	444 €





# Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all the stakeholders concerned, both from the industry and the destination, for their participation.

These include PCO and reception agencies, hotels, restaurants and catering companies, venues, the City Council, university, airport, waste and environmental associations, sustainable food associations, public participation social and cultural associations, business and tourism promotion.

We would also like to thank the GDS Movement for the work carried out during this restructuring process.

Monitoring will be carried out by again consulting the same stakeholders and new companies or collaborative entities as they become involved. So we would also like to thank future commitments and collaborations.



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