Joint Recommendations of the Sustainability Group and the Directors for climate friendly business trips at the MPIL

as of 23 January 2025

Summary

Key principle (§ 1): Business trips should be conducted as climate friendly as possible.

Short-distance (§ 2): Trips of up to 8 h with climate friendly means of transport only.

Medium distance (§ 3): For journeys between 8-16 h, avoid flying as far as feasible. Consider alternatives such as overnight sleeper trains, stopovers, or remote conference participation.

Long distance (§ 4): Minimise intercontinental travel where feasible.

Balancing (§ 5): For medium- and long-distance trips, weigh all relevant factors for and against flying to the specific event, particularly: How much travel time is saved? What is the added value of attending in person? How long will you stay at the destination? How often did you fly before?

Flying with reduced emissions (§ 6): Avoid short connecting flights.

Booking via ORBS (§§ 7-8) automatically results in a compensation payment for CO_2 emissions and records travel data for transparency purposes.

Best Practice Examples (§ 9): Share your climate friendly travel experience on MAX.

Institute events (§§ 10-13): Take into account flight kilometres when choosing the venue. Enable virtual participation. Encourage climate friendly traveling.

Aim and purpose

Our natural livelihood is threatened by a global climate catastrophe, which is largely caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. The Senate of the Max Planck Society has decided to drastically reduce the Society's emissions by 2035. Business trips are a crucial aspect in reaching this goal. The environmental impact of travelling by air is many times greater than that of travelling by train or long-distance bus. For example, a flight from Frankfurt to Berlin causes around 115 kg of CO_2 emissions per person, around **four times as much** as an equivalent train journey. In the first half of 2024, business trips at the Institute caused 36 tons of CO_2 emissions, 12 tons of this were due to flights within Europe. It is therefore possible and reasonable to reduce emissions from air travel at the institute. At the same time, research and academia depend on international cooperation. This is particularly pertinent for research in comparative public law and international law, which profit from personal exchange in international relations. The following recommendations aim to strike an appropriate balance between these concerns.

A. Recommendations for business trips of MPIL employees

§ 1 – Principles

1. Business trips should be conducted as climate friendly as possible. Climate friendly means of transport include cycling, public transport, long-distance buses and trains.
2. As flights cause the most emissions per kilometre travelled, flights should be reduced as far as feasible.

§ 2 – Short distance

1. For short distance trips, we recommend avoiding flights.
2. A business trip is considered short distance if the journey by climate friendly means of transport does not take longer than by plane.
3. A business trip is also considered short distance if the destination can be reached by climate friendly means of transport within 8 h travelling time.

Notes:

- *Travelling time means the total estimated time from door to door, i.e. the journey to the airport, the waiting time at check-in and at the security check, up to the destination.*
- *Usually, travel time on the train can be used more efficiently for work compared to air travel time.*
- *The map at https://www.chronotrains.com/en helps you estimate the journey time by train. Direct connections from any train station can be found at https://direkt.bahn.guru/.*
- *For comparing traveling times by bus, train and flight, https://rome2rio.com/ is useful.*
- *The best train connections can be found at https://int.bahn.de/en (Germany and neighbouring countries), otherwise at https://www.thetrainline.com/ or https://www.raileurope.com/.*

§ 3 – Medium distance

1. A business trip is considered medium distance if the destination can be reached within one day by climate friendly means of transport (travelling time: 8-16 h).
2. For medium-distance trips, we recommend avoiding air travel as far as feasible. The decision should be made after weighing up the aspects mentioned in § 5. In particular, it should be checked whether an overnight sleeper train or a train or bus journey with an overnight stopover is possible.

Notes:

- *Upon consultation with superiors, the MPIL will cover the costs of an additional overnight stay or a possibly more expensive overnight sleeper train journey in order to facilitate more climate friendly business trips (§ 3 Abs. 1 S. 2 BRKG).*
- *The Night Train Map helps find sleeper trains, e.g. from Mannheim, Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Frankfurt.*

- *Example journey to **Vienna**: train journeys from Heidelberg Hbf to Vienna Hbf take 7-8 h with one changeover, depending on the connection. Alternative: overnight sleeper from Stuttgart.*
- *Example journey to **northern Italy**: During the day, train journeys to Milan take less than 8 h, to Bologna less than 9 h. A sleeper train takes you from Munich to Rome (calls in Bologna, Florence).*
- *Further examples can be added to the MAX page of the Sustainability Group (see § 9).*

§ 4 – Long distance

1. A business trip is considered long distance if the destination cannot reasonably be reached without travelling by plane (travel time over 16 h, typically intercontinental travels).
2. We recommend reducing long-distance trips as far as feasible. If possible, they should be replaced by virtual participation. A balance must be struck in accordance with § 5.
3. We also recommend bundling several travel purposes (e.g. conference participation and research stay) wherever possible in order to reduce the number of flights.

§ 5 – Balancing of interests for medium and long distance trips

The following aspects should be weighed up when deciding whether to fly:

1. How much travelling time does the flight save compared to more climate friendly means of transport? The less time saved, the stronger the recommendation not to fly.
2. What added value does participation in person offer compared to remote participation in the specific instance?
3. Is the flight journey combined with other business or private purposes? The longer the stay at the destination or in the region, the more likely a flight is justified.
4. The more business air trips one has already completed in the calendar year, the stronger the recommendation to choose more climate friendly means of transport.
5. Is there a comparable event at a closer location that could be attended to avoid flying?
6. Obligations to family members or other close relatives that cannot be postponed and are tied to a specific location.
7. Individual mobility restrictions or health aspects.

Notes:

- *When combining a business trip with a private trip, § 13 BRKG must be observed: If the business trip is combined with a holiday of more than five working days, only additional travel expenses incurred can be reimbursed.*

§ 6 – Additional recommendations to reduce flight emissions

1. In cases of travelling by air, direct flights should be preferred.
2. Short distance feeder flights in the sense of § 2 should be replaced by climate-friendly means of transport as far as feasible.

Notes:

- *Flights cause more CO_2 emissions during take-off and landing. Therefore, a direct flight causes less CO_2 emissions than a connection with a similar flight distance with a changeover.*

B. Procedural recommendations

§ 7 – Justification in the travel authorisation form and booking via ORBS

1. We recommend that in the case of air travel, applicants add a justification to the necessary business trip request (travel authorisation form) which contains at least the expected time saving due to flying, comparing the total estimated time from door to door (§ 5 no. 1).
2. A CO_2 compensation payment is automatically made for all flights booked via the online travel booking system (ORBS). We thus strongly recommend booking all flights via ORBS.

Notes:

- *The justification for choosing a flight can be added in the existing justification field in the travel authorisation form ('Antrag auf Genehmigung einer Dienstreise').*
- *The compensation payment will be made by the Max Planck Society General Administration until 2025, from then on by the institutes, to carefully audited Atmosfair projects.*

§ 8 – Systematic recording of air travels via the ORBS

1. All flights booked via the ORBS are automatically recorded (including destination and CO_2 emissions). This is another reason why we strongly recommend booking all air travel via the ORBS so that the exact climate impact of business trips can be assessed.
2. The data from the ORBS should be provided to the Sustainability Group, which prepares an annual summary and makes it available on its MAX page. The summary does not contain any personal data.

§ 9 – Collecting best practice examples

Anyone who has undertaken a climate-friendly business trip is encouraged to report it on the MAX page of the Sustainability Group. This creates a collection of best practice examples that helps with the planning of future business trips. On the basis of this collection, the Sustainability Group annually awards an employee for a particularly climate-friendly business trip.

C. Recommendations for institute events

§ 10 – Principles for institute events

At all events organised by the institute (institute events), care should be taken to minimise emissions, in particular by taking into account the recommendations under §§ 11-13.

Notes:

- *This tool of the Federal Environmental Agency helps to determine the CO_2 emissions of events.*
- *When selecting the venue (§ 11) and modality of the event (§ 12), ecological concerns should be balanced with other concerns. This includes the expected scientific added value for participants, which may be greater if the event takes place in-person at the MPIL.*
- *The scientific added value includes intellectual diversity, representation of underrepresented regions, global knowledge sharing and the confidence-building effect of face-to-face meetings. It should also be taken into account that virtual participation can pose a major challenge for guests from politically sensitive regions.*

§ 11 – Venue

When choosing the venue for an event, consideration should be given to the question whether the additional air travel emissions that could be avoided by choosing another venue are justified by the added value for academia that the venue offers.

§ 12 – Virtual and hybrid events

1. If the majority of participants can only travel by plane, it should be considered whether the air travel emissions are justified by the scientific added value that holding the event in person offers compared to holding it virtually.
2. The institute should facilitate virtual, remote participation.

§ 13 – Travels of guests financed by the MPIL

If guests are invited whose travelling expenses the MPIL reimburses, we recommend that §§ 1-6 be taken into account accordingly.

Notes:

- *When striking a balancing in accordance with § 5, particular consideration should be given to the fact that intellectual diversity, representation of underrepresented regions and global knowledge exchange can be achieved in particular through the participation of guests from different regions of the world.*