

# ENVIRONMENT

# INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

# GUIDANCE 2024

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<b>Date:</b>	10-1-2024
<b>Version:</b>	Final version – Approved at Full ExCom on 12th November 2024

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## Introduction

This document provides comprehensive guidance on responsible travel for MSF entities. The guidance aims to: a) Support MSF entities in reducing carbon emissions, aligned with MSF's commitment to a 50% reduction in emissions by 2030, based on the 2019 baseline. b) Enable informed travel decisions that balance operational needs with environmental sustainability.

Adherence to this guidance is based on the level of endorsement reached at Core and Full ExCom, with the expectation that individual entities will align their travel policies with these recommendations over time, as outlined in this document.

A Global Travel Policy Framework is being developed in collaboration with all entities, coordinated within the Global Travel Project, with an estimated completion date on the first quarter of 2025.

This environmental travel guidance has been validated by Full ExCom on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and will be updated as needed.

## Background

In 2022, ExCom endorsed the previous international travel guidance ([2022 MSF Guidance On Responsible International Travel](#)). The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated the potential for significant travel reduction, acknowledging that business travel is likely the most challenging carbon emissions category in the MSF baseline due to the organization's unique operations and work culture. However, the initial guidance was not directive enough, allowing too much flexibility that hindered effective emission reduction.

According to the 2019 MSF footprint baseline established in June 2023, business travel accounted for 21% of MSF's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, with air travel representing 15% of the total. Operational travel comprises around 70-80% of air travel due to MSF's operational model. **The reduction target for travel is set at 30-35% relative to the 2019 baseline** as reflected at the [MSF-wide roadmap](#).

Given the momentum created by MSF to achieve these ambitious reduction goals, the guidance has been revisited at the request of Core ExCom, with technical delegation to the Climate Smart Project by IO. The preliminary outcomes were presented to Core ExCom on June 12, 2024, and are incorporated into this document for final development.

## Levels of Reflection

The Taskforce's revision process included three levels of reflection:

1. Strengthen Travel Rules: Define specific rules for entities' teams and management.
2. Carbon Budget per Entity: Define and monitor carbon caps per entity per year.
3. Carbon Pricing and Internal Trading System: Financially value excess emissions to support MSF's climate transition.

Levels 2 and 3 require further analysis to assess implementation viability and were not supported by Core ExCom due to their complexity and the still ongoing implementation of the MSF Carbon Framework. However, these options are retained for future consideration.

This document focuses on Level 1, providing more directive rules to be implemented within each IM's specific travel policies according to their deployment plans and in accordance with the Global Travel Policy Framework.

The updated guidance highlights the strengthened policy rules aimed at reducing carbon emissions. Under an optimistic but feasible scenario (see [Annex 3](#)), the estimated reduction is around 20% within the travel emission category, short of the 30-35% reduction ambition; the scenario could be stricter with 100% effort applied and an impact up to 30% could be estimated. But this is estimated not realistic because divers presential gatherings will be always needed and even advisable. Considering this, the Taskforce emphasized that HR staffing and operational support models have significant influence on MSF's global mobility, necessitating further reflection and analysis.

The key point here is that the effort required to implement sustainable travel practices is significant, and it must be distributed across different strategies, much like a communicating vessel model. If less effort is put into one area, it will necessitate greater effort in another to achieve the same overall goal.

## Objective

The objective of this document is to **strengthen the guidance to better support entities' management and event/meeting organization** in reducing the carbon impact of MSF's international business travel by 30-35% relative to the 2019 MSF Carbon baseline, a movement priority.

With the endorsement of this guidance, **ExCom members ensure the adoption, contextualization, and implementation** at each IM according with the deployment plan to be defined as stated below.

## Out of Scope:

This guidance **does not aim** to:

- **Define the contextualization and implementation plans for each MSF entity.** This will be determined by each IM based on their capacity.
- **Define the Operational or Staffing model,** despite its key role in achieving the desired carbon reduction. This debate should be held at the appropriate time and decisional level considering the potential impact and initial agreement on different platforms.

## Travel guidance principles:

Following interaction with Core ExCom, main principles are to be considered:

1. **Lead by Example:** Management at all levels must take an active role in travel decisions and consequently carbon emission reduction, setting the right example for their teams.
2. **Allow More Latitude for Social Mission Implementation:** Flexibility should be provided when the travel objective directly supports MSF's core medico-humanitarian mission.
3. **Ensure MSF's International Character and Diversity:** Travel reductions should maintain the organization's international dimension and the diversity of its staff across intervention regions.
4. **Communicating vessel:** This principle emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach. The overall objective remains to minimize the environmental impact of travel, but the means to achieve this can vary, and all strategies must work together to maintain effectiveness.

All rules below will be nuanced by these complementary principles.

## Strengthen travel rules:

The rules, endorsed by ExCom, are classified into two types: Organizational and Technical. While their impact and hierarchy differ, both contribute to reducing MSF's climate impact. The indicative reduction effort is included as a reference to set and frame the ambition according to the scenario set in [Annex 3](#).

Type of rule	Linked with...	Description	Reduction effort target
Organizational	Meetings & events	Online by default, with exceptions	70%
	L&D training	Online by default, with exceptions	50%
	Briefing & debriefing	Online by default, with exceptions	50%
Technical	Travel validation	Standard questionnaire process	100%
	Replace plane by train	When possible use of train <6hrs trip	100%
	Book direct flights	Even if 20% more expensive	100%

For more detail on these rules, see [Annex 1](#). The successful implementation of these rules requires organizational and personal development support, detailed in [Annex 2](#).

## Expected impact on emissions:

As detailed in [Annex 3](#), the potential reduction in emissions from implementing these rules is estimated at 19% according to an optimistic but feasible scenario. However, this is still short of the 30-35% target. The efforts percentage on these rules' implementation (as per above table) could be decided bigger from a theoretical standpoint reaching a higher reduction; but it is perceived as not realistic due to the need of certain justified exceptions.

Because these rules only deliver part of the reduction, **achieving the full reduction also requires revisiting the HR staffing model and the Operational Support model**. An effort to reduce travel by 25% in the staffing model and 20% in the support model could be correctly evaluated and considered to close the gap. This has to be ensured by considering the above guidance principles and avoiding

jeopardizing operational impact. Key identified areas on these HR staffing and support models for effort investment are:

- Avoiding gaps and better management of gap filling.
- Extending the average length of assignments.

These two aspects should be critically analyzed to minimize unnecessary travel.

### Travel Guidance deployment:

Following Full ExCom endorsement 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024, the challenge is now in deployment. **Each IM is responsible for adopting, adjusting, and implementing these travel policies within 6 to 12 months** of the guidance endorsement.

When	What	Who
Oct – Dec '24	Environmental Travel Guidance adoption, understanding, and contextualization by IMs	IM with C&E travel taskforce
Oct'24 – Oct'25	Define travel deployment plans to incorporate Environmental travel rules	IM
Mar- Oct'25	Share implementation plan with IO's C&E Mutual Accountability	IM
Oct'25	Report to Full ExCom on deployment plans ready	IO's C&E Mutual Accountability
Mar'25 onwards	Implement deployment plans	IM

## Annexes

### Annex 1 – Travel rules

#### a) Organizational Rules

##### a.1. Meetings & events:

For gatherings that require bringing together colleagues from various locations and necessitate long-distance travel beyond daily commuting, these meetings **should be organized online by default**. However, recognizing the importance of maintaining social bonds, certain exceptions are allowed:

- **Recurring International Platforms:** For international platforms, working groups, task forces, multi-based projects, and similar entities that already meet more than once a year, it should be organized an annual meeting face-to-face.
- **Annual Gatherings:** Major yearly events such as General Assemblies (GA), International General Assemblies (IGA), Coordination Weeks, and Executive Committee (ExCom) meetings should be organized physically every other year.
- **One-Time Events:** Single-instance events must clearly justify and broadly communicate the necessity of physical presence before being organized.

Meeting reduction effort expected à 70% less travels.

##### a.2. L&D Trainings:

All existing and new **training programs within the MSF portfolio should transition to an online format**. Similar to meetings, physical presence is justified only when training requires hands-on activities, simulations, or interaction with specific equipment or teams. The reasons for opting for face-to-face sessions in such cases must be clearly stated and communicated well in advance of organizing any in-person training sessions.

Training reduction effort expected à 50% less travel.

##### a.3. Briefing and Debriefing:

Given the minimal impact of holding briefings and debriefings in person, these **will generally be conducted online**. However, operational exceptions may be necessary and will be detailed as thoroughly as possible in the IM guidelines. Should additional exceptions be required, they must be clearly justified and communicated in advance before organizing any in-person briefing or debriefing sessions.

Meeting reduction effort expected à 50% less travel.

## b) Technical Rules

### b.1. Travel Validation:

In line with the above rules and exceptions, **all meetings need to be remote or offer a robust hybrid option. Face to face meetings will need to be explicitly validated by IM's Executive Director**, and any new situations or exceptions should be carefully considered. To guide this process, the following standard questionnaire must be answered:

#### Standard questionnaire:

- Is the meeting or travel necessary and well-prepared?
- Can the objectives be achieved without face-to-face interaction?
- Is physical presence absolutely required?
- Are trip dates and duration according to guidelines?

If all four questions are answered "YES," the trip is justified, and the manager can approve it. If any question is answered "NO," the trip must be put on hold and its necessity reevaluated.

Meeting reduction effort expected → 100% of travels validations are checked against questionnaire.

### b.2. Replace Plane by Train or Bus:

In regions with well-developed train networks, such as Europe, **air travel should be avoided when the train journey is less than 6 hours**. For trips lasting less than 8 hours, train travel is also recommended. Additionally, bus travel may be considered if it offers a level of comfort comparable to that of train travel.

Meeting reduction effort expected → 100% train travels of <6hrs.

### b.3. Book Direct Flights:

Direct flights have a significantly lower carbon impact than flights with stopovers. Therefore, **direct flights should be booked by default, even if they are up to 20% more expensive** than options with stopovers. To facilitate this, trips should be planned and booked at least two weeks in advance to ensure better availability and pricing.

Meeting reduction effort expected → 100% direct flights travel where possible

## Annex 2 – Recommendations and elements to consider.

As outlined in the [Strengthen Travel Rules](#) section, implementing these rules requires careful consideration of several key factors. This annex provides a list of recommendations to ensure successful implementation:

### When organizing meetings, events, trainings, briefing and debriefings, ...

- **Enhance Virtual Collaboration Skills:** Improve proficiency in collaborating virtually, both synchronously and asynchronously, using MSF's digital tools such as Office 365 suite (Teams, OneDrive, Planner, Forms, Word, Excel, PowerPoint online, etc.).
- **Facilitate Online Meetings and Events:** Develop expertise in organizing and managing online meetings and events effectively.
- **Offer Hybrid Solutions:** Provide hybrid face-to-face and virtual meeting options, especially when required to meet governance needs, such as Full Executive Meetings, General Assemblies, and other key decision-making platforms.
- **Prepare Document Packages:** Distribute document packages in advance as pre-readings to ensure participants are well-prepared for the event (meeting; workshop; BF&DBF).
- **Plan Agendas and Attendance:** Prepare meeting agendas in advance. For physical meetings, ensure the presence of local staff when colleagues from other locations are visiting.
- **Evaluate Meeting Locations:** Select meeting locations based on environmental impact, favoring regional hubs. Consider alternative locations to enhance participant diversity. Utilize the [Travel App](#) developed by the Climate Smart Project and Epicentre.
- **Prioritize Wellbeing:** Pay special attention to remote teams and members who may benefit significantly from face-to-face interactions.
- **Respect Personal Risk Acceptance:** Ensure that all participants have the right to refuse travel based on their personal risk tolerance. Recognize that individual circumstances (e.g., health status, caregiving responsibilities) can affect travel willingness. When organizing meetings, ensure that all participants explicitly consent to travel and feel free to decline if necessary.

### Prioritizing Train Travel:

- **Account for Train Schedules:** Plan events taking into consideration the various train schedules to ensure travel arrangements align with available options.
- **Consider Travel Time as Working Hours:** Treat travel time on trains as working hours where applicable. Ensure train bookings include necessary comfort and Wi-Fi connectivity to facilitate productive travel.
- **Update Booking Systems:** Ensure MSF travel agencies incorporate booking systems that support train travel to streamline arrangements.
- **Adjust Budget Expenditures:** Anticipate increased costs for lodging and per diem when opting for train travel, as it may involve longer journey times.
- **Book in Advance:** Plan and book train trips at least two weeks in advance to secure better availability and pricing.

## Guidelines for Traveling to Meetings and Events

- **Use the MSF Travel Decision Tree:** Refer to the [MSF travel decision tree](#) for guidance on planning trips.
- **Combine Visits:** When traveling to one location, schedule additional meetings with nearby teams or sub-groups of the main meeting. Consider extending your stay to maximize the trip's value by bundling meetings with local teams or nearby locations.
- **Choose Direct Flights:** Opt for direct flights as they have a lower carbon impact, even if they are up to 20% more expensive than flights with layovers. Booking well in advance can often provide better availability and pricing. All travel should be booked as far in advance as possible; travel booked less than 2 weeks ahead should be considered emergency travel and requires supervisor approval.
- **Avoid Carbon Offsets:** Do not rely on carbon offsets to mitigate emissions. Refer to the [Positioning Paper on Offsets](#) and [SAF positioning Paper](#) (*being finalized*) for more details.
- **Collective Transport:** Use trains or other public transportation as default options, as they are the most environmentally friendly, especially when moving around cities and considering specific and common personal security rules.
- **Follow Health Guidelines:** Adhere to local epidemiological guidelines and prioritize staff health recommendations and the hosting entity's guidelines.

## Annex 3 - Environmental travel guidance impact:

To assess the impact and effort needed, a theoretical calculation has been established based on a reasonably optimistic but ambitious plan. This calculation relies on existing data sources and aims to set a clear target for reducing the carbon footprint associated with air travel.

### *Data Basis*

- **Travel Data Reference:** The calculation uses 2023 travel data from OCG (Operational Centre Geneva) as a reference point. This data is considered representative and can be extrapolated to the entire MSF movement to establish a broader ambition.
- **Categorization of Trips:** The trips are categorized according to the reason for travel, reflecting different purposes such as project staffing, field visits, training, briefing, and debriefing, ...

### *HR Staffing and Operational Support Models*

- **Staffing Model** (Field project): This model primarily includes trips made by International Mobile Staff (IMS) to field projects. These trips are essential for project staffing and operational support on the ground.
- **Support Model** (Field visit): This model includes trips from headquarters (HQ) to the field, typically for field visits, project oversight, and operational support.

### *Effort Scenario (Ambition)*

- **Effort per travel reason:** The tables feature an "ochre color column," which represents the effort scenario or ambition. This column defines the percentage of the carbon footprint that

each trip should reduce. The effort scenario reflects the overall ambition of the plan to reduce travel-related emissions.

The theoretical calculation provides a framework to understand the impact of implementing these travel rules. By defining different scenarios and using a data-driven approach, MSF can better estimate the efforts required and set realistic yet ambitious targets for reducing its carbon footprint from air travel.

### Two Calculation Scenarios

The calculation is conducted under two different scenarios to account for various levels of ambition and potential outcomes:

#### Scenario 1 – Environmental travel guidance rules

This scenario includes the impact of implementing the six rules defined in this document. However, it does not take into account any modifications to the Staffing and Operational Support models.

	Footprint	Effort	Effective reduction
Brief/Debrief	6%	50%	3%
MSF Meeting	5%	70%	3%
Non MSF Meeting	1%	70%	1%
Training	15%	50%	7%
Field visit	15%	0%	0%
Field project	48%	0%	0%
Travel validation		100%	
Flight replaced by train <6	TBC	100%	1.50%
Flight optimisation	TBC	100%	6.00%
		Total reduction	20%
RECAP	Footprint	Effort	Effective reduction
TRAVEL	20%	20%	4%

**The result is a potential reduction of 20%.**

If the effort applied to all rules would be 100%, the theoretical potential reduction would be calculated to 30%. This level of effort is evaluated as not realistic because there will be always a need for presentational training, briefings and meetings.

	Footprint	Effort	Effective reduction
Brief/Debrief	6%	100%	6%
MSF Meeting	5%	100%	5%
Non MSF Meeting	1%	100%	1%
Training	15%	100%	15%
Field visit	15%	0%	0%
Field project	48%	0%	0%
Travel validation		100%	
Flight replaced by train <6	TBC	100%	1.50%
Flight optimisation	TBC	100%	6.00%
		Total reduction	30%
RECAP	Footprint	Effort	Effective reduction
TRAVEL	20%	30%	6%

Scenario 2 – Including actions on Staffing and Operational Support models.

Adding to the above scenario 1 measures impacting on the staffing and support models, the **31% reduction could be accomplished** with reducing:

- 1 over 4 trips from HQ to field and
- 1 over 5 trips on field staff trips

	Footprint	Effort	Effective reduction
Brief/Debrief	6%	50%	3%
MSF Meeting	5%	70%	3%
Non MSF Meeting	1%	70%	1%
Training	15%	50%	7%
Field visit	15%	25%	4%
Field project	48%	20%	10%
Travel validation		100%	
Flight replaced by train <6	TBC	100%	1.50%
Flight optimisation	TBC	100%	6.00%
		<b>Total reduction</b>	<b>31%</b>