**Knowledge Guide**

# How to Get Started With Sustainable Business Travel

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# Colofon

# 0. Introduction

## Coalition for Sustainable Business Travel

The Coalition for Sustainable Business Travel brings together frontrunners who underline the importance of more sustainable business travel and are committed to an ecologically responsible travel policy. In this way, they contribute in an impactful way to achieving the climate goals and reap the social and economic benefits of a smart and efficient travel policy. By strengthening each other in a coalition, leading by example and sharing knowledge and expertise, they are catalysing the many steps already taken today. As experts by experience, the coalition partners offer useful insights to policymakers and stakeholders on the current barriers to and economic benefits of sustainable business travel. In this way, an enabling framework can emerge in which sustainable business travel becomes the new normal. As such, coalition partners take responsibility for minimising the environmental and climate impact of business travel without compromising the added values of international meetings.

### With support of the cabinet of Federal Minister of Mobility – Georges Gilkinet

*"It is great that so many business leaders are already choosing to make their business travel more sustainable. The train is a worthy alternative to the plane. Together we can reduce our $CO_2$ emissions and make a huge difference to the climate and especially to our children and grandchildren."*

## Knowledge Guide

This knowledge guide provides tips and tricks to redesign your company's travel policy to make international business travel more sustainable. It includes best practices and testimonials that were collected either via an online survey (see section '*Methodology of the Survey*' at the end of this document) or via interviews and discussions that were held with a selection of frontrunners.

# 1. Become a Pioneer for Sustainable Business Travel

Did you know that planes are responsible for 3.5 % of $CO_2$ emissions in Europe? And that business travellers account for a disproportionate share of those emissions? In other words, as an internationally active company, you hold the keys to creating a positive impact: on the climate, but also for your own business. And you are not alone. Together with other pioneers, our Coalition for Sustainable Business Travel will help you on your way!

## Why Become a Pioneer in Sustainable Business Travel?

**Win the war for talent**. For 6 out of 10 employees, a commitment to sustainability is an important criterion when choosing a new job. With a sustainable travel policy, you show that your organisation takes its impact seriously.

**Improve the well-being of your employees**. With a well-thought-out travel policy, you not only increase your organisation's efficiency, but also improve your employees' work-life balance.

**Flying less is also cheaper**. Corona taught us that meetings can also be done differently. Don't throw these lessons in the bin, but take advantage of the financial benefits that online meetings offer. Travelling by train can also be cheaper than flying, if you take into account the number of hours that can be worked on the train.

## Why Participate in our Coalition for Sustainable Business Travel?

**Increase your knowledge and expertise**. During various workshops, you gain insight into your organisation's travel behaviour, learn how to create awareness among your employees, receive tips on formulating targets and concrete measures, and learn from experts where the greatest reduction potential lies.

**Meet the right partners**. At numerous networking events, you will enjoy a rich exchange between partner organisations, economic players, knowledge institutions and policymakers.

**Increase your visibility**. Highlight the steps your organisation is taking at public events, via the communication channels of Bond Beter Leefmilieu (social media, website, newsletter) and via press releases and interviews.

**Influence policy**. Get a platform to raise current barriers to sustainable travel policies, formulate policy recommendations and engage with policymakers from within the coalition.

# 2. Decrease Your Climate Impact in 3 Steps

The corona pandemic firmly changed the travel habits of business travellers. Companies and people switched to virtual meetings and invested strongly in digitalisation. This created a clear trend towards less and more conscious travel, which has since been embraced by many employers and contractors. Many business travellers see a positive impact of the new travel habits on their work-life balance, their productivity, health and motivation[1]. Employers also see that business travel can be organised more efficiently and smartly without sacrificing quality. The high impact of business flying gives them leverage to greatly reduce aviation emissions while winning the war for talent.

In general, there are 3 main steps to decrease the climate impact of business travel (in order of importance): **avoid transport, stimulate alternatives for air travel** and **reduce the impact of unavoidable transport**. Per step, this document will dig deeper into what an organisation can do, what is already happening and bring a couple of testimonials for inspiration.
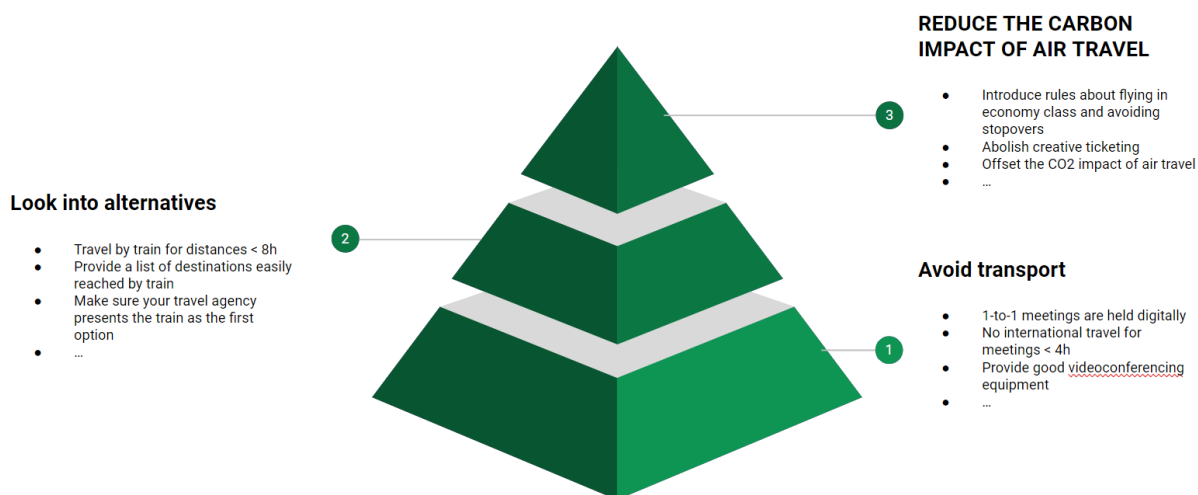
**REDUCE THE CARBON IMPACT OF AIR TRAVEL**

- Introduce rules about flying in economy class and avoiding stopovers
- Abolish creative ticketing
- Offset the CO2 impact of air travel
- ...

**Look into alternatives**

- Travel by train for distances < 8h
- Provide a list of destinations easily reached by train
- Make sure your travel agency presents the train as the first option
- ...

**Avoid transport**

- 1-to-1 meetings are held digitally
- No international travel for meetings < 4h
- Provide good videoconferencing equipment
- ...

*Figure 1 - Which steps can an organisation take to decrease the climate impact of business travel?*

## 2.1 Avoiding Business Travel is Key

Even though there are some interesting innovations emerging in the next years (e.g., electrical flying, e-fuels, other types of airplanes[2]) it will still take at least a decade until these innovations will be rolled out on a large scale. Other solutions (e.g., advanced biofuels) are only feasible and sustainable at limited quantities. The most simple and effective way to reduce your travel emissions is therefore to implement measures aimed at reducing business travel. A recent questionnaire[3] shows that most business travellers feel that post-corona travel habits have a positive impact on their work-life balance, productivity, health and motivation.

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[1] *https://travelsmartcampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/Travel-Smart-Topline-101922_USPA.docx.pdf*
[2] *https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2022/02/04/what-is-the-future-of-air-travel/*
[3] *https://travelsmartcampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/Travel-Smart-Topline-101922_USPA.docx.pdf*

## What Steps Can I Take?

**Establish concrete guidelines for when employees physically go to an international meeting.**

Possible measures:
- Evaluate the (non-)$CO_2$ emissions and other sources of pollution of any international travel.
- Do not travel for one-to-one appointments.
- Do not travel international for meetings shorter than 4 hours.
- Establish a decision tree to encourage conscious decision-making, distinguishing between regular meetings and workshops or networking opportunities.
- Provide a framework on how to make agreements with clients/associates around conscious decision-making.

**Facilitate and encourage digital meetings.**

Possible measures:
- Include the option "online meeting" when sending a meeting request.
- Invest in or provide budget for camera and audio systems.
- Provide training on efficient online meetings or the use of digital tools.

## Best practices – What Do Others Do?

### Silke Lepee – Accenture:

"*At Accenture, we mainly try to avoid business travel and look for alternatives for air travel. Pre-travel approval is needed in order to book business travel.*"

### Kris Bachus – KULeuven:

"*KULeuven reduces travel by extensively supporting videoconferencing. This reduces the need for staff to travel to attend meetings at different locations. Likewise, teaching student groups located on different campuses should not always involve travel. Our best-equipped auditoriums are already used for remote teaching. We encourage the use of the facilities already in place and are expanding our infrastructure and capabilities further.*"

## Survey Results

In our survey 62% of the respondents (16 out of 26) indicated that their organisation took measures to reduce all types of business travel. There is room for improvement because 27% (7 out of 26 respondents) also indicated that no efforts were made to decrease the amount of business trips and 12% (3 out 26 respondents) were not sure.
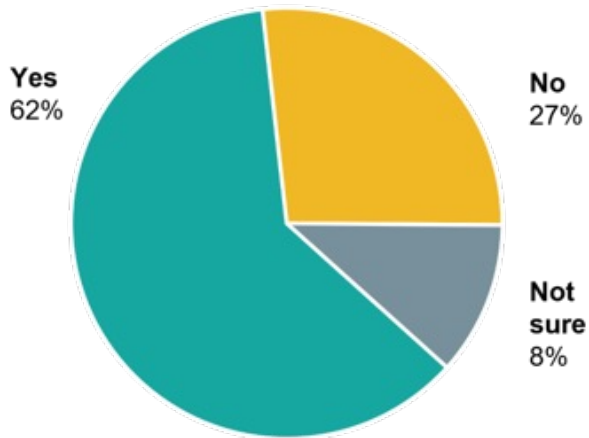


*Figure 2 - Does your organisation take measures to reduce business travel? (26 respondents)*

Many organisations seem to be aware of this because in our survey results, we see that reducing the carbon footprint was the main reason for an overwhelming majority of the respondents (25 out of 26 respondents; 96%) to reduce business travel by plane.
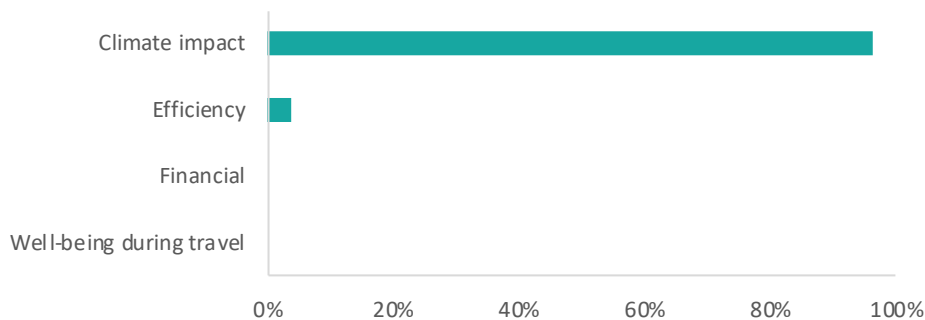


*Figure 3 -What is the main reason for reducing your organisation's business travel by plane? (26 respondents).*

## 2.2 Look into Alternatives

After avoiding business travel, the next step to take to reduce the climate impact of business travel is to look for alternatives. Especially for short journeys, the train is the best travel alternative. It is more durable and competes with the aircraft in terms of travel time, comfort and price. A recent study[4] indicates the gain in climate impact of travelling by train instead of plane, for the 25 most popular European destinations from Belgium. The climate impact of travelling by train to Paris is for example almost 9 times lower compared to going by plane. For Brussels-Vienna, you can go 7 times by night train with the same climate impact as going 1 time by plane.

### What Steps Can I Take?

**Establish clear rules around when the plane can be taken, when any exceptions are allowed and how they should be approved.**

Possible measures:
- Only fly when travel time by train exceeds 8 hours. Or to be expressed by distance or in relative travel time of train vs plane.
- Draw up a list or map of destinations that can be easily reached by train and indicate which are mandatory and which are preferably reached by train.
- Plan with your travel agency, as to when flights are presented and in what order the options appear.

### Best Practices – What Do Others Do?

Silke Lepee – Accenture:

*"For destinations that can be reached by train in less than 3h30, the train has to be taken instead of the plane."*

Kris Bachus - KULeuven:

*"KULeuven wants to discourage the use of planes in 2 ways:*

*Depending on how far a destination is by train, it is only possible to go by train (when flight plus three hours takes about the same time as the train ride). In addition, KULeuven gives a lot of additional information on how to find alternatives by train.*

*There is a flight fee of €40/ton $CO_2$ for all work-related air travel by staff. The compensation fee goes to an internal climate fund used to support emission reduction measures, reforestation projects and investment in research and videoconferencing."*

[4] *https://www.bondbeterleefmilieu.be/artikel/de-trein-bus-nemen-plaats-van-het-vliegtuig-het-maakt-wel-degelijk-een-groot-verschil*

## Survey Results

Our survey shows that 2/3 of the responding organisations are promoting a shift towards more sustainable business travel (17 respondents replied 'very much' or 'much', 65%). A smaller part of the respondents feels their organisation is not doing a lot to make their business travel more sustainable (6 respondents replied 'a little' or 'not at all, 23%).

These findings highlight that even though many organisations are aware of the climate impact of business flights, only 2/3 of the responding organisations put in effort to make their business travel by plane more sustainable.
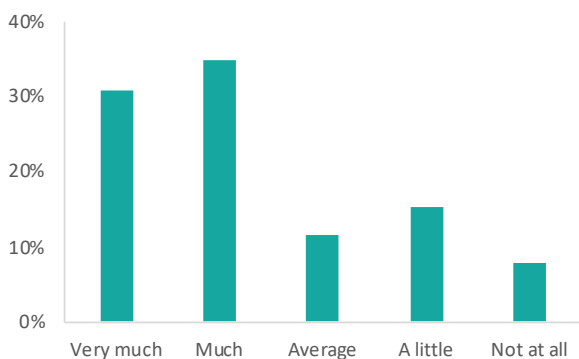


*Figure 4 - Does your organisation promote a shift towards sustainable business travel by plane? (26 respondents)*

The barriers that prevent a shift from business travel by plane to more sustainable alternatives are dominated by a **lack of alternatives** (38%; 10 out of 26 respondents). On a second place comes the **higher cost** of alternatives for flights, a **lack of information** and **reluctance from employees** to not take the plane (15% each; 4 out of 26). Finally, it seems that the **lack of booking tools** and the **loss of comfort** during travel with alternatives seems a minor barrier (8% each; 2 out of 26).

Of all the barriers, there are 3 that organisations can alter themselves:

Lack of information
- Make sure that booking systems give priority to train travels.
- Provide additional information on how to book trains.
- Periodically give a numerical overview of the impact of the travel behaviour.

Reluctance from employees
- Organise consultation moments or a survey to capture concerns.
- Co-create the travel policy with stakeholders (frequent flyers, employees with interest in sustainability, HR, finance,...)
- Set up an internal communication campaign and raise awareness among staff.
- Using gamification to encourage employees.

Increased costs
- Introduce a $CO_2$ price for air travel and implement financial incentives for travels by train.
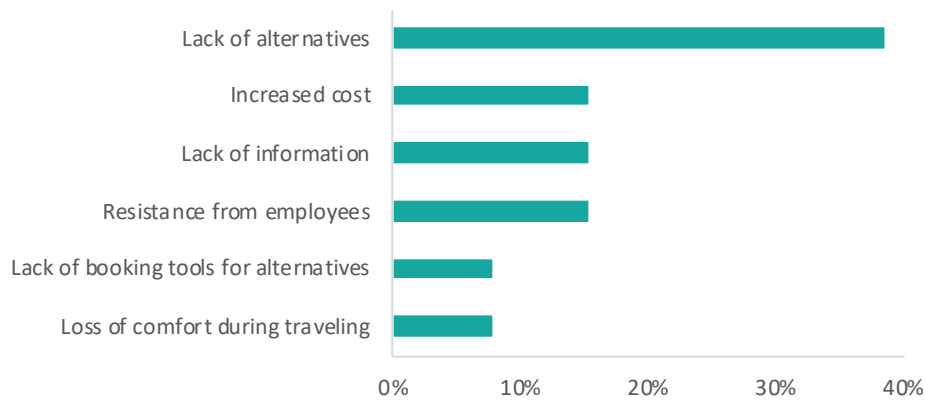- Minimise personal benefits like loyalty programs.

*Figure 5 - What is the main barrier to reducing business flights in your organisation (26 respondents)*

## 2.3 Reduce the Carbon Impact of Air Travel

In some cases, there are business trips for which you still need to take a flight. The third step you can take to reduce the climate impact of your business trip is to choose the flight option with the smallest carbon footprint and to offset the emissions.

Not every flight is the same. By choosing carefully, the carbon footprint of your flight can be reduced (e.g., direct flights, economy class, technologically advanced air planes). In addition, the emissions of business trips that were unavoidable can be compensated through the purchase of carbon credits issued by accreditation standards to projects that remove GHG emissions from the atmosphere (e.g. afforestation, carbon farming, …) or avoid generating the emissions (e.g. renewable energy, forest conservation, cookstoves,  …) in the first place. Always opt for compensation projects with a quality mark. The Gold Standard[5], Verified Carbon Standard[6] and Plan Vivo[7] are examples of the highest international standards in terms of carbon offsetting. They ensure that $CO_2$ capture and reduction projects are and remain on track and ensure their additionality.

### What is Carbon Offsetting?

Carbon offsetting is a mechanism used to compensate for corporate or individual carbon footprints through the purchase of carbon credits. A carbon credit represents a reduction or removal of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the atmosphere through a carbon offset, also called a compensation project. By investing in carbon offsets, companies take their responsibility for emissions they can't reduce or avoid (yet).

[5] *https://marketplace.goldstandard.org/collections/projects*
[6] *https://verra.org/programs/verified-carbon-standard/*
[7] *https://www.planvivo.org/*

## Why Offsetting is Necessary

Climate change is a global problem that requires a lot of effort and solutions. With only reduction measures, we will not achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. We need to stimulate action to further reduce emissions or sequester carbon. Offsetting is a legitimate working mechanism which helps companies meet their targets. However, compensating for your emissions always needs to happen in conjunction with reduction: it should not be a free pass to just continue emitting. Offsetting should always be part of your reduction strategy on the road to Net Zero for your organisation.

## Offsetting and the Voluntary Carbon Market

The Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM) is where carbon credits are traded and new projects are developed. Putting a price on emissions results in greater awareness of investments and also the pollution caused, making reduction transparent within the organisation and stimulating climate action. It empowers the private sector to take climate action ahead of and beyond regulation, accelerating the transition to Net Zero. Therefore reduction and offsetting go hand in hand.

The ICROA association consists of established carbon reduction and offset providers. ICROA members must follow the ICROA Code and produce an annual report demonstrating their compliance. Offsetting projects offered by the members must meet the following criteria: real, permanent, independently verified, unique and additional.

## What Steps Can I Take?

**Taking measures to reduce the carbon impact of air travel.**

Possible measures:
- Always fly in economy class and establish guidelines around giving exceptions to this (e.g. based on travel time).
- Introduce rules around avoiding stopovers and replace transit flights (i.e. feeder flights) with trains where possible.
- Abolish creative ticketing (e.g., booking a return ticket while only taking the outbound flight).
- Include the carbon impact (aircraft-specific) in the choice of flight.

**Offsetting the carbon impact of air travel and secondary effects of air travel.**

Possible measures:
- Introduce a $CO_2$ price for air travel (target price: 100€/tonne).
- Offset the $CO_2$ impact of air travel (e.g., through ICROA accredited organisations).

# Best practices – What Do Others Do?

### Silke Lepee – Accenture:

*"For the flights that cannot be avoided, Accenture is trying to minimise the carbon impact. Accenture signed the World Economic Forum's Clean Skies for Tomorrow SAF pledge, which includes an aviation industry goal of flying on 10% SAF by 2030."*

### Kris Bachus – KULeuven:

*"At KULeven air travel is unavoidable. To offset this, the university uses a $CO_2$ compensation system. The system affects prices, raises awareness and supports projects aimed at reducing global $CO_2$ emissions.*

*We evolved from a voluntary compensation system to a generalised compensation of €40 per tonne of $CO_2$ for all work-related air travel by staff. The compensation fee goes to an internal climate fund used to support emission reduction measures, reforestation projects and investment in research and videoconferencing."*

## Survey Results

More than half of the respondents (54%; 14 out of 26) do not compensate their trips, while 46% do (12 out of 26 respondents). A lot of the respondents that are compensating, indicate that this is merely encouraged and not obliged by their employer.
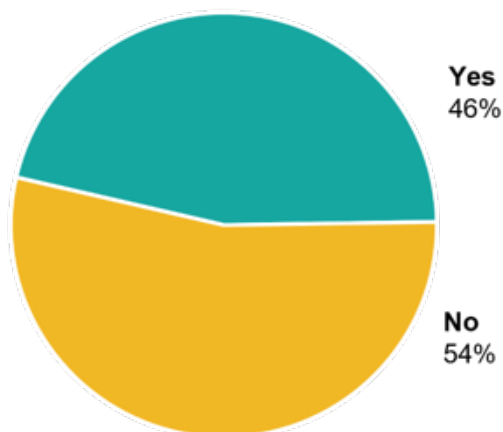


Yes 46%

No 54%

*Figure 6 - Does your organisation compensate $CO_2$ emissions from air travel? (26 respondents)*

# 3. Get Started: Implement a Travel Policy

Ideally, a good travel policy should remove any "grey areas" for employees and clearly define all information on carbon impact, travel cost, safety and booking procedures. In fact, a well-crafted travel policy is an efficient way to inform your employees that your organisation is serious about reducing the impact of their business travel. Several organisations publish their strategies online, which can be used as inspiration[8].

## What Steps Can I Take?

**Draft a travel policy highlighting the benefits that it will bring.**

Tips and tricks while drafting your travel policy:
- Look at existing travel policy documents for benchmarks and inspiration.
- Understand travel practices of your people.
- Set your policy goals.
- Make people the "heart" of your travel policy.
- Choose your technology and flexibility.

## Survey Results

Most of the respondents (69%) indicate that their organisation has a type of mobility policy, either as a separate document or as part of an overarching sustainability strategy.
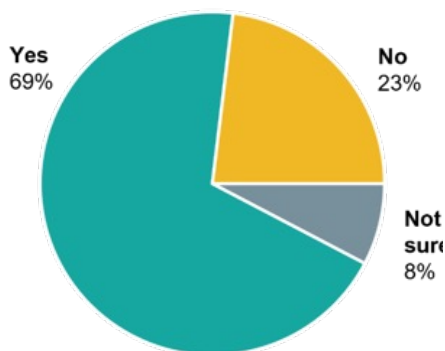


*Figure 7 – Overview of which organisations have a mobility strategy (26 respondents)*

We asked the respondents to list the links to their mobility strategies if available online, so they could serve as inspiration for others.

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[8] *https://nl.backontrackbelgium.be/notre-dossier*
*https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/nl/departement-omgeving-lanceert-klimaatbewust-reisbeleid*
*https://www.durable.uliege.be/cms/c_15909593/fr/faq-durable-politique-environnementale-des-trajets*
*https://www.kuleuven.be/duurzaamheid/sustainability/sustainable-travel-policy/index*
*https://www.ugent.be/en/ghentuniv/principles/sustainability/climateplan/travelpolicyplan*
*https://www.vub.be/nl/over-de-vub/de-vub-universiteit-van-de-toekomst/naar-een-duurzame-en-klimaatneutrale-universiteit/klimaatvriendelijke-mobiliteit-vub*
*https://www.imec-int.com/en/sustainability*
*https://www.accenture.com/us-en/about/sustainability/sustainability-value-promise*

# 4. Get Started: Involve Your Employees

A sustainable travel policy cannot be successful without a strong involvement of your employees. The new policy will require a change of habits, which is not always easy to achieve. It is crucial to capture the concerns of your employees and to explain why the new travel policy is necessary and beneficial.

## What Steps Can I Take?

**Actively involving employees in introducing new travel measures, convincing them of the need and communicating it transparently.**

Possible measures:
- Organising consultation moments or a survey to capture concerns.
- Co-create the travel policy with stakeholders (frequent flyers, employees with interest in sustainability, HR, finance,...).
- Setting up an internal communication campaign.
- Using gamification to encourage employees.
- Periodically giving employees/departments a numerical overview of the impact of their travel behaviour (total cost and $CO_2$ emissions).

**Introducing incentives to encourage employees towards desired behaviour.**

Possible measures:
- Introducing first class train tickets.
- Abolishing frequent flyer rewards.
- Set carbon targets/budgets per department.

## Best practices – what Do Others Do?

Silke Lepee – Accenture:

*"Accenture is working on a travel dashboard and the internal travel portal shows messaging to increas..."* with *"The internal Accenture travel portal gives information on how to travel sustainably."*

## Survey Results

Our survey results indicate that this is not yet a common practice for 58% of the respondents (15 out of 26 respondents). It is not an easy task to change your employees' behaviour. To get inspired, we are listing some of the initiatives of organisations that are focussing on changing employee behaviour (42%; 11 out of 26 respondents).
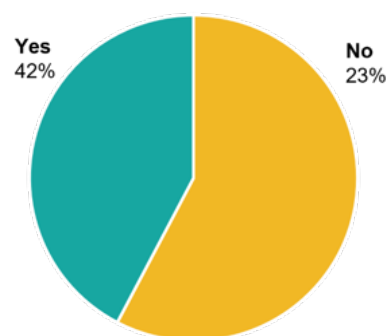


*Figure 8 - Is your organisation focusing on changing employee behaviour? (26 respondents)*

# 5. Methodology of the Survey

As part of the Coalition for Sustainable Business Travel, The Shift conducted a survey that ran from 5 September 2022 to 20 October 2022 (49 days). The key target for the survey were organisations that are interested in alternatives for business travel by plane. The goal of the survey is to gather how companies are reducing the emissions of corporate air travel and what the main barriers are in their efforts.

Key data on the respondents:

- All respondents **work in Belgium** and are members of the **sustainability team** of their organisation
- Most of the respondents work for a **company** (16 out of 26 respondents; 62%), **academic institution** (6 out of 26 respondents; 23%) or an organisation from the **public sector / government** (4 out of 26 respondents; 15%).
- The 16 companies that completed the survey are working in different fields including **manufacturing** (6 out of 16; 38%), **consulting** (5 out of 16; 31%), **entertainment and recreation** (2 out of 16; 13%) and others (3 out of 16; 19%).
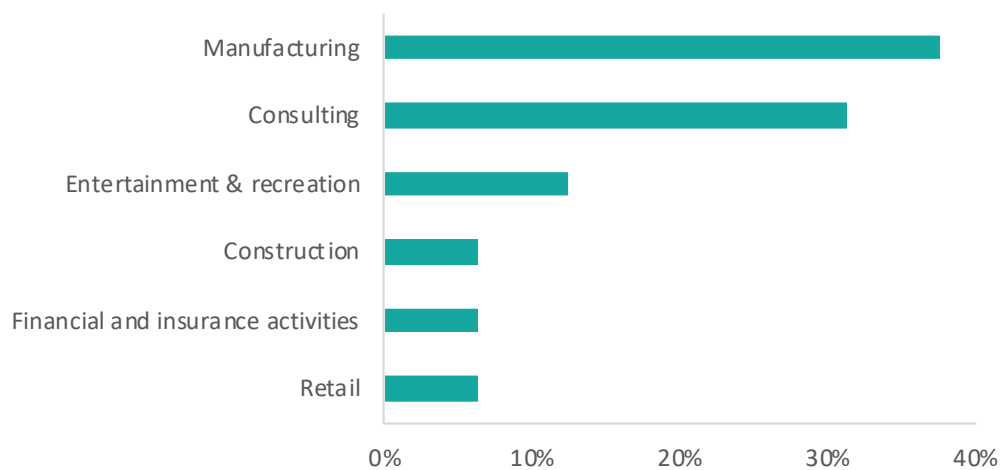


*Figure 9 – Professional activity of the corporate respondents*
*(16 out of 26 respondents are companies)*