

COMMON DONOR GREENING PRIORITY ACTIONS



PRIORITY ACTION 2

Prioritise products and services with a proven lower climate and environmental footprint

February 2026

Humanitarian supply chains are among the largest sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the sector, estimated to account for 40–75% of organisations' total carbon footprint¹. Most of these emissions stem from procurement of goods, notably from *raw material extraction* and the *production* of humanitarian goods, although transport, delivery and disposal also contribute. The products and services we purchase as humanitarian organisations can also have significant environmental impacts contributing, for example, to deforestation, soil contamination etc. As such, procurement is a critical area on which to focus emissions reduction and “greening”² efforts.

To make greener procurement choices, organisations first need to understand which of their products and services have the biggest climate and environmental impacts. Conducting Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs)³ of products is one way to guide humanitarian organisations in this sense, by identifying climate and environmental “hotspots” across a product’s life cycle, helping manufacturers shift to more sustainable alternatives. LCAs of most commonly procured relief items are already publicly available⁴ (for example, the [LCA Resource Hub, managed by the WREC Coalition](#)⁵) and provide information that can guide greener procurement decisions.

LCAs are not the only tool for guiding green procurement. They can be challenging to conduct due to the time, cost and technical expertise required, inconsistent data across product life cycles, and limited access to results caused by confidentiality and the lack of data-sharing frameworks. LCAs rarely provide simple answers and are often highly context-specific, except when comparing two similar items. It is therefore not recommended to carry out an LCA for every product⁶. Existing evidence and established patterns can guide action, and even if a product-specific LCA is unavailable, one for a *comparable* item can still offer valuable insights to support greener specifications and procurement decisions.

¹ For example, the Climate Action Accelerator’s [Roadmap for Halving Emissions in the Humanitarian Sector by 2030](#) reveals that 75% of the sector’s GHG emissions stem from procurement

² “Greening” refers to the integration of climate and environmental considerations into humanitarian response by identifying, assessing, and mitigating their impacts on our work. This involves minimising or avoiding negative environmental effects and leveraging opportunities for positive outcomes

³ LCA is defined by the ISO 14040 as the compilation and evaluation of the inputs, outputs and the potential environmental impacts of a product or service system throughout its life cycle

⁴ Examples include: the LCA Resource Hub, managed by the WREC Coalition, providing full LCA reports of humanitarian relief items, along with guides on applying LCAs in planning, sourcing, and transport (<https://logcluster.org/en/life-cycle-assessment-lca-resource-hub>) and Climate Action Accelerator’s LCA Repository (<https://climateactionaccelerator.org/repository-of-lifecycle-assessments>). In addition DG ECHO mapped existing LCAs of humanitarian items in 2025, creating a product-based database that currently includes 89 LCAs.

⁵ WREC stands for Waste management and measuring, Reverse logistics, environmentally sustainable procurement and transport, and Circular economy. Coordinated by the Global Logistics Cluster, the WREC Coalition includes the Danish Refugee Council, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Save the Children International and the UN World Food Programme.

⁶ This is based on the conclusions and recommendations from DG ECHO’s 2025 “Life Cycle Assessment : Mapping and Overview of current use by humanitarian organisations on the main elements, findings and recommendations” (available under Downloads here https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/climate-change-and-environment_en)

Alternative approaches - that are less costly and time-consuming - can also be used. Streamlined LCA methodologies⁷, for example, simplified data and assumptions to quickly identify key environmental impacts and support greener procurement choices. While LCAs typically focus on emissions, this alone may be insufficient for sound decision-making. Balanced scorecard approaches⁸, which combine LCA results and other environmental factors, provide another suitable alternative.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Focus on greening procurement for high-volume or frequent purchases, high-spend areas, and goods or services with the greatest environmental impact, where your organisation has the most influence and can achieve the biggest impact.
- ✓ Undertake LCAs only where clearly justified (i.e. for cases of uncertainty, critical decision-making, or significant potential impact).
- ✓ Draw on existing evidence and sector-wide information – including results and common findings from LCAs, streamlined LCAs, balanced scorecards, and market analyses – to guide updates to product specifications so that climate and environmental considerations are properly integrated.
- ✓ Share these “green” specifications across the sector (for example, through [the Green Procurement Specifications Repository](#) below) to minimise workload and avoid duplication, particularly for smaller organisations that have limited capacity or are less advanced in their greening efforts. Sharing and using them as a basis for dialogue with suppliers can also stimulate demand, lower costs, and increase the availability of greener products and services.
- ✓ As LCAs are often unavailable for locally procured goods and services, prioritise engagement with local suppliers to jointly explore practical, greener options that reflect their knowledge and capacities.
- ✓ Harness the expertise of environmental experts to interpret LCAs, carry out new assessments where needed, and support suppliers to reduce environmental impacts.
- ✓ Where feasible, and where certification schemes exist, procure items from certified suppliers or products that meet high environmental and climate performance standards. Examples include EnergyStar for IT equipment, relevant eco-labels for office equipment, and Ecocert or similar schemes for agricultural products.
- ✓ Special attention should be paid to the procurement of timber, bamboo, or related materials for shelter or construction projects, as unsustainable sourcing can cause serious environmental harm. Such materials should be purchased from certified suppliers⁹. If certified materials are not available, organisations should seek expert advice to identify sustainable alternatives. Where impacts cannot be fully avoided, mitigation actions should be considered.

⁷ For example, the Climate Action Accelerator has developed a Streamlined methodology for LCA that analyses the most intensive areas of impact within the products’ life cycle and pinpoints the scope of action for impact reduction (see methodology paper here https://climateactionaccelerator.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/EPFL_LCA_methodology_v1.0.pdf). Elsewhere, the WFP has developed an efficient methodology to conduct a streamlined LCA of packaging used in humanitarian settings. This helps to identify which packaging types have higher footprints and where interventions can reduce impacts. See <https://www.logcluster.org/en/document/streamlined-life-cycle-assessment-world-food-programme-food-packaging>

⁸ LCAs typically measure CO₂ equivalent emissions, but practitioners also need tools to guide mitigation decisions. A scorecard approach – on the other hand - combines LCA results with other environmental and social factors, helping avoid trade-offs whereby focusing on one metric may lead to unintended harm.

⁹ Such as those accredited by the [Forest Stewardship Council](#), [Sustainable Forestry Initiative](#), or [American Tree Farm System](#).

- ✓ Embed environmental sustainability across procurement policies, strategies, and manuals by integrating environmental considerations into product specifications, tender requirements, and supplier selection criteria. This can include applying environmental criteria to product choices, favouring suppliers that actively reduce impacts, or selecting products with recycled content, for example. These approaches should be adapted to different supplier contexts to avoid unintentionally excluding smaller or local suppliers with limited capacity or resources to implement advanced sustainability measures.
- ✓ Conduct periodic green market assessments to ensure local suppliers are aware of humanitarian demand for sustainably sourced goods and services, while enabling humanitarian organisations to make informed, comparable, and practical procurement decisions that reduce environmental impact in complex and resource-constrained contexts.
- ✓ Apply available tools and guidance to strengthen green procurement practices and engage with other humanitarian organisations through established coordination fora such as country Logistics Clusters, the WREC Coalition, the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations, the Global Platform for Action, or the Inter-Agency Procurement Group. These bodies should be consulted for tools and guidance to support greener procurement.



KEY RESOURCES

Resources from DG ECHO

- [Guidance on the operationalisation of the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations](#) : this refers to green procurement throughout and contains a section on sustainable supply chains (pages 29-35).
- [Conclusions and recommendations regarding LCA use in the humanitarian sector](#) (under Downloads). This qualitative analysis is part of ECHO's mapping of existing LCAs of relief items used in humanitarian aid. The mapping has led to the creation of a product-based database that currently includes 89 LCAs. It helps organisations to quickly identify which products have been assessed and to understand their environmental impacts, thereby helping to avoid duplicating work already carried out within the sector. The LCAs will be progressively integrated into the abovementioned [LCA Resource Hub](#) (managed by the WREC Coalition).

Resources from WREC Coalition

- [Environmentally Sustainable Humanitarian Logistics MOOC \(Massive Open Online Course\). online course.](#)
- [Cheat Sheet on Green Procurement](#) (Practical 7-step guide to green procurement)
- [Quick Guide: Environmentally Sustainable Procurement](#) (how to get started with environmentally sustainable procurement)
- [Green Procurement Specifications Repository](#) (environmentally sustainable product specifications from across various organisations' catalogues)
- [Life Cycle Assessment Resource Hub](#) (provides full LCA reports of humanitarian relief items, and guidance on applying LCAs in planning, sourcing, and transport)
- [Green Procurement Market Assessment Toolkit](#) (helps humanitarian organisations to evaluate local markets' capacity to supply greener alternatives).
- [Making Sustainability Sustainable Through Circular Economy](#) (lists best practices and examples of sustainable procurement saving costs)

Hulo's [Joint Procurement Initiatives](#) (JPIs): These allow humanitarian organisations to pool procurement efforts, reduce costs, and access higher-quality, more sustainable goods and services.

Open to local and international organisations, JPIs prioritise local procurement, with Hulo working closely with suppliers and supporting greater participation by local humanitarian organisations.

Resources from the Sustainable Supply Chain Alliance¹⁰

- [Sustainable procurement guidelines](#).
- [Sustainability \(green\) specifications](#) for several standard products¹¹
- [The Supplier Code of Conduct](#) - includes relevant social, environmental, and quality standards

The IFRC [Green Logistics Guide](#) : This offers practical tips and good practices for organisations beginning their “greening journey”. It is available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic, with an accompanying webinar and presentation.

Case study [Promoting Sustainability through Supply Chains - Lessons from Save the Children International/SCI](#) (explains measures taken by SCI including the creation of a supplier sustainability policy, staff sustainability pledge and sustainability criteria to evaluate prospective suppliers).

The Interagency Procurement Group (IAPG)¹² [Supplier Sustainability and Ethical Code of Conduct](#) provides a common framework for organisations to embed environmental (as well as social and ethical) standards in procurement. It is based on SCI’s Supplier Sustainability Policy. Organisations can include this in tender documents and integrate it into supplier contracts.

Réseau Environnement Humanitaire (REH)’s [Sustainable Procurement Criteria Database/ SPCD](#) Developed by REH’s Sustainable Procurement Working Group, the SPCD provides environmental and social procurement criteria across 30 goods and service categories.

Climate Action Accelerator’s [Procurement Solutions](#) pages and [Repository of Life Cycle Assessments](#) produced as part of its [LCA Project](#)¹³ aimed at identifying climate and health hotspots across the life cycle of core relief items. LCAs were conducted (or existing ones adapted) for 13 items¹⁴, and emission factors tailored to humanitarian supply chains were calculated for each.



PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Do not treat green procurement as a tick-box exercise by failing to carry out green market assessments or engage in dialogue with suppliers on what is and is not feasible, as this limits its ability to drive lower-impact, locally appropriate goods and services.
- Avoid siloing functions: green procurement can become unnecessarily complex and less effective when programmes, procurement teams and leadership do not work together.
- Avoid excluding smaller or local suppliers by overburdening them with climate and environmental requirements they cannot reasonably understand or meet, as this risks undermining localisation objectives; instead, adopt a collaborative and supportive approach.

¹⁰ Project led by ICRC and aimed at integrating the 3 pillars of sustainability (environmental, social, and economic) into the supply chain of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

¹¹ Food parcels, synthetic blankets, floor mats, mattresses, mosquito nets, plastic buckets, plastic foldable jerrycans, kitchen sets, hygiene parcels, solar lamps, tents, tarpaulins and plastic sheeting roll and shelter toolkits

¹² IAPG is a network of nearly 30 organisations, mostly NGOs, who share knowledge and aim to exert greater influence over procurement issues. Sustainability has become a key topic over the past few years, and contributions have included a procurement essentials guide, environmental criteria for contracts, and a supplier sustainability policy (inspired by Save the Children’s work) as well as selection criteria for various markets, including sustainability considerations.

¹³ Entitled “Accelerating the reduction of the environmental impact of humanitarian action”. As part of this project, LCAs were conducted (or existing ones adapted for 13 key humanitarian items, including mattresses, blankets, jerrycans, buckets, mats, solar lamps, hygiene kits and products, PPE, mosquito nets, and RUTF. Emission factors tailored to humanitarian supply chains were calculated for each.

¹⁴ These included mattresses, blankets, jerrycans, buckets, mats, solar lamps, hygiene kits and products, PPE, mosquito nets, and RUTF.

Do not assume that local procurement is automatically greener, as locally sourced goods may in some cases have higher carbon intensity, generate more waste, fail to meet environmental standards or be less durable than internationally procured alternatives.

- Do not assume that the cost of greening is a barrier, as greener products and services do not necessarily cost more and simple measures can reduce both environmental impacts and costs.



GOOD PRACTICES

- Advocate internally and mobilise leadership to embed greening in routine procurement practice by reframing “value for money” to include climate and environmental impacts across the full life cycle, and by consistently highlighting the co-benefits of environmental sustainability, such as improved efficiency, reduced risk and potential cost savings. Embed shared responsibility by integrating environmental sustainability across departments and roles rather than confining it to a single function, recognising that both programme and procurement staff have a role to play and that effective interdepartmental collaboration is essential.
- Invest in people and capacity by allocating dedicated human resources and drawing on the expertise of environmental specialists (including local experts) to strengthen procurement teams, ensuring they have the time, tools and confidence to identify greener options, engage suppliers effectively, work with logistics and programme teams, and apply environmental criteria flexibly across different contexts.
- Use established national and international standards and labelling schemes in procurement processes to ensure credibility, comparability and consistency, and to reduce the risk of greenwashing.
- Engage suppliers strategically by mapping their understanding of and progress on sustainability, then providing tailored support: suppliers with lower awareness may require training and close accompaniment, while more advanced suppliers may benefit from resource-sharing and signposting to existing tools and platforms. Existing market assessments can help in this regard.
- Collaborate across organisations by working with peers on joint advocacy to suppliers and by sharing specifications, market assessments, tools and resources, thereby strengthening collective influence and reducing duplication of effort.
- “Right-sizing” procurement should also be considered as an essential part of green procurement. This includes adequately planning the number of items, size and frequency of procurement and distribution.