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Grassroots Change

Volunteering, leadership and emancipation through hands-on work and mentoring



Climate Guidelines for Volunteer Projects



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Introduction :	1
Why this toolkit and the role of SCI	4
Previous projects and toolkits on the topic	5
Dictionary	6
Climate Justice	8
Our ecological handprint	8
Our ecological footprint	9
Food	10
Travel	11
Responsible Energy	12
Cleaning	13
Waste	14

Introduction :

This toolkit came to life in a cooperative framework of the project Grassroots change: Volunteering, leadership and emancipation through hands-on work and mentoring, thanks to financial support of the UNESCO' s Participation Programme and the Erasmus + Programme of the European Union. Grassroot Change had the objective to improve the quality of short- and long-term volunteer projects in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa and Europe, and to combat the decrease in volunteer exchange between European and African countries, creating a basic change in the communities of each organization.



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Grassroot Change has seen several associations involved: Zimbabwe Workcamps Association, Vwan Nigeria, AJOV Moçambique, South Africa Volunteer Work Camp Association, KVT Finland, Service Civil International (SCI) e Servei Civil Internacional and SCI Italy.



Associação dos Jovens Voluntários

One of the activities of the project was the European Regional campleader training: it took place in Italy, Rome, from 19th to 26th of June. The training, coordinated by SCI Italy, has seen 17 participants who, through non-formal education, have addressed issues such as group management, nonviolent communication, and conflict transformation.



Furthermore, the participants have visited the Semi di Comunità - CSA Rome, a Sustainable Agricultural Community located in Rome; the CSA members showed to the participants their values of solidarity, inclusion and respect for nature. In particular, during the tour they explained their production of healthy food, using agro-ecological production techniques that enrich the biodiversity of the fields and tend, over time, to reintroduce an agro-forestry system.



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Why this toolkit and the role of SCI

SCI was created in order to work on several challenges, such as war, destruction, injustice and violence. In the last 100 years of commitment to building peace and promoting the culture of peace, SCI has reacted to postwar situations, natural disasters, ecological and social challenges.

Today climate change is for us what World War I was to Pierre Cérésolle - the founder of SCI - in early XX century: it presents a growing threat to peace, nonviolence and human rights. The climate is changing rapidly around the planet and this change is without question caused by humans. Our fossil fuel based economy and capitalistic system is contributing significantly to this process.

So, since climate justice is in line with SCI's mission and values, we think it is important to answer the call for climate action! Especially that it is often coming from the impacted communities in the countries where SCI and its partners are active.

We work on numerous fronts to find ways for a more sustainable future. From educating on climate issues to supporting local initiatives for sustainability, we involve our branches and activists all around the world to make the climate justice dimension mainstream in SCI activities and through this ensure that SCI has a meaningful and active part of the solution to the multidimensional climate crisis.

Furthermore, since we are a movement of different people and bodies, with partner organisations all over the world, it is important to highlight the fact that sustainability of workcamps can change context by context. What is considered green in one country, it isn't in another one. So, it is always important to take into consideration the political, social and economical aspects of a context.

Previous projects and toolkits on the topic

Our branches and partners organize training courses, workshops, events, to inform and educate people on different aspects of the climate crisis and possible solutions.

In 2021-2022, SCI Germany and SCI Austria organized a project called MOVE on the impact of flying across the globe on the environment. Click [here](#) and [here](#) to discover the everyday lives of the participants of the project.

In June 2022, the International Secretariat has organized a week-long training course in Belgium for future coordinators, with the goal to educate the participants on how to organize sustainable and inclusive projects within SCI.

Our [Peace Education in Practice](#) online learning course contains a module on Peace with Nature.

Moreover, every year our Branches and Partners organise workcamps and long-term volunteering positions around ecology, permaculture, sustainability, beach cleaning or forest maintenance, ... You can check out the available opportunities on our

workcamps database and filter your search by the topics “Environment protection” and “Climate and sustainable lifestyle”.

Whom to involve?

For organizing a sustainable volunteer project, it is important to **get all other actors on board**: coordinators, host organisation, the accommodation, project partner, participants, local people, office staff and logistic support people - whoever is involved in your project.

→ As soon as possible, try to put sustainability on the agenda in the preparation!

Dictionary

- **Carbon sinks** - an area of forest that is large enough to absorb large amounts of carbon dioxide from the earth's atmosphere and therefore to reduce the effect of global warming ([Cambridge dictionary, n.d](#))
- **Climate change** - Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural, but since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels (like coal, oil and gas), which produces heat-trapping gasses. ([UN, n.d](#))
- **Climate crisis** - serious problems that are being caused or likely to be caused by changes in the world's weather, in particular the world getting warmer as a result of human activity increasing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere ([Cambridge dictionary, n.d](#))
- **CO2 equivalent (eq)** - A carbon dioxide equivalent or CO2 equivalent, abbreviated as CO2-eq is a metric measure used to compare the emissions from various greenhouse gasses on the basis of their global-warming potential (GWP), by converting amounts of other gasses to the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide with the same global warming potential. ([Eurostat, 9 March 2017](#))
- **Compost** - decaying plant material that is added to soil to improve its quality ([Cambridge dictionary, n.d](#))
- **Degrowth** - Degrowth is an idea that critiques the global capitalist system which pursues growth at all costs, causing human exploitation and environmental destruction. The degrowth movement of activists and researchers advocates for societies that prioritize social and ecological well-being instead of corporate profits, over-production and excess consumption. This requires radical redistribution, reduction in the material size of the global economy, and a shift in common values towards care, solidarity and autonomy. Degrowth means transforming societies to ensure environmental justice and a good life for all within planetary boundaries ([Degrowth, n.d](#)).
- **Ecosystem** - the complex of living organisms, their physical environment, and all their interrelationships in a particular unit of space. ([Britannica, 26 March 2023](#))

- **Eutrophication** - the gradual increase in the concentration of phosphorus, nitrogen, and other plant nutrients in an aging aquatic ecosystem such as a lake. ([Britannica, 26 January 2023](#))
- **Fair-trade** - a way of buying and selling products that makes certain that the people who produce the goods receive a fair price ([Cambridge dictionary, n.d](#))
- **Fossil fuels** - any of a class of hydrocarbon containing materials of biological origin occurring within Earth's crust that can be used as a source of energy. ([Britannica, 5 April 2023](#))
- **Global warming** - Global warming is the long-term heating of Earth's surface observed since the pre-industrial period (between 1850 and 1900) due to human activities, primarily fossil fuel burning, which increases heat-trapping greenhouse gas levels in Earth's atmosphere. ([NASA, 14 April 2023](#))
- **Greenhouse effect** - The greenhouse effect is a process that occurs when gasses in Earth's atmosphere trap the Sun's heat. This process makes Earth much warmer than it would be without an atmosphere. ([NASA, 31 March 2023](#))
- **Greenhouse gasses** - any gas that has the property of absorbing infrared radiation (net heat energy) emitted from Earth's surface and reradiating it back to Earth's surface, thus contributing to the greenhouse effect. Carbon dioxide, methane and water vapor are the most important greenhouse gasses. ([Britannica, 6 April 2023](#))
- **Human rights** - Human rights are standards that recognize and protect the dignity of all human beings. ([UNICEF, 2015](#))
- **Intersectionality** - "Intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking." (Crenshaw, 1989)¹
- **Needs based mentality** - changing the mindset of consumption to include what you actually need instead of what you want (Climate for Peace toolkit).
- **Organic** - not using artificial chemicals in the growing of plants and animals for food and other products ([Cambridge dictionary, n.d](#))
- **Permaculture** - Permaculture integrates land, resources, people and the environment through mutually beneficial synergies – imitating the no waste, closed loop systems seen in diverse natural systems. ([Permaculture research institute, n.d](#))
- **Renewable energy** - Renewable energy is energy derived from natural sources that are replenished at a higher rate than they are consumed. Sunlight and wind, for example, are such sources that are constantly being replenished. Renewable energy sources are plentiful and all around us. ([UN, n.d](#))
- **Vegan** - a person who does not eat or use any animal products, such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese, or leather ([Cambridge dictionary, n.d](#))
- **Vegetarian** - a person who does not eat meat for health or religious reasons or because they want to avoid being cruel to animals ([Cambridge dictionary, n.d](#))
- **VOC pollution** - Volatile organic compounds are compounds that have a high vapor pressure and low water solubility. Many VOCs are human-made chemicals that are used and produced in the manufacture of paints, pharmaceuticals, and refrigerants. ([EPA, 15 March 2023](#))

¹ Crenshaw, Kimberle' Williams (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." University of Chicago Legal Forum 1989:139–67, p. 149

- **Zero waste** - A zero-waste approach entails responsible production, consumption and disposal of products in a closed, circular system. This means that resources are reused or recovered as much as possible and that we minimize the pollution to air, land or water. ([UN, n.d](#))

Climate Justice

Why do we speak about this? Climate justice means to treat the climate crisis as a question of social justice and to tackle social and economic conditions as well and look at historical responsibilities like where and who did cause the majority of pollution. It is not only an issue of the environment. It is connected with other social issues like feminism, migrations, decolonisation, even LGBTIQ+ rights and thus we need to talk about it from an intersectional perspective. For that reason it is important to include the debate on the climate crisis in all of the spaces as all of them are connected and look at it with a systemic approach as it can help tackle those other inequalities.

What can we do to actively strive for climate justice?

1. **Inform** yourself, question, reflect and try to recognise inequalities
2. **Empowerment**: create rooms for exchange with people with **similar** experiences
3. **Listen** actively to people affected by discrimination, learn about their perspectives and take their critiques into account
4. **Give room** to less visible people
5. **Make actions accessible** for people with different life realities
6. **Show solidarity** and ask people who experience discrimination how to support them
7. **Learn about the history** of climate justice movements, frontline fights, the origins of discriminations and the connection between climate crisis and colonialism

Source.

<https://www.bundjugend.de/wp-content/uploads/Fuer-ein-Klima-der-Gerechtigkeit-Flyer.pdf>

Our ecological handprint

What is it? Why do we do this?

Besides focusing on the negative impacts our behavior has on the climate and environment (see “our ecological footprint”), we can also focus on the positive change our actions can have. We refer to this as the “ecological handprint”, a concept initially raised from the Indian organization CEE, to encourage commitment. In volunteering projects this can be different activities in work or study parts e.g.

- join or organize awareness raising, policy debates, petitions, signature campaigns, demonstrations, public actions
- organize trainings, events, seminars (e.g. climate or eco messenger)
- involve in climate justice movements
- speak to politicians
- engage in projects which help communities adapt to climate change impacts and protection

- composting, permaculture and presentation of other alternative lifestyles

Regarding the last point it is important to remember that there are certain widely promoted actions that in reality have a low impact on mitigating the climate crisis. A good example of such action is planting trees. Even though trees are a good carbon sink which takes out the CO₂ from the atmosphere, theoretically for it to be an effective action we would need to plant another 1 trillion trees on our planet (there are around 3 trillion trees currently there). The problem is that due to the climate crisis the soil quality went down, and in many places it wouldn't support the growth of new planted trees. For that same reason those trees wouldn't be able to absorb the same amount of CO₂ as the ones that are already there. Another thing is space. In order to plant 1 trillion trees we would need to probably destroy some cities and transform our land in a way that wouldn't be able to support the amount of people living on Earth.

Talking about reforestation as an effective way of mitigating the impact of the climate crisis is taking the focus away from the concentration on actually fighting deforestation. New trees often can be adding to the problem while the trees that we already have can actually help us save civilization as we know it.

We give that example to make you realize that some actions that we consider helpful could be taking our energy in a different place then it is needed. For that reason we should be informing ourselves well on things we do to not let ourselves accidentally fall into a greenwashing narrative.

- You can find more information about different forms of actions and how to organize them in the padlet.

Our ecological footprint

What is it and why should we be careful about it?

The idea of our ecological footprint was supposedly created to make people more conscious about the influence of our actions on climate by the amount of CO₂eq that we emit. To calculate it many companies and organizations have created different carbon footprint calculators (Source: [Durojaye, Laseinde & Oluwafemi, 2019](#)). They can be used for individuals, countries, and the global level organizations to find out how many resources they use (and compare it to the planetary capacities). It is very important to know that the concept of the Carbon Foot was introduced by BP, the biggest British oil company, to shift the responsibilities from the companies to the consumers (Source [Supran & Oreskes, 2021](#)). It very effectively took the focus away from the systemic roots of the problem. Political actions favoring structural change are often left out there as well (see paragraph on handprint). Even though by promoting sustainability and climate justice, we try to reduce the ecological footprint of our volunteering project we need to be careful to not repeat the same narrative as BP and other responsible companies! SCI as an organization is a part of the system and we have a responsibility to not push our volunteers to create more carbon footprint then it is unavoidable in the capitalistic system that we live in. Still by pushing our volunteers to worry about their own individual ecological footprint we take the focus away from the actual roots of the problem. If anything, we should mainly target the big points (high-impact) behaviors

first (e.g. not taking the airplane, not eating animal products) (Source [Lacroix, 2018](#)), so first focus on what matters, and always present it as a way of influencing a system and not a way to make ourselves more sustainable and greener.

For volunteering projects, we therefore focus on the four areas: Travel, Food, Energy Use and Waste Generation (each described in the next sections). At the same time we really want to point out that those actions and changes cannot substitute the real political action as they are unproportional to the real issue we are dealing with. It is our responsibility to promote involvement in public life and active citizenship.

Food

Our choices of food is one of the main ways through which we can influence climate change. About one fourth of a person's climate imprint comes from the food they eat ([WWF, n.d](#)).

Eating less animal products is the behavior with the biggest potential of reduction of greenhouse gas emissions on an individual level ([Lacroix, 2018](#)). This is because the cows produce methane naturally through their digestive system, which then turns into carbon dioxide when it decomposes in nature. Methan itself is also contributing to global warming, being a stronger greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Since a lot of people in the northern hemisphere eat meat and dairy on a daily basis, the meat- and dairy industry breeds a lot of cows. This makes the emissions very high. The fabrics also contribute to the emissions getting even higher, through producing the actual products from the meat and milk.

Adding to this the food industry is problematic in other ways. To begin with it is a problem that the industries buy land previously filled with forest, or land used for other cultivations, to be able to breed the cows and food for the cows. Non-organic farming furthermore risks causing eutrophication of water, and the pesticides are dangerous for the persons working with it. The farmers also often get low salaries/gain at the end of the production chain, and other than this being unfair, it sometimes causes a black market of food. Finally, our food consumption contributes to conflicts and migration on a wide scale level. As for most, if not all issues concerning climate change, the people living in the southern hemisphere are the ones most negatively affected, while at the same time have contributed the least to the problem to begin with.

An SCI workcamp can be a leading example of concrete sustainable food consumption encouraging its replication even outside of the camp. To accomplish this we have some tips that you can find on the next page.

Tips :

- Cook vegan/vegetarian meals at the camp. Distribute the recipes after the camp and tell the volunteers where you find them, so the volunteers gets suggestions on where to find other vegan/vegetarian recipes.

- Cook with seasonal ingredients which are locally produced and organic when possible.
- Eat simple and fresh food instead of processed food.
- Avoid food waste and use leftover ingredients. You can also collect leftovers and food from local food shops and markets.
- While doing the grocery shopping keep in mind the aspects: local, plant-based, seasonal, organic, fair-trade, human rights, packaging.
- Compost bio-waste if you have the possibility to follow through with the whole process of composting, for example through collaborating with local associations that already have compost. This contributes to the wellbeing of the soil, so that you can plant in it more easily.
- Organize a night dedicated to discussing the theme of food justice and sustainability. You can do this through for example:
 - Visiting an eco-farm or a sustainable agriculture community
 - Have interactive informal educational game about food
 - Experts visit
 - Workshop about how you can become your own producer of food, for example giving suggestions about how to bake your own bread and grow your own condiments and vegetables
 - Cinema nights/videos sessions. Some documentaries to keep in mind are: Cowspiracy, Seaspiracy, <https://www.edengreen.com/blog-collection/10-documentaries-on-food-sustainability>

Travel

Flying - with all the opportunities it offers for international encounters - is increasingly creating socially and ecologically unjust conditions. This is in strong contradiction to our goals as a peace organization. As it is written at our international Website: "Today climate change is for us what World War I was to Pierre Ceresole in the early 20th century: it presents a growing threat to peace, nonviolence and human rights." (<https://sci.ngo/our-work/themes/climate/>)

That is why we think that it is urgently needed that we reduce flights within SCI! But how?

We would like to reach our volunteers at an early stage and raise their awareness of climate issues.

We want them to make a conscious decision when choosing a camp, also taking into account which means of transport they can travel to the camp. Information on the impact of flying and tips on climate-friendly alternatives to travel should be made available to them early on (the infosheet comes too late). Green transport/ sustainable travel focuses on the protection of the natural world, combating climate change, engaging the community and supporting sustainable growth through the elimination of waste. It leaves an eco-friendly footprint that helps humanity to preserve natural and cultural gems, keeping them intact for generations to come. In essence, it helps in the harmonization of the natural, social and economic environment.

Tips :

- Travel with public transport (Ask local people and where to find them : bus/train station).
- Consider activities that combine experiences and environmental benefits, ex : voluntary work etc.
- During your travel, find eco-friendly accommodation.
- When you use public transport, be patient and take your time, enjoy the trip.
- Research on the transport system of your destination before traveling.
- Rent hybrid cars

Responsible Energy

Introduction :

Energy is fundamental in our daily life and we need an extremely huge amount of it. This is why it is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. These emissions are the first cause of climate change, and leading to disasters worldwide as our global economy is completely dependent on fossil fuels.

Below you will find some basic tips for how you can introduce ways of saving energy during the camp. We would especially like to highlight the first point that we find crucial if we truly want to talk about responsible energy management.

Especially in a context of the energy crisis, the energy bills are currently growing higher. Therefore, in the context of other tips below, we still believe we should be talking about them. But the reason for them is not to be more sustainable, as these small changes will have an insignificantly small impact on the climate crisis. They can, though, have an impact on the height of our energy bills, and that is the most reasonable explanation behind why we should pay attention to them and actively work on changing our system, so that we do not have to worry about the lack of heat in our houses in the future.

Tips :

- Organize a seminar about how global economy is addicted to fossil fuels and how our way of production of energy is currently influencing various crises around the world (ex. climate crisis, energy crisis, Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but also how is it all connected to issues of social justice)
- Take shorter/colder showers
- Don't store any hot food in the fridge
- Close the water tap while brushing your teeth
- If it's cold, wear more clothes
- Switch the old lightbulbs to low energy ones
- Provides fans instead of AC, if it is possible rely on breeze
- Dedicate a specific day for laundry to have an efficient usage of energy and water
- Introduce a habit of being responsible with the energy use during the camp, to remind them of these guidelines

Cleaning

Cleaning products (such as cleaners for windows, floors, stoves, toilets, bathtubs, disinfectants, etc.) are made with different kind of chemicals and are part of the larger chemical industry, which is extremely energy intensive (heat, pressure, electricity) and the second largest user of fuel in the manufacturing sector. This happens, because most of the chemical industry uses petroleum and natural gas to make chemicals. Consumer products (including cleaning products) emit just as much VOC pollution (volatile organic compounds) into our air as tailpipe emissions from vehicles. The chemicals pollute streams and rivers and may take a long time to break down, sometimes entering the food chain. Furthermore, cleaning products' packaging adds to the harm of the environment. To this is, lastly, also added the class dimension, since people with a higher socioeconomic standard have the possibility to gain access to knowledge about the dangers with cleaning products, as well as to buy safer and more organic products.

In SCI we want to be inclusive to people with different standards of cleanliness and to people with allergies. With that said, we also have to remember that the economical capitalist system is benefitting from us wanting to keep both ourselves, our things and our environments very clean. There is an ongoing debate about the so-called "hygiene hypothesis" talking about whether keeping yourself too clean is beneficial for us as individuals. It can make us develop allergies. Furthermore it can ruin our clothes. However, cleaning at a workcamp is inevitable, and we therefore have to make efforts to make sure that the cleaning being done is as kind to our health and the environment as possible. In the chart you can find different tips for achieving a sustainable cleaning process.

Preparing	Cleaning during the workcamp	Everything is clean, what now ?
<p>Ask yourself :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Can your SCI Branch buy green products ? -Can the partner buy products with labels from local + herbal stores ? <p>Do the research :</p> <p>Application "Think dirty"</p> <p>Ressources padlet</p>	<p>Making :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Make your own cleaning products and use natural cleaning products such as baking soda and vinegar when possible: you make this through lemon, vinegar and baking soda <p>Buying :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Buy less cleaning products, and when you buy do it in big packs to avoid unnecessary packing -Watch out for phosphates and nitrates -Shop local, organic and vegan <p>Using :</p>	<p>Dispose :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The packaging → Recycle -The dirty water → Not near water supply <p>Spread the message</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Testimonies (video) - Greenpeace campaigns - Eco volunteer - Distribute recipes for creating your own cleaning products: <p>https://padlet.com/Marieboutier/grassroot-climate-justice-jlikgf1rokalmajx/wish/2230236179</p>

	-Use less cleaning products -Think about the necessity of cleaning and whether you have to buy new products for this or can create your own!	
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Waste

Waste is one of the most common topics appearing around the discussion on climate change. It is true that it is one of the most polluting factors that influences the health of soil and waters on Earth. It is important to know though that the belief that just reducing our waste's production could help significantly to mitigate the impacts of the climate crisis is not true. Waste is responsible for only 3.2% of global CO₂eq emissions.

Still waste reduction is promoted as the most effective way for us as individuals to have a positive impact on climate change. During our volunteering camps we shouldn't add to this false view. Yes, let's try to reduce our waste and not use unnecessary materials, but let's not obsess over it. Especially let's not obsess over recycling! Currently only 9%² of global plastic waste is recycled, wouldn't it be better to put our focus on working on changes in the energy sector instead of obsessing over something visibly ineffective?

As camp organizers you can still take a look at some of the tips below, keeping in mind what we have written about those actions before.

Tips :

- Think about the needs and not wants, meaning that already in the initial phases of our projects, we should start considering buying only really necessary materials, tools and groceries.
- Use reusable materials
- Plan meals
- Avoid overusing water

Do you want more information ?



²

<https://www.oecd.org/environment/plastic-pollution-is-growing-relentlessly-as-waste-management-and-recycling-fall-short.htm>

→ In this [Padlet](#) you find more information and a collection of useful toolkits