Disrupting the Status Quo:
Young Professionals' Approach to Social Sustainability

ICCA

About ICCA and the Future Leaders Council

Shaping the future and value of international association meetings

ICCA - the International Congress and Convention Association - is the global community and knowledge hub for the international association meetings industry. The Future Leaders Council is a leadership initiative, launched in the spring of 2021, to involve young professionals in sharing new ideas, concepts and approaches to meet future challenges of the industry.

ICCA is the global association leader for the international meetings industry. Since its establishment in 1963, ICCA offers unrivalled data, education, communication channels, and business development and networking opportunities. ICCA represents the world's top destinations and most experienced suppliers specialised in handling, transporting and accommodating international meetings and events, and comprises of over 1,100 member companies and organisations in almost 100 countries and territories worldwide. As of 2020 ICCA encompasses all major stakeholders in the world of association meetings, by opening its doors to associations with the launch of the "ICCA Association Community", offering education, connections, tools and resources to associations to organise more effective meetings.

With the introduction of the Future Leaders Council, ICCA aims to facilitate sharing ideas and strategies to keep ICCA current, relevant, and positioned as the thought-leaders for the association meeting community. The Future Leaders Council consists of eight representatives from each of ICCA's geographic regions for a term period of two years:

- Africa - 1

- Asia Pacific - 2

- Latin America - 1

- Europe - 2

- Middle East - 1

- North America - 1

The Future Leaders Coucil members all have a variety of academic and professional backgrounds, beliefs and personal interests which ensures the opportunity for dynamic discussion and approaches from new perspectives. Although this international team is characterized by many differences, we have one thing in common: the drive and ambition to create a better future for our industry by bringing fresh perspectives to the table.

This white paper is the first of four publications by the ICCA Future Leaders Council for the term 2021-2023, and the first topic chosen by the councilmembers themselves. These papers are aimed towards the international association community, to assist them in running more efficient and effective meetings whilst also introducing new ideas, challenging the status quo and giving young professionals the opportunity to influence and impact the industry now, as well as in the future.

If you would like to join the ICCA Community or the next term of the Future Leaders Council, please visit the ICCA website www.iccaworld.org. For more information and to get in touch with the Future Leaders Council, please contact: Frances van Klaveren, Community Engagement Manager, at frances.k@iccaworld.org.

Summary

The Future Leaders Council created its first white paper which aims to discuss the centrality of social responsibility in meeting the post-pandemic needs of ICCA's association meetings. The idea is framed by an understanding that change begins with the people attending and organizing meetings, rather than meeting environmental KPIs. The council members were tasked to think outside the box - resulting in a paper that doesn't focus on environmental issues, but instead on empowering the next generation. The paper's objective is to refocus on social sustainability through the eyes of young event professionals. It also includes recommendations for the association meeting industry's stakeholders on how they should consider implementing best practices to ensure their future meetings are socially sustainable, by attracting and retaining young professionals in the industry.

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, our industry has begun questioning the environmental and economic sustainability of hosting conferences, congresses, meetings and events as limitations on travel and social gatherings have disrupted the fundamentals of our business. In turn, less attention has been given to the social sustainability component, leaving a disparity of active and engaged young professionals in our industry searching for purpose, action and meaningful connections. We are suggesting that if organizations do not focus on social sustainability and attracting, empowering, growing and retaining the younger generation, our industry's future will be put at risk.

Many young professionals had little to no prior knowledge of ICCA prior to entering the industry and we have outlined ways that not only ICCA can improve the engagement of young professionals but the industry as well. Young professionals want:

· Targeted content and involvement;

· Better communication;

· Increased involvement with universities;

· Upskilling opportunities

· More information and access to jobs; and

· A renewed focus on social sustainability.

In terms of the future of meetings, we found that over the course of the pandemic, virtual and hybrid events became the standard. However, video conferencing with its lack of physical mobility and higher cognitive load are becoming psychologically and physically draining. In the near future, the younger generation are looking for events that align with their availability of time and cost, and fit with their work/life balance, as well events which are meaningful and are moving away from being only virtual. We also know, as an industry, that future meetings and events must be planned with safety as a priority.

Finally, at the close of this white paper, the Future Leaders Council puts forward recommendations that focus on:

· Increasing marketing and communications targeted specifically at young professionals;

· Creating education and experiences that involve young professionals at various levels of ICCA as well as within their own organisations;

· Encourage the meetings industry to embrace young professionals not only within this industry but across others as well; and

· Making social sustainability a priority.

Table of Contents

Introduction – our journey to this topic

In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development – WCED – published a report which contains a definition of sustainable development that remains in use even to this day. It reads: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[1]. There are multiple benefits of incorporating sustainable practices into meetings and events. They can lead to a reduction in "environmental impact, and brings numerous advantages to the main actors involved, such as financial benefits, positive reputation and improved image, and social benefits, contributing to positive event legacies."[2].

Simultaneously, meetings require a great number of resources, from flights to food, water, transportation and time.[3] Our industry's response has been to incorporate environmentally sustainable practices into meetings and events, such as ISO certifications, bans on single-use plastic, offsetting carbon emissions from travel, and environmental sustainability is consistently a topic, track or talking point of several industry conferences. Environmentally sustainable practices have widely been labelled as "green", and terms such as "green" destinations, venues and events are now widely accepted, not focusing on the human, social, technological and economic facets to the same extent.

Considering the implications of COVID-19 on people in the international meetings industry, such as policy responses, furlough schemes and financial support measures that further marginalized young workers, in particular as many of them worked in industries that were hit hardest by the pandemic, how will the international meetings industry recover? What do these young professionals need and want? We believe it is very important for our industry to understand why these generations think and feel as they do, to effectively meet their aspirations and needs in the future. Without them, the vitality, recovery and overall sustainability of our industry are in jeopardy.

It is with this background that the ICCA Future Leaders Council made the choice to focus on the topic of social sustainability. Our aim is not to discuss social sustainability as part of an organizational strategy but more so on the importance of inclusion, legacy and engagement amongst the attendees and organizers of future international association meetings. This is framed by an understanding that change begins with people and behaviour rather than solely meeting environmental KPIs. In order to achieve this, we advise involving and uplifting the next generation of young professionals in our industry.

This is what ICCA has done with the introduction of the Future Leaders Council, and is just one of several ways in which we can work together to engage and retain young professionals in our industry. This white paper will describe the current challenges we face, and give the ICCA board, its members and associations ideas on how to engage young professionals to create social sustainability in their meetings and organisations.

---

1 Our Common Future (WCED, 1987) p.37

2 Pavluković et al, "*Sustainability In The Meetings Industry*"(SITCON Conference, Belgrade, 2020) p.6

3 *Sustainable Events Guide* (UNEP, 2012)

Aim - what do we want you to take away?

Through initial conversations within the Future Leaders Council, it became apparent that discrepancies exist in the approaches and priorities between ICCA's geographical regions, making it difficult to discuss the topic of sustainability on a global level. Our discussions then turned to finding common ground in the definition of young professionals and social sustainability, which is the first aim of this white paper.

We also aspire to share the challenges currently faced by the international association meeting industry's young professionals, how they would like to engage with ICCA as an organisation, and how they have experienced changes in the conversation regarding social sustainability over the pandemic, comparing this between the younger and the more senior respondents of a survey we sent out in September 2021.

Thirdly, we strive to understand the behaviour of young professionals when asked about their decision-making factors when deciding to attend future meetings, also comparing these results between generations. We will then aim to make the case that engaging with and incorporating young professionals into the association meetings industry is a method with which to achieve social sustainability of the industry.

We will finish with recommendations for ICCA member organisations and associations alike, which we believe will have a positive impact on their legacy, businesses and engagement with the next generation, ensuring the recovery and reengagement of our industry as a whole.

Within this white paper we will uncover:

- Why our industry must focus on social sustainability and why it should start with the involvement of young professionals.

- The background of young professionals in our industry, how they found their way into it, and what is keeping them here.

- How young professionals engage with ICCA as an organisation and what they believe ICCA can do to further interact with them.

- What the sustainability priorities of the industry are, how they have changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how/ if they differ between generations.

- Which factors are important for attending meetings in the future and how/ if they differ between generations.

- If there are any preferences as to attending virtual events over physical events in the community and how/ if they differ between generations.

- Which recommended areas of interest ICCA should focus on in order to retain young professionals in the industry.

Young Professionals - the next leading generation

The classification of someone as a "Young Professional" can vary across industries and there are several definitions and programmes targeted towards young people in their twenties and thirties. McKinsey & Company defines the generations as seen on the table below.[4]

	B Baby boomer 1940–59	**X** Gen X 1960–79	**Y** Gen Y (millennial) 1980–94	**Z** Gen Z 1995–2010
Context	• Postwar • Dictatorship and repression in Brazil	• Political transition • Capitalism and meritocracy dominate	• Globalization • Economic stability • Emergence of internet	• Mobility and multiple realities • Social networks • Digital natives
Behavior	• Idealism • Revolutionary • Collectivist	• Materialistic • Competitive • Individualistic	• Globalist • Questioning • Oriented to self	• Undefined ID • "Communaholic" • "Dialoguer" • Realistic
Consumption	• Ideology • Vinyl and movies	• Status • Brands and cars • Luxury articles	• Experience • Festivals and travel • Flagships	• Uniqueness • Unlimited • Ethical

McKinsey&Company

In addition to the characteristics above, millennials reflect a large and growing cohort in the meetings industry and are "...considered to be the most environmentally and socially conscious generations, willing to pay more for sustainability...".[5] Gen Z members are also more diverse than any previous generation and are digital natives, who have nearly no memory of the world before smartphones existed. They are also on course to become the most well-educated generation yet.[6] The World Economic Forum Global Risks Report also states that "Many young adults work in the service industry..." which includes accommodation, food services, transport, entertainment, and, implicitly, meetings and events.[7] The report also estimates that around 80% of the world's youths belong to this more informal sector. Together, these generations account for about 55% of the world's population, Gen Z aimed to surpass Millennials as the largest generation with 2.47 billion people compared to 2.43 billion people out of the world's 7.7 billion. [8]

For the purpose of this white paper, young professionals are defined as employed people aged 35 and younger, in line with the age ranges of Millennials and Generation Z, currently used as examples of young professionals in wider research and surveys.[9][10]

Defining social sustainability is not an easy task and has received little attention over the years. The UN Global Compact, the world's largest

4 Francis and Hoefel, "'True Gen': Generation Z And Its Implications For Companies", (McKinsey, 2018)

5 Pavluković et al, "Sustainability In The Meetings Industry"(SITCON Conference, Belgrade, 2020) p.6

6 Parker and Igielnik, What We Know About Gen Z So Far (Pew Research Center', 2020)

7 World Economic Forum, The Global Risks Report 2021, 16Th Edition (World Economic Forum, 2021) p.42

8 Wood, Generation Z Will Outnumber Millennials By 2019, (The European Sting, 2018)

9 Radically Better Future: The Next Gen Reckoning Report (BBMG & GlobeScan, 2020)

10 A Call For Accountability And Action, The Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial And Gen Z Survey (Deloitte, 2020)

Social Sustainability - it is all about people

corporate sustainability initiative, defines social sustainability as the process of "identifying and managing business impacts, both positive and negative, on people".[11] The UNEP shares that the "social aspect of sustainability highlights the fair use of human resources and a healthy and safe workplace for all involved, respecting human rights, the inclusion of minorities, respecting diversity, attention to equal opportunities, encouraging the involvement of the local community, sourcing goods and services locally, and employing local people".[12] For social sustainability therefore, a human's wellbeing is the central focus.

There are seven principles involving people and social sustainability out of the UN Global Compact's Ten Principles, a symbol of the significance of social sustainability. Thus, we regard social sustainability of equal importance as environmental and economic sustainability, although we experience it, it is regarded as less significant than environmental sustainability. According to the UN Global Compact, aiming for social sustainability can help businesses in several ways:

- Unlocking new markets

- Helping retain and attract business partners

- Becoming the source of innovation for new product or service lines

- Raising internal morale and employee engagement

- Improving risk management

- Improving company-community conflicts

In the international meetings industry, there are several benefits of incorporating sustainable practices. They can lead to a reduction in "environmental impact, and brings numerous advantages to the main actors involved, such as financial benefits, positive reputation and improved image, and social benefits, contributing to positive event legacies."[13]

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, our industry has increased focus on the environmental and economic sustainability of hosting conferences, congresses and business events. In turn, less attention has been given to the social sustainability component, leaving a disparity of active and engaged young professionals in our industry searching for purpose, action and meaningful connections. Without the engagement of the next generation, the above goals may not be possible to achieve. We are not discrediting the importance of economic and environment sustainability, instead suggesting that if organizations do not focus on social sustainability and attracting, empowering, growing and retaining the younger generation, our industry's future will be put at risk. Without actively pursuing younger professionals today, the future success of our industry is in jeopardy as there will be no informed and empowered thought leaders to champion the continuation of economic and environment sustainability. Dramatically speaking, without the engagement of the next generation our industry will not survive.

50% of those with a relevant degree, had no knowledge of ICCA or the association meetings industry

11 *Social Sustainability*, United Nations Global Compact (United Nations, 2021)

12 *Sustainable Events Guide* (UNEP, 2012)

13 *"Pavluković et al, "Sustainability In The Meetings Industry"*(SITCON Conference, Belgrade, 2020) p.6

Facing the Facts - the community's voice

The make-up of the Future Leaders Council provides a realistic representation of young professionals in our industry. That said, we are only a small group. In order to collect more input for our research and to support our thoughts the Future Leaders Council, on behalf of ICCA, sent out a survey in September 2021 to all its current members, as well as the 2018 and 2019 Forum for Young Professionals attendees and all applicants to the Future Leaders Council

It was also shared on social media to reach as wide an audience as possible, and we accepted responses from both non-members and those who did not identify as young professionals 35 or under to gain insight into the challenges and interests of non-ICCA members as well as to encourage opportunities for comparison between generations. The survey covered four areas: demographics, young professionals, social sustainability and the decision-making factors of future meetings.

Demographics:
The survey generated a total of 295 responses, of which the makeup of the respondents was as follows:
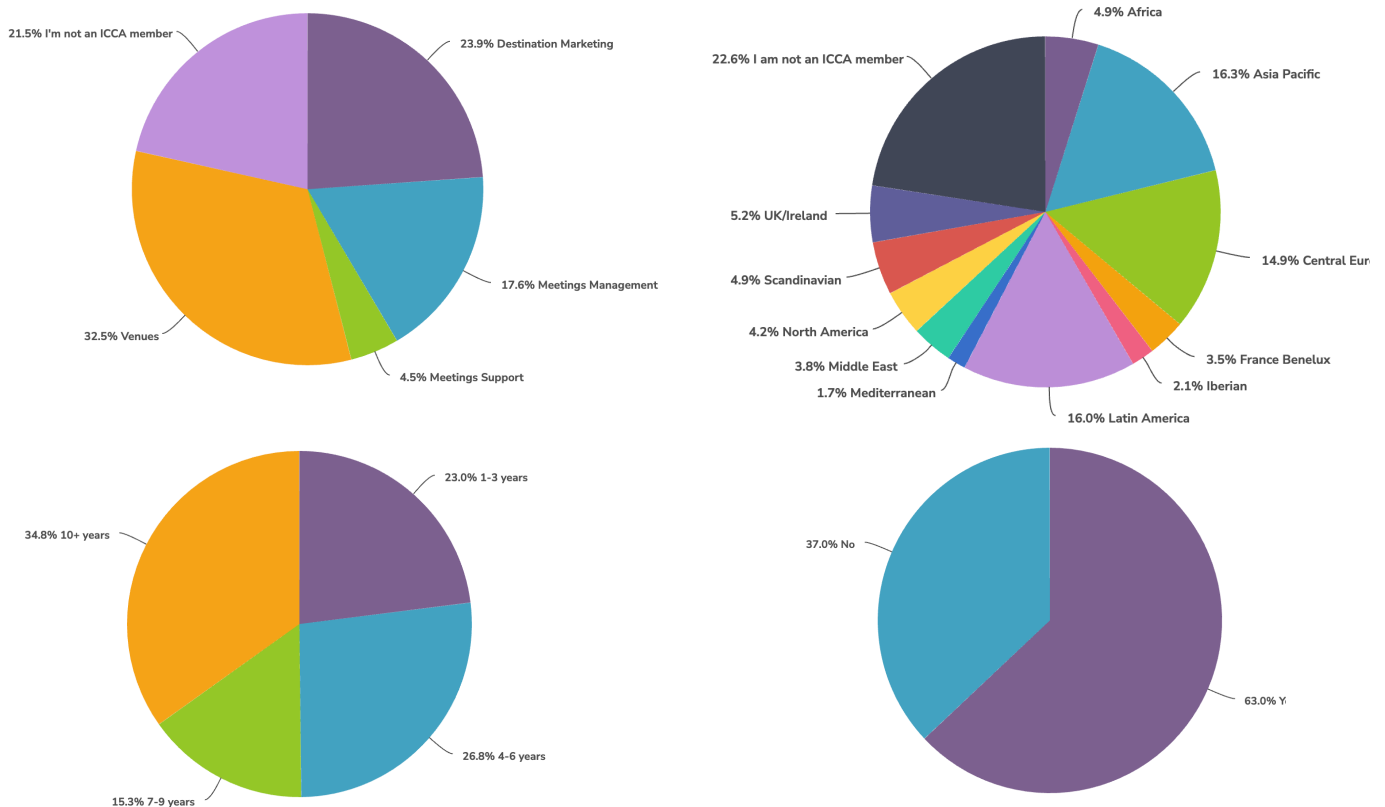

Out of these, 63% identified as Young Professionals.

Focusing on the younger generation, when asked how long they have worked in the industry, the majority of young professionals, 37%, have worked in the industry for 4-6 years, followed by 1-3 years, 31%. Out of the remaining respondents, aged over 35, nearly 75% have worked in the industry for over 10 years, which goes to show that this is an industry that workers remain in for a long time.

The respondents aged 35 and over were more likely in senior company positions such as managers (37%), directors(24%) and CEOs (10%). For Young Professionals, managerial roles were also the most common(42%), followed by coordinators (10%) and executives (9%). Thus, we have a variety of responses from both age groups and company roles.

Young Professionals
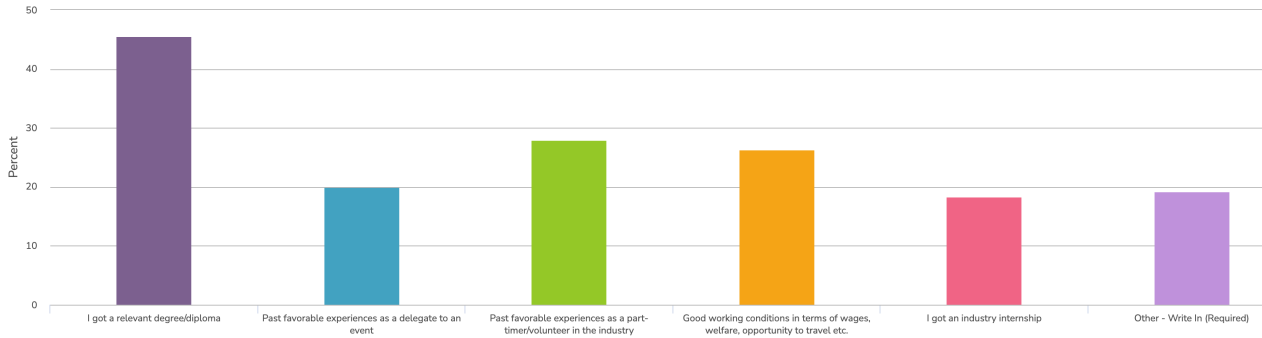
How did they join the industry? Majority had a relevant degree

Over 45% of Young Professionals reported entering the industry due to having studied/ obtained a relevant degree/ diploma. Other reasons were having favourable experiences having worked part-time or volunteered in the industry (28%) and appreciating the working conditions and perks such as getting to travel (26%)."

Interestingly, a couple of the individual responses mentioned that the opening of a new venue in their city inspired them to apply for a job there. Successful marketing of something exciting, culturally relevant and new may have attracted them to our industry.
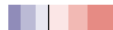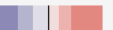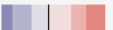
Value		Percent	Responses
No prior knowledge (never heard of ICCA/ associations/ meetings industry)		31.5%	39
Very little knowledge (heard of ICCA/ associations/ meetings industry)		30.6%	38
Some knowledge (had an understanding of ICCA/ associations/ meetings industry)		19.4%	24
Thorough knowledge (studied relevant subjects/ had relevant internships/ some industry connections)		11.3%	14
Very thorough knowledge (relevant studies/ attended industry events eg IMEX/ had relevant industry connections)		6.5%	8
Extremely thorough knowledge (had an extensive network of industry contacts/ well informed about ICCA / experience studying/ working in the meetings industry prior to becoming an ICCA member)		0.8%	1

50% of those with a relevant degree, had no knowledge of ICCA or the association meeting industry

When asked what level of knowledge they had about the industry or ICCA asan organization prior to joining, a total of 62% claimed to have no or very little knowledge. Looking deeper, we found that out of the young professionals who studied a relevant degree/ diploma, as many as 52% had no or very little knowledge of the industry prior to joining.

This means that half of those who enrol in post-secondary education to gain the tools and skills relevant for working in it, were not fully aware of the associations meetings industry, what ICCA's role in the industry is, or even of its existence. This is a key area for improvement whereby ICCA, member organisations and associations alike, should take the opportunity to increase visibility and engagement with the younger generation before they head out into the jobs market.

Item	Overall Rank	Rank Distribution	Score	No. of Rankings
It's a fun and exciting job	1		479	122
Good working conditions	2		452	123
Opportunities for personal growth	3		450	120
Opportunities for career progression	4		446	122
Social connections and networking	5		414	121
Making a difference in the world/my community	6		333	121

Lowest   Highest

Why stay in the industry? It's fun and exciting!

When asked what elements are important for continuing to work in the association meetings industry, the majority ranked "It is a fun and exciting job" the highest, followed by "Good working conditions", "Opportunities for growth/ career progression", "Social connections and networking" and lastly, "Making a difference in the world/ my community".

According to a report by PWC on millennials in the workplace, millennials have unique characteristics that require a different strategic approach for the retention of employees. In looking for the right job, millennials want a job that provides satisfaction and they want to work for a company that aligns their personal values to the values of a company.[14] We were surprised, therefore, to see "Making a difference" being ranked so low, but can appreciate that in a post-pandemic recovery climate, the privilege of even having a job combined with "good working conditions" and a sense of enjoyment is more highly valued than the impact it has on the world. It could also be that there are fewer opportunities to work with the local communities or see the effects of
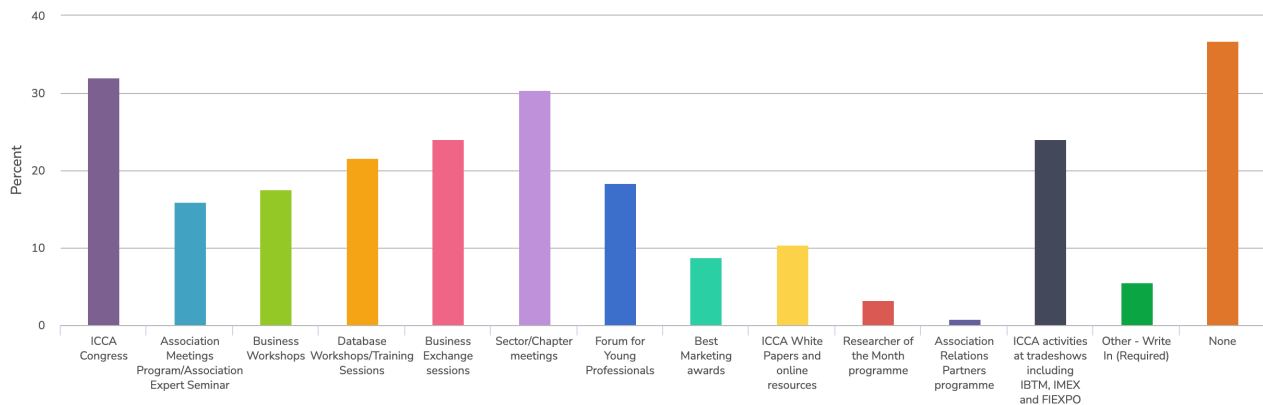
your work due to restrictions and lockdowns.

Majority of those who have never attended an ICCA activity are ICCA members

We also asked the young professionals to select which ICCA activities they have been involved in/ attended in the course of their career. A surprising amount of 37% of respondents replied that they had not attended any ICCA events at all. We would assume perhaps that the non-ICCA members would have been highly represented in this group, but 72% of those who had never attended an ICCA event were, in fact, also ICCA members. The most frequently attended events, were the ICCA Congress (34%) Sector/ Chapter meetings (33%) and Business Exchange sessions (26%). For perspective, out of the 174 young professionals, fewer than 60 have attended an ICCA congress over the course of their (on average) 4-6 year long careers.

What do young professionals want?

51% want more targeted content and involvement

Most of the young respondents would like to see activities aimed at a younger audience and further efforts to involve young professionals in the organisation. Suggestions were separate networking events, creating a separate chapter/sector for the younger members, hosting educational events and workshops, onboarding events to industry "newbies", involving them in the ICCA congress organisation (perhaps as volunteers at other events), cross-skilling and upskilling forums and more opportunities to interact with the Future Leaders Council.

---

14 Millennials At Work - Reshaping The Workplace (pwc, 2021)

30% want better communication

One third of the respondents answered that ICCA should promote themselves and what they offer to young professionals more via social media channels and have an increased presence via those channels. Examples include: to discover and lift new talents, targeted marketing and communications, use of platforms like LinkedIn and other social media channels, and creating a young professionals report after each ICCA event perhaps through a blog. Furthermore it is important to make sure that information is not filtered via companies' contact persons – one respondent mentioned having worked in the industry for several years' and did not even know of ICCA or what they were offering because information gets "stuck" in the hierarchy. Another did not even know their company was an ICCA member.

Working with universities

It is interesting to note that some respondents suggested working closely with universities, as way to promote ICCA amongst young professionals even before they start their career path in the industry; this could lead to retaining more young professionals with related degrees within the industry but also raise awareness of the value of association meetings within research and academia. Current students are future delegates and employees within the industry.

Upskilling opportunities

24% of the respondents want to gain skills in order to progress in their career or gain certifications. Career progression and personal development opportunities were also highly prioritised when asked why they remain in the industry. Perhaps due to the effects of COVID-19 on the industry, young professionals want to make sure they are highly valued and skilled workers, with knowledge that can help them pivot roles or industries if need be.

More information and access to jobs

Around 19% replied that they were looking for some sort of job or careers platform where ICCA members could recruit within ICCA's membership. ICCA currently refers to a closed LinkedIn group, but there is an absence of relevant information and promotion, which contributes to the unawareness of the group.

Other ideas mentioned were mentorship opportunities, discounted rates for young professionals to attend events, and chapter exchange programmes to
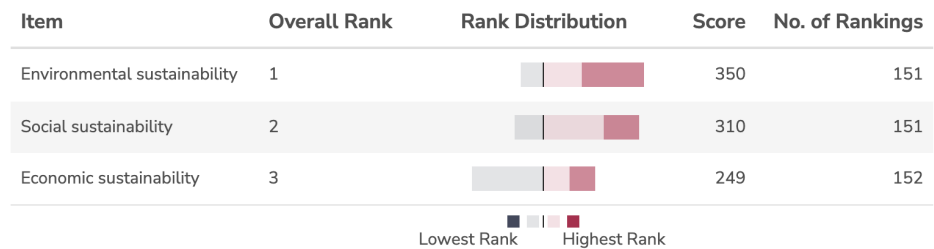
encourage knowledge and experience exchange.

A shift in priorities - environmental and social sustainability ranks higher

In the Deloitte Global Millennial and Gen Z survey, research found that "...the pandemic, extreme climate events, and a charged sociopolitical atmosphere may have reinforced people's passions..."[15] and instigated a shift of concerns and priorities in these age groups. While climate change is found at the top, key findings include a need to focus on issues regarding health and employment, mental health and stress as well as the societal impact of business, wealth and income inequalities and systemic racism. All issues which fall under our earlier definition of social sustainability, where a human's

Item	Overall Rank	Rank Distribution	Score	No. of Rankings
Economic sustainability	1		357	151
Environmental sustainability	2		279	152
Social sustainability	3		273	151

Lowest Rank   Highest Rank
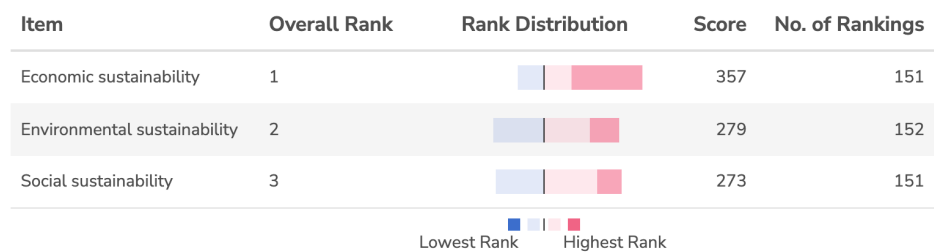
wellbeing is in focus. This was also shown in our survey:

Item	Overall Rank	Rank Distribution	Score	No. of Rankings
Environmental sustainability	1		350	151
Social sustainability	2		310	151
Economic sustainability	3		249	152

Lowest Rank   Highest Rank

What do you think the industry's current sustainability priorities are?

What do you think the industry's sustainability priorities should be?

The majority of respondents believe that economic sustainability is the industry's current sustainability priority. One respondent states: "The pandemic has really hit the events industry hard. For many of our chapters, I believe, the work now lies in trying to recover economically ...". This entails looking over supply chains and business models, recruitment choices, obtaining government support, changing policies and using resources efficiently and responsibly to produce an operational profit. This is not a unique perspective as six in ten respondents under the age of 30 from a BBMG & GlobeScan report say that in a state of post-pandemic recovery, the priority should be on "restructuring our economy so it deals better with challenges like inequality and climate change..." [16]

However, when we asked what the respondents think the priorities should be, both sets of professionals believe environmental sustainability should be prioritised to a greater extent, putting an end to the assumption that Baby Boomers or GenXers do not take the climate crisis seriously. The young professionals and over 35s alike ranked social sustainability as the second

15 *A Call For Accountability And Action,* The Deloitte Global 2021 Milennial And Gen Z Survey (Deloitte, 2020) p. 3

16 *Radically Better Future:* The Next Gen Reckoning Report (BBMG & GlobeScan, 2020)

highest priority.

Follow-up questions regarding the sift in priorities were later asked, with insights given into why there has been an increased want to focus on social aspects. It goes without saying that these three aspects of sustainability are all closely linked to each other and, as one respondent wrote, "Without one the others can't exist". Another stated: "...economic, social and environmental cannot be dealt with separately. The reasoning is simple: our growth strategy (for the industry) will depend on our ability to include sustainable principles (all 3) in our business models and value propositions". However, these questions were not asked to find a right or correct answer, or to motivate why one is more important than the other. Instead, we want to understand, in particular, if social responsibility has been brought further up as a priority – what arguments lie behind that?

Social sustainability as a condition for economic recovery

For over a year, the international association meetings industry has had their fundamental business model disrupted. Physical meetings, travel and accommodation were all placed on hold, meaning that not only were delegates stripped of experiences and content to help them exchange knowledge, achieve personal and professional growth, and network and communicate with their peers, but a whole industry which relies on these events to take place was also severely negatively impacted. One respondent writes: "...a variety of industry sectors belonging to the Convention & Exhibition market are suffering from the lack of demand and generating business profit...". Many also see social sustainability as a means of obtaining the others: "Without People, you cannot reach any environmental or economic sustainability", and "...if we achieve social sustainability we grow as a society, and then we have economic development". As a result of the economic impact COVID-19 has had on the industry, "Social Sustainability is more important than ever with ensuring confidence within the market".

More focus on health and wellbeing

For some, the health and wellbeing of people, both mental and physical, has had to be reprioritised. "Social sustainability has definitely come to the forefront with the importance and awareness of mental health and community togetherness". Another writes: "Topics such as mental well-being and work-life-balance has become more and more relevant, especially amongst younger professionals". The oxygen mask theory may apply here – putting on your own mask before helping others may seem selfish, but without doing so, you won't be able to help anyone at all. "A good social wellbeing will WANT to make environmental changes. Economic sustainability will be a consequence".

Diversity, inequality and justice

There are also mentions of injustice bringing about a change in priorities. The pandemic has increased social divides and job opportunities are sparse in some regions. Also, one cannot disregard the activism occurring all over the world both physically and virtually, as elections, protests and campaigns have still been held despite the COVID-19 outbreak. Resolving issues of inequality, discrimination and lack of education may contribute to change in governments and politics, in turn creating better, stronger communities that allow us to act on environmental and economic sustainability. "The organizations should consider sustainability as a whole and include as a

priority the topic of gender equality, diversity and inclusion in teamwork", perhaps referring to the effect of diversity on company profits .[17] The pandemic has also led to people beginning to "…understand the need for a stronger community and to push for what they believe in, more proactive than reactive.", reads one response. From a Deloitte report specifically targeting millennials, research found that "pessimism about social/political climates also reached historic levels. More than four in 10 respondents expect worsening situations, the highest number ever recorded".[18]

Human force can also be used for good

"Without the social wellbeing, of all humans, there will be no natural concern about the environment." states another respondent, once again underlining the holistic approach to sustainability. Poignantly, it is in some cases concern about the environment that has showcased the effect mankind has on our planet. On one hand, the fires, droughts, floods and natural disasters which have rampaged the globe over the past years illustrate an urgency and a true climate crisis caused by humans. At the same time, we have seen evidence of nature's ability to recover – air quality improving, wildlife returning, alternative resources being found – when the world was put on pause. A reminder that we can use human force for good as well.

Future Meetings – what influences our decision to attend?

Networking opportunities, safe meetings and engaging content are important

Another aim for our research was to understand the decision-making factors in place when it comes to attending future meetings. We asked respondents

	All	Under 35s	Over 35s
To benefit from face-to-face networking	1	1	1
Thorough safety protocols in place	2	3	2
Better access & engagement with educational content	3	2	4
Better ROI	4	4	3
The event meets sustainability criteria	5	7	5
It fits with my work/life balance	6	6	7
The destination meets sustainability criteria	7	8	6
The destination is new/exciting	8	5	8

to place weight on each criterion, from least important to most important. The factors which are most important to the group of respondents are, in order of weighted importance and divided by age group:

Between the age groups, we derive that young professionals regard better content, a new/ exciting destination and a fit with work/ life balance as more important factors when deciding to attend an event in the future. More experienced professionals over 35 place the sustainability criteria of the event and destination at more importance and are less influenced by content, but

17 Dixon-Fyle et al, Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters, (McKinsey, 2020)

18 *A Call For Accountability And Action,* The Deloitte Global 2021 Milennial And Gen Z Survey (Deloitte, 2020)

more so by ROI and the safety protocols in place.

Lack of time and cost will prevent young professionals, over 35s are concerned about health

We also asked respondents what reasons they would have to attend a virtual meeting instead of a physical one. In general, limitations on time and cost seem to prevent all respondents from attending, but even more so the young professionals group. These young professionals will also not attend physical events if the events interfere with their work/life balance, or if the content is the only focus since there are often more resources available (such as presentations and recordings). The destination being too far away is also a concern, as it compromises and impedes on their personal time.

For the over 35 age group, more than one in four shares health and safety concerns will prevent them from attending physical events in the future. This is closely followed by lack of time and the unwillingness to attend digital events. Work/ life balance is not as high a consideration for this group as the young professionals, neither is distance to the event or sustainability reasons, although they are mentioned as factors for consideration.

Some won't attend virtual events anymore

Over the course of the pandemic, virtual and hybrid events became the standard model. However, virtual events involve an excessive amount of screen time, the lack of physical mobility and require longer attention spans which have led to the concept of "zoom fatigue" arising, even going so far as to have Stanford University introduce a so-called "ZEF scale", standing for "zoom fatigue and exhaustion".[19] Around one out of eight young professional respondents are not interested in any virtual events at all, and the number is even higher for more experienced professionals, where as many as one in four do not want to attend solely digital events.

---

19   Ramachandran, Four Causes For 'Zoom Fatigue' And Their Solutions" (Stanford News, 2021)

Redefining Social Sustainability - what is the problem?

In February 2020, the Event Academy released its annual Industry and Trend Report with the key takeaway that "…the need for a more sustainable and environmentally-responsible events industry…" would be the largest and most consistent challenge we would face in the upcoming year.[20] Little did we know that the COVID-19 outbreak would be declared a pandemic in March 2020 and that our priorities would without a doubt shift.

In the latter half of 2020, The Regenerative Revolution, a report sponsored by IMEX and Marriott International, highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which continued to have a disastrous effect on our industry. It stated: "The global meetings and events industry has collapsed with millions of workers being furloughed or losing their businesses and jobs /…/ As a result, all our paradigms of normality are being challenged, and we are being forced into an epoch of rapid change, accelerated innovation and unimagined creativity."[21]

We have a firm belief that to ensure the recovery of the meetings industry, and its work towards a sustainable future, we must empower the younger generations. We also want to advocate for strengthened channels through which youths are enabled "to make their voices heard in all levels of government, on company boards and in multilateral organizations— which will in turn foster an intergenerational transfer of experience, knowledge and skills /…/ Youth must be guaranteed a say in the global recovery. Failure to ensure youth a seat at the table risks entire societal and economic systems being rejected by this generation…".[22] From The Next Gen Reckoning Report by BBMG & GlobeScan, nearly six in ten respondents under age of 30 strongly agree that "the more socially and environmentally responsible my company becomes, the more motivated and loyal I become as (an employee)".[23]

The meetings industry is a peoples' business. There is an urgent need to involve, engage and include the next generation in organisations, boards and across all levels of governance. It is worth noting that although our focus is on empowering the younger generations, free text responses from the survey's final question – if the respondents have anything they want to share with the Future Leaders Council - suggests that in particular, respondents over the age of 35 also highlighted the importance to not only empower and involve the younger generations, but to ensure professionals that are new and emerging to the industry also have a voice and are provided the same platform and opportunities. The industry needs to continue to share experiences, knowledge, and new ideas across multi-generations. By focusing on these intergenerational relationships and providing opportunities for intergenerational collaboration, we can empower and sustain a multi-generational workforce.[24]

Through further research, the Future Leaders Council also identified how the different generations value various aspects of sustainability. In the ICCA Kaohsiung Protocol, it cites that:

> The future of everything has always been born in the wellspring of youth culture. The events industry has grown weary of the

---

20 *Industry Trend Report* (Event Academy, 2020), p.2

21 Bigwood, *The Regenerative Revolution* (IMEX & Mariott International, 2020) p.8

22 *The Global Risks Report 2021*, 16th Edition (World Economic Forum, 2021) p.46

23 *Radically Better Future: The Next Gen Reckoning Report* (BBMG & GlobeScan, 2020)

24 *Millennials At Work - Reshaping The Workplace* (pwc, 2021)

conversation around the "millennial mindset," but it ignores generational shifts at its peril. Today, based on countless studies, it is clear that the inter-related themes of diversity, equity and inclusion; sustainability and resilience; and community building are major priorities for future generations.

Technology is a vehicle that provides opportunities to address all three, and where members, attendee and stakeholders can engage with each other in new conversations. The overarching strategy to accelerate and elevate those conversations is based on how organizations align the development of their events, the priorities of their audiences, and local government, economic and community priorities.

By focusing on the results of the survey, which showed an interest by young professionals in the field of social sustainability, the research both other companies and ICCA have found, we can say that sustainability is as important to them as some other prevalent issues, and we need to further engage and involve them to ensure the future of not only ICCA as an organisation but the entire international association meetings industry.

Recommendations - looking ahead

Marketing & Communications	Increase digital presence - create unique engagement experiences with young professionals.	Enhance the look & feel of ICCA website - catch the attention of young professionals.	Creation of content especially for young professionals - give them the feeling of not being alone.	Recording of more detailed demographic details of ICCA members - know the sustainability of your community.
Education and Experience	Encouragement of members to send young professionals to industry meetings - start sooner than later.	Discounted participation rates for young professionals for ICCA events - bring in fresh air.	Better understanding of what sustainability meens to young professionals - exchange is key.	Driving skills development & certification among young professionals - challenge them.
	Support in creating a young professional's network across all members - let's strengthen the community.	Inclusion of young professionals in decision-making meetings - give them a voice.	Mentorship programs for pushing exchange between generations - learning from each others is not complicated	Provision of engagement zones - give young professionals a chance.
The Meeting Industry	Cooperations with universities to gain attraction - talk directly to young people	Redefine recruiting measures - gain a real benefit and this does not need to be money only.	Show courage and give responsibility to young professionals - they will make it.	Think outside the box - young professionals will help you.
Make social sustainability a priority				
Creation of focus groups - understand what drives young professionals	Education of association members on how to incorporate social sustainability in meetings - set a sign		Empowerment of younger generation to lead the process - let's start	

Through the Future Leaders Council's experience and knowledge of the meetings industry, and conducting the research outlined in this white paper, the Future Leaders Council have come to a variety of recommendations for ICCA and the meetings industry which are summarized within the following matrix of actions:

Marketing and Communications

- It is important for ICCA to increase their digital presence through key social media channels such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn. By allocating a larger investment percentage in marketing and communications to young professionals, and professionals that are new to the industry, this will provide more connection points to the younger generations, creating unique engagement experiences that reinforce their value in the industry.

- Enhancing the look and feel of ICCA's website ensuring the site is easy to access and navigate and appeals to multi generations,y incorporating a dedicated section that is targeted at young professionals. This will provide a platform for young professionals to engage with likeminded people that want to make a difference and shape the future of the meetings industry. This platform can also be used as a forum for young professionals to ask questions and share experiences with others all over the world. Providing a platform like this can expand their networks digitally and create confidence to attend face to face ICCA events.

- Currently, ICCA's engagement is directed at the ICCA member representative level only. By identifying the young professionals within each member organisation and providing access to the dedicated young professionals section on the ICCA website, this will present a cost-effective engagement strategy and provide a greater reach to potential industry leaders. By having this section on the ICCA website, this will also provide a platform for young professionals to share ideas and provide feedback directly back to ICCA.

Education and Experience

- Creating a roster where ICCA members can nominate young professionals from their organisation to attend an Future Leaders Council meeting or a monthly board meeting. By implementing a mentorship programme aimed at young professionals, it is not only extremely low cost to run, but also intergenerational collaboration can empower and sustain a multi-generational workforce, whereby young professionals can learn from experienced professionals, and young professionals can provide fresh ideas.

- ICCA should encourage its members to send their young professionals to attend ICCA and other industry events in order to achieve a greater presence across different platforms. As mentioned in the paper, it is important to provide opportunities for young professionals, particularly for those that may be disadvantaged. By offering discounted rates for young professionals to attend conferences and other educational events, this will provide opportunities for young professionals to expand their experience and their networks.

- Other educational and experience opportunities include virtual and in-person chapter events targeted at young professionals, and providing the opportunity for young professionals to contribute in writing post-event reports and share their testimonials.

The Meetings Industry

- ICCA can lead the way and promote these activities. However at the end of the day, organizations need to provide similar opportunities and tools within their organizations to uplift and empower young professionals too. For example, organizations should give their employees opportunities to attend university careers fairs and open days to promote the industry and collaborate with universities to provide the opportunity to speak to educate on and increase the profile of the meetings industry. ICCA can support this initiative by providing tools such as guiding key messages and presentation toolkits.

- Expand outside of our industry to source and recruit talented professionals that have a wide range of transferrable skills. We should lean on the meetings industry to use our incredible networks that we have developed across all industries to welcome professionals that may have different approaches to tackle problems in a fresh and unique way.

- It is important to further understand the mindset of a young professional for more input and more direct effect. Therefore, the industry should work on young members priorities, such as more job opportunities. We believe that providing job opportunities is one of the most attractive and effective ways which can make a difference. Building a strong network of peers within the industry by encouraging the members of the industry to represent themselves through young professionals. This in turn can bring fresh energy, new skills and creative ideas. There are also initiatives and partners that are specialized in creating awareness and assist in educating young professionals.

Make social sustainability a priority

- Create focus groups virtually and at upcoming ICCA meetings

Conclusion - exciting times ahead

and congresses to better understand what is important to young professionals in topics such as, diversity, equity and inclusion, sustainability ,resiliency and community building.

- Educate association members on how to incorporate principles of social sustainability in future meetings and events.

- Empower the younger generation to not only take part in how we weave social sustainability into our industry but actually lead it.

As the Future Leaders Council, we believe that the future of the meetings industry lies in the next generation. And while outside forces, such as the impacts of COVID-19, have heavily shifted the focus of our industry in the last 18 months, we believe that by empowering young professionals, we can not only recover what was lost but build a brighter and more resilient future for the meetings and association industry.

We conclude that by focusing on social sustainability through a lens that is meaningful to the next generation, we will successfully retain and engage future leaders and advocates for our industry. The key is to not dismiss the needs of a different generation, but to embrace them and foster environments in which they can flourish. We know social sustainability is important to the up-and-coming leaders and therefore, not only do we have to create a social environment that is focused on growing the interests and leadership of young professionals by meeting the new needs of their generation, we also need to focus on shifting what sustainability looks like within the industry to better reflect what the younger generation values.

Future Leaders Council - the members

Name: Ernest Van Sitters
Job Title: Event Sales Executive
Company: Cape Town International Convention Centre
Country: South Africa
Chapter: Africa
Contact: Ernestv@cticc.co.za

Name: Doreen Richter
Job Title: Project Management Congresses
Company: Messe Frankfurt
Country: Germany
Chapter: Central European
Contact: doreen.richter@messefrankfurt.com

Name: Hyo-In Son
Job Title: Assistant Manager, Convention Marketing
Company: KINTEX
Country: Korea
Chapter: Asia Pacific
Contact: hison@kintex.com

Name: Diana Frederiksen
Job Title: Business Development Manager
Company: Stockholmsmässan Congress & Exhibition Centre
Country: Sweden
Chapter: Scandinavian
Contact: diana.fred@stockholmsmassan.se

Name: Jess Lamb
Job Title: Client Engagement Manager
Company: BESydney
Country: Australia
Chapter: Asia Pacific
Contact: jlamb@besydney.com.au

Name: Javier Contreras
Job Title: Commercial Manager
Company: Centroparque Convention Centre
Country: Chile
Chapter: Latin America
Contact: jcontreras@centroparque.cl

Name: Mariya Al Hashar
Job Title: Senior Business Development Executive
Company: Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre
Country: Oman
Chapter: Middle East
Contact: malhashar@ocec.com

Name: Kaili Cashin
Job Title: Marketing & Communications Manager
Company: Calgary TELUS Convention Centre
Country: Canada
Chapter: North America
Contact: kailic@calgary-convention.com

References

"2018 Global Economic Significance Of Business Events" (EIC Insights, 2018) <https://insights.eventscouncil.org/Full-Article/ArtMID/398/ArticleID/1445/2018-Global-Economic-Significance-of-Business-Events> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

10, 15, 18 "A Call For Accountability And Action", The Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial And Gen Z Survey (Deloitte, 2021) <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/2021-deloitte-global-millennial-survey-report.pdf> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

Baird, Melissa, "The Regenerative Revolution" (GDS Movement, 2020) <https://www.gds.earth/the-regenerative-revolution-2/> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

21 Bigwood, Guy, "The Regenerative Revolution" (IMEX & Mariott International, 2020) <https://www.imexexhibitions.com/sites/default/files/2020-10/The_Regenerative_Revolution_.pdf> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

Blomster, Paula, "The Road To Sustainability In Events" (MPI, 2020) <https://www.mpi.org/blog/article/the-road-to-sustainability-in-events> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

"Climate Change And Disaster Displacement" (UNHCR, 2020) <https://www.unhcr.org/climate-change-and-disasters.html> [Accessed 6 October 2021]

Davidsson, Rob, "Business Events" (London: Routledge, 2018)

17 Dixon-Fyle, Sundiatu, Kevin Dolan, Vivian Hunt, and Sara Prince, "Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters", (McKinsey, 2020) <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters> [Accessed 6 October 2021]

Fleming, Sean, "The Pandemic Has Damaged Youth Employment: Here's How We Can Help", (World Economic Forum, 2020) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/07/pandemic-damaged-youth-employment/> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

4 Francis, Tracy, and Fernanda Hoefel, "'True Gen': Generation Z And Its Implications For Companies", (McKinsey, 2018) <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/true-gen-generation-z-and-its-implications-for-companies> [Accessed 7 October 2021]

Hall, Colin, "Sustainable Mega-Events: Beyond The Myth Of Balanced Approaches To Mega-Event Sustainability", Event Management, 16 (2012), 119-131 https://doi.org/10.3727/152599512X13343565268294

"ICCA Kaohsiung Protocol" (ICCA, 2020) <https://www.iccaworld.org/cnt/docs/ICCA%20Kaohsiung%20Protocol.pdf> [Accessed 2 September 2021]

20 "Industry Trend Report" (Event Academy, 2020) <https://eventacademy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/TR2020-webready.pdf> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

14, 24 "Millennials At Work - Reshaping The Workplace" (pwc, 2021) <https://www.pwc.com/co/es/publicaciones/assets/millennials-at-work.pdf> [Accessed 4 October 2021]

1 "Our Common Future", World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987) <https://www.are.admin.ch/dam/are/en/dokumente/nachhaltige_entwicklung/dokumente/bericht/our_common_futurebrundtlandreport1987.pdf.download.pdf/our_common_futurebrundtlandreport1987.pdf> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

9, 16, 23 "Radically Better Future: The Next Gen Reckoning Report" (BBMG & GlobeScan, 2020) <https://globescan.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/BBMG_GlobeScan_Radically-Better-Future-Report_2020.pdf> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

11 "Social Sustainability", United Nations Global Compact (United Nations, 2021) <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/social> [Accessed 22 August 2021]

"Sustainability", (United Nations, 2021) <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability> [Accessed on 23 August 2021]

3, 12 "Sustainable Events Guide - Give Your Large Event A Small Footprint" (UNEP, 2012) <https://uist.acm.org/uist2019/sustainability/SustainableEventsGuideMay302012FINAL.pdf> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

7, 22 "The Global Risks Report 2021", 16Th Edition (World Economic Forum, 2021) <https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2021.pdf> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

"The JMIC Global Manifesto - An Industry Rationale For The Use Of Business Events As Primary Agents For Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery And Renewal", (JMIC, 2020), <https://www.the-iceberg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/JMIC_Industry-Manifesto.pdf> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

6 Parker, Kim, and Ruth Igielnik, "What We Know About Gen Z So Far", (Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2020) <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/> [Accessed 4 October 2021]

5, 13 Pavluković, Vanja, Milica Vujičić, James Kennell, and Marija Cimbaljević, "Sustainability In The Meetings Industry", in Singidunum International Tourism Conference – SITCON (Belgrade, 2020) <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/James-Kennell/publication/348009418_Sustainability_in_the_Meetings_Industry/links/5feccd3a299bf140885de9a2/Sustainability-in-the-Meetings-Industry.pdf> [Accessed 2 October 2021]

19 Ramachandran, Vignesh, "Four Causes For 'Zoom Fatigue' And Their Solutions", Stanford News, 2021 <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/02/23/four-causes-zoom-fatigue-solutions/> [Accessed 6 October 2021]

8 Wood, Johnny, "Generation Z Will Outnumber Millennials By 2019", The European Sting - Critical News & Insights On European Politics, Economy, Foreign Affairs, Business & Technology - europeansting.com, 2018 <https://europeansting.com/2018/08/27/generation-z-will-outnumber-millennials-by-2019/> [Accessed 4 October 2021]