

BEST PRACTISES IN PLASTIC-FREE SOLUTIONS

The BALTIPLAST project co-financed by Interreg BSR helps to drive the transition to a green and resilient Baltic Sea region.

Green event: Women's Run 2024 TALLINN, ESTONIA



Photo: Andres Luidre

TALLINN, the capital of Estonia, is a vibrant and diverse city with the population of 460 000 people, representing over 140 nationalities. Tallinn is known for its forward-thinking approach to public services, and the city offers free public transport to its residents, making it an environmentally friendly and convenient place to live.

Tallinn is an important promoter of the smart and circular consumption model and a creator of a system for circular products and services that support it. Tallinn operates resource-efficiently by reducing primary material consumption, increasing waste recycling, and actively promoting reuse, providing businesses and residents with various opportunities to participate in the circular economy.

83 %

CO2 reduction

Achieved by the switch
to reusable tableware

The Women's Run is the largest women's movement and sports event in Estonia. The organizers of the run have committed to reduce the environmental footprint of the event, striving to create a sport event with minimal environmental impact. In 2022, single-use drinking cups were replaced with reusable ones and in 2023, eco-friendly seed paper participation medals were given to all participants, which could later be planted in suitable locations to grow. All event materials were designed without the date, so they can be reused again.

Challenges and actions

The Women's Run is the largest women's movement and sports event in Estonia. The first Women's Run took place in 1988, attracting a couple of hundred women to participate in the health run. Today, Women's Run has become the largest health and movement event for women in Estonia, with nearly 16 000 women participating each year.

The LHV Women's Run 2024 set a new participation record, surpassing 20 000 registrants for the first time. A total of 20 370 participants took part in the event – the event gathered around 12 000 women and 2000 children on site, with thousands of spectators and 6 370 women attended the virtual run. In 2024, even more focus was set on organizing a sustainable event. The LHV Women's Run 2024 hosted participants all over Estonia and from 31 foreign countries.

The Women's Run has not been just about fitness and empowerment – it was also about making a difference for the planet. In 2024, the event set new sustainability standards, proving that large-scale events can be both exciting and eco-friendly. **The goal of the Women's Run organizers is to continuously find environmentally friendly alternatives for organizing the event.**

Since the Women's Run organizers have been continuously seeking ways to host the event with the smallest environmental footprint possible. It was easy to get in touch with the event organizers and discuss opportunities for organizing even more sustainable event. The event organizers, in collaboration with the City of Tallinn, took a significant step towards sustainability. After some meetings with the organizers **different ways to reduce single-use plastics and promote waste management and reduce environmental footprint where possible were found.**

To reduce plastic waste, **participants were encouraged to bring their own reusable water bottles**, refilling them at permanent and additional public water stations instead of using single-use plastic bottles. **Race bibs were made smaller**, and **safety pins were collected after the event** for reuse next year, ensuring minimal waste.

A major sustainability highlight was the **use of reusable cups** at the hydration point during the 7 km race. These cups were collected in special containers and washed for future use. On the event grounds, all **food and drinks were served in reusable tableware** provided by RingoEco, eliminating disposable alternatives. **Waste sorting was a priority**, with clearly labeled bins for biowaste, plastic, paper, and mixed waste placed throughout the area, along with dedicated containers for reusable tableware.

To further reduce unnecessary waste, **single-use souvenirs like balloons and leaflets were prohibited**. Instead of printing new banners each year, organizers used **reusable signage without dates**, ensuring they could be used in future events.

Sustainability extended beyond waste reduction: **public transport was made free** for all race participants to encourage greener commuting options. **Runners were urged to arrive on foot, by bike, or via public transport**, reducing the event's overall carbon footprint.

Green elements of the event

- **Water refill:** The event ground already had permanent water taps to get fresh drinking water. Additionally, four public water refill stations were added to the event area, allowing participants to refill their own water bottles and reduce the number of single-use plastic bottles. Participants were encouraged through a call-to-action/press release to bring their own reusable water bottles to the event.

- **Bibs:** The size of the race bibs for the children's run was reduced by half, and the bibs for the women's run were also made slightly smaller to decrease the amount of single-use plastic. Each runner used 4 safety pins to attach the bib to the shirt. After the event safety pins were collected to reuse it next year.
- **Reusable tableware:** There was one hydration point during the 7 km race where water and sports drink was offered in reusable cups. There were special collection containers next to the running track and all runners through the cups into the container. All participants received a bottled drink (water/sports drink) at the end of the race and therefore not so many reusable cups to serve water were needed at the end of the race. At the event field all food and drinks were sold only in reusable tableware. Special collection containers were available around the event field. Reusable tableware was distributed by the service provider RingoEco.
- **Waste sorting:** Special focus was set on sorting waste. Clearly labeled waste sorting bins for biowaste, plastic packaging, paper, and mixed waste were placed throughout the event. Reusable tableware containers were placed alongside the sorting bins.
- **Single-Use Item Restrictions:** The event organizers set the focus on reducing single-used souvenirs. Vendors were prohibited from distributing single-used plastic souvenirs such as balloons and leaflets.
- **Reusable Signage:** All event signage was designed without dates to allow reuse in future years.
- **Sustainable Transportation:** Public transport was free for all race participants, encouraging the use of sustainable transportation options such as walking, cycling, and public transit. It was encouraged to come on foot, by bicycle or by public transportation. For that, the public transportation was made for free for the runners.

Target groups and timeline

The first meeting with the organizers took place **6 months before the event**, several meetings were held.

Target groups
Women all over the Estonia and beyond
Children
Companies and city authorities (were invited to take part in the women's run)

Results

Reusable tableware

In this event, food and drink were served using only reusable tableware. There was one hydration point during the 7 km run where water and sports drink was offered in reusable cups. All participants received a bottle of drink (water/sports drink) at the end of the race and therefore not so many reusable cups to serve water were needed at the end of the race.

The LHV Women's Run 2024 set a new participation record, with a total of 20 370 participants taking part in the event. Taking this into account, around **20 000 reusable cups** were used plus **4000 pcs of reusable tableware** to sell food/drinks at the event ground.

Waste reduction

In 2024, around 20 000 participants created **1160 kg** of waste from which 60kg was biowaste, 500 kg was paper and cardboard, 120 kg was mixed packaging and 480kg was mixed waste.

In comparison for the year before, in 2023, around 15 000 participants created **2360 kg** of waste from which 1200kg was biowaste, 620 kg was mixed packaging and 540 kg was mixed waste.

Taking that into account it can be said that in 2023 0,16kg of waste was created per participant and in 2024 0,058kg. So, **the amount of waste generated reduced by around 50%.**

Size of bib

The size of around 12 000 women's bibs and 2 000 children's bibs were **reduced** so a lot of single-used plastic material was saved.

Enablers



- + **Strong support and sustainable will** of the organizers team
- + **Regulation** that supports the use of reuse systems at public events
- + **Clear and understandable guidelines** for Organizing Sustainable Events in the city of Tallinn
- + **Great communication team** by the organizers

Barriers



- **Demand for human resources** to manage the development process.
- **Financial constraints might pose a risk.** All events need budget. This event had many sponsors who want their products to be seen, tasted, bought. This event had a sponsor who distributed bottled water/sports drinks to all runners at the end of the event. So, as sponsors are needed, we could not cut out the distribution of the sports drinks bottled in single-used bottles.
- **Participants do not know how to sort waste.** Even if there are special waste collection containers all around the event field, visitors need to be guided. This event didn't have any volunteers (so called green ambassadors) to guide the visitors on how to sort waste. Therefore, the waste collected was not properly sorted and some of it ended up as a mixed waste.

Key takeaways

Even if you think your event is already organized very well and there are no more sustainable steps that can be taken, there are **still some topics that can be improved**. After some meetings with the organizers different ways to reduce single-use plastics and promote waste management and reduce environmental footprint where possible were found.

The proper organizational approach (reusable tableware service providers, collection system, clear informative materials/guides/communication, early involvement of all stakeholders, etc) showed that it is possible to organize mass sports events in a sustainable way.